

The Transformative Value of *Antigone* on the Arab Stage: Amplifying Voices of Resistance and Justice

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Abstract

In contexts marked by human rights abuses, state violence, and gender-based injustices, theatrical performances in the Arab world offer a vital platform for marginalized voices. By exploring the transformative power of modern adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*, particularly in this unique context, this study reveals how these performances serve as poignant reflections of resistance, justice, and societal transformation. *Antigone* is renowned for its exploration of political themes and moral dilemmas and continues to resonate across cultures and epochs. Through an adaptation theory lens, this study examines various Arab adaptations of *Antigone*, demonstrating the global reach and influence of this classic work. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, the paper delves into how these adaptations dialogue with the source material while incorporating new elements and cultural nuances. Hutcheon emphasizes the importance of viewing adaptations as creative reimagining rather than mere reproductions. This study demonstrates how adaptations of *Antigone* in the Arab world transcend being mere theatrical performances, serving as platforms for social commentary, cultural reflection, and collective memory. Through their creative reappropriation of Sophocles' classic, these adaptations illuminate the enduring relevance of *Antigone*'s timeless themes and their resonance with contemporary struggles for justice and human rights.

Keywords: Theory of Adaptation, Antigone, Arab Stage, Resistance, Justice.

1. Introduction

In regions where human rights violations, state atrocities, and gender-based violence are often met with silence, misinformation, indifference, or denial, theatrical performances featuring modern adaptations of works such as Sophocles' ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone* play a crucial role in giving voice to the marginalized and oppressed. These performances create platforms for reconciliation, testimony, and memory, exposing historical truths and unearthing socio-political traumas. Sophocles' *Antigone* is arguably the most explicitly political of all Sophocles' tragedies, having influence throughout history and retaining relevance in today's world. The play has captivated the imagination of artists, writers, philosophers, and directors worldwide, often

depicting the conflict between morality and state regulation, justice and order, individual liberty and state authority, and female/male societal roles. It tells the story of Oedipus's daughter, Antigone, whose older brother, Polyneices, and younger brother, Eteocles, fatally clash over the kingship of Thebes. The subsequent heir to the throne is her uncle, Creon, who passes a proclamation that the body of the traitor Polyneices is not to receive a burial and imposes a severe punishment of stoning for anyone who defies his edict. Unyielding in her conviction, Antigone defies the king's decree and insists on burying Polyneices's corpse. This act of defiance leads to her sentencing to death. Tragically, even after Creon repeals the sentence, Antigone has already taken her own life by hanging. Creon's harsh law not only results in the demise of his niece but also triggers a chain of tragic events leading to the deaths of his son, Haemon—Antigone's fiancé—and his wife, Eurydice.

In the ever-evolving realm of theater and adaptation of Sophocles' Greek tragedy *Antigone*, the play has found a profound resonance on the stages of the Arab World, echoing the enduring spirit of resistance, rebellion and justice. From Jihad Saad's *Antigone's Emigration* in 2005 to the evocative interpretation in the Jenin Refugee Camp, where Antigone's tale interweaves with the Palestinian narrative, and the performance of *Antigone of Syria* in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2014, by a group of Syrian refugee women, these adaptations offer a powerful lens through which the complexities of contemporary Arab communities are examined.

Continuing this exploration, this study extends further to the Gulf region, where the classical Greek masterpiece *Antigone* underwent a captivating Arab transformation at Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) in 2014. The American University of Sharjah also orchestrated a unique production in 2015, drawing connections between *Antigone* and the Arab Spring. As we journey through these thought-provoking adaptations, we witness the convergence of ancient Greek tragedy and modern Arab realities, illuminating the universal themes that bind humanity across cultures and times. Through the creative lenses of talented playwrights and performers, Antigone's story takes on new meanings, emphasizing the determined spirit of individuals amidst adversity and societal transformation.

This paper heavily draws on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon argues:

The curious double fact of the popularity and yet consistent scorning of adaptation is where *A Theory of Adaptation* begins its study of adaptations as adaptations; that is, not only as autonomous works. Instead, they are examined as deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works. Because we use the word adaptation to refer to both a product and a process of creation and reception, this suggests to me the need for a theoretical perspective that is at once formal and 'experiential'. (Hutcheon, 2006)

Hutcheon has developed a theory of adaptation rooted in her conviction that adaptations should not be perceived as secondary derivatives. According to Hutcheon, adaptations are not new to our time as we have retold stories from the beginning of human time, challenging the notion that they are a recent phenomenon. In her view, adaptation is a "derivation that is not derivative" (Hutcheon, 2006), signifying that it is derived from the original work but is not of lesser value or secondary to the original. As a product, adaptation is described by Hutcheon as "[a]n acknowledged transposition" of a familiar "work or works." As a process, it entails "[a] creative and an interpretative act of appropriation/salvaging" and "[a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (Hutcheon, 2006).

Linda Hutcheon's perspective on adaptation as a product and process further illuminates the connection. She emphasizes the importance of exploring adaptations beyond the confines of fidelity discourse, which often limits the understanding of adaptations to their faithfulness to the original text. The different modes of engagement—telling, showing, and interacting—“provide the structure of analysis for this attempt to theorize what might be called the what, who, why, how, when, and where of adaptation” (Hutcheon, 2006). Hutcheon's approach encourages an examination of the adaptation's engagement with its audience, the motivations of the adapter, and the broader context of reception. This perspective aligns with the adaptations of *Antigone*, which are innovative reinterpretations that involve the audience, provoke critical thinking, and address contemporary social and political issues.

The chosen adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* can be linked to the notion of intertextuality, as explained by Julia Kristeva in her works “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (1966) and “The Bounded Text” (1966-67). Intertextuality, in essence, refers to the complex relationships a text has with other texts, demonstrating the interconnectedness of literary works and their influence on one another. According to Kristeva, every text is intertextual, shaped not solely by the writer's original thoughts but also by existing texts, showcasing the constant dialogue between different works (Kristeva, 1980). In the context of *Antigone* and its adaptations, intertextuality is evident through the ways these adaptations draw on the original text while incorporating new elements, contexts, and cultural nuances. The adaptations are not isolated entities but are deeply intertwined with the source material, engaging in a continuous dialogue with Sophocles' work. Through this intertextual relationship, the adaptations are able to expand and transform the narrative, presenting it in diverse ways that resonate with contemporary audiences.

1.1 Review of Related Literature

In his book *Antigones* (1996), George Steiner asserts that during the period spanning from 1790 to 1905, “it was widely held by European poets, philosophers, [and] scholars that Sophocles' *Antigone* was not only the finest of Greek tragedies but a work of art nearer to perfection than any other produced by the human spirit” (Steiner, 1996). The widespread admiration for *Antigone* during that time reflects its enduring resonance and profound impact on the European cultural and intellectual landscape. The play's exploration of complex moral and ethical dilemmas and its timeless themes of defiance, justice, and individual versus state endow it with profound philosophical and artistic significance that continues to captivate and resonate with audiences today. Steiner focuses on the literary and critical predominance of the play in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, shedding light on Sophocles' portrayal of the conflict between Antigone and Creon. For Steiner, the “conflict staged by Sophocles was of a timeless urgency. It dramatized clashes of private conscience and public welfare of a nature and seriousness inseparable from the historical, social condition of man” (Steiner, 1996).

Influential interpretations of the play have commonly focused on the conflict between Creon and Antigone. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone* demonstrates his theory of dialectical progress in history, highlighting the clash between two equally valid rights – divine versus civil law (Steiner, 1996). In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel argues that Antigone justifies her position based on the law of the gods, which necessitates proper burial. Similarly, Creon defends his stance based on his authority as the king of the state. For Hegel, both Antigone and Creon are justified, acting within a reasonable moral framework. Antigone finds herself unable to reconcile adherence to both the law of the gods and the state, just as Creon struggles to uphold religious requirements and enforce the state's laws at the same time. While

both characters may be morally justified in their assertions, they ultimately become wrong through their mutual destruction of one another (Hegel, 1807)

In her seminal work, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (2000), Judith Butler, a distinguished philosopher and gender theorist, delves into the ethical and political implications of Antigone's actions, particularly in relation to her defiance of patriarchal authority and pursuit of justice. Butler examines Antigone's character as a figure who challenges the state's authority and laws by asserting her ethical and familial obligations. Butler rejects categorizing Antigone within the conventional dichotomy of conflicting divine law versus state law as proposed by Hegel (Butler, 2000) or viewing her solely through the lens of the symbolic order and the linguistic power to manifest desire, as expounded by Lacan (Butler, 2000). Instead, Butler perceives Antigone as a subject open to interpretations surpassing prevailing paradigms. Contrary to the conventional understanding of Antigone as a representation of kinship, Butler views her as a figure challenging the established norms of kinship. Antigone occupies diverse kinship roles, relating to her siblings, who are also her nephews and nieces, and her father, who is also her brother. In this intricate web of relationships, Antigone places paramount value on her connection with her brother/nephew Polyneices, bordering on an intensity of affection that appears extravagant. The complexity of Antigone's familial ties, coupled with the fact that her physical existence embodies the taboo of incest, leads Butler to assert that Antigone transcends the ordinary (Butler, 2000).

Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage (2011), edited by Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley, examines the global mobilization of Sophocles' *Antigone*, mainly concentrating on the post-World War II era. The book, with essays and productions composed by authors from classical and theater backgrounds, strongly emphasizes performance. The exploration covers a wide geographical range, encompassing Europe, North America, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Far East. It sheds light on how cultural, social, historical, and political contexts reshape the material, investigating how artists and spectators worldwide engage with *Antigone*. The book addresses a diverse range of issues that the play has been used to tackle (Mee & Foley, 2011). For instance, *Antigone's Emigration* (2005), crafted and directed by the Syrian playwright, director and actor Jihad Saad, delves into the theme of "violence and displacement in the Arab world and its effects on women" (Mee & Foley, 2011). The production sheds light on the challenges immigrants and refugees face as they strive to assert their rights and existence in the turbulent Arab landscape. Sa'ad's play paints a different picture of contemporary conflicts, using Antigone's departure as a metaphorical journey, symbolizing a spiritual detachment from the relentless pursuit of truth within a world marked by oppression and war. *Antigone's Emigration* vividly portrays the brutality of civil war anarchy and the unyielding drive of political power to eliminate any vestige of opposition. By treating Antigone's suicide as an act of emigration, Sa'ad's play evokes the notion of compulsory migration from regions engulfed in warfare (Ziter, 2011).

In his introduction titled "Antigone — If Their Lips Weren't Sealed by Fear" to Slavoj Žižek's *Antigone* (2016), Hanif Kureishi, a British filmmaker, screenwriter, playwright, and novelist with a background blending South Asian and English roots, argues that Antigone emerges as a "modern heroine." Describing her as a "rebel, refusenik, feminist, and anti-capitalist," he underscores her role as a "martyr" and acknowledges her challenging and persistent nature (Kureishi, 2016). According to Kureishi, Antigone is a "rebel, not a revolutionary," as she is not seeking to overthrow Creon and "replace his dictatorship with a more democratic system." Kureishi asserts that Sophocles, through Antigone, portrays the intricate relationship between "law

and dissent,” highlighting the inherent tension between “the state and the people, the family and the individual, and man and woman” (Kureishi, 2016).

While the existing body of literature provides a rich analysis of Sophocles’ *Antigone* across various perspectives, several gaps remain unexplored, particularly regarding its adaptations in non-Western contexts. Much of the scholarship, such as the works of Steiner, Hegel, and Butler, focuses on philosophical, psychoanalytical, and ethical dimensions rooted in Western traditions. However, these works often overlook the adaptation of *Antigone* in modern socio-political contexts outside of the Western experience, precisely how her story is reimaged in the Arab world amidst contemporary issues such as state violence, gender-based injustices, and human rights abuses. Furthermore, while Mee and Foley’s collection and the interpretations touch upon some non-Western adaptations, there is still a noticeable absence of comprehensive studies that examine the unique cultural, historical, and political threads these adaptations weave into *Antigone*’s narrative, particularly in the Arab world. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how modern Arab adaptations of *Antigone* function as platforms for resistance and reflection, allowing the play to transcend its ancient origins and engage with pressing contemporary issues on the Arab stage.

2. Discussion and Analysis

In his chapter entitled “No Grave in the Earth: Antigone’s Emigration and Arab Circulations” from the book *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, Edward Ziter delves into Jihad Saad’s adaptation of *Antigone*, titled *Antigone’s Emigration*. Saad’s play premiered in Damascus in 2005 and was subsequently showcased in various cities before returning to Damascus in 2006, where it was staged at the Damascus International Theater Festival. The play’s global journey and representation in various countries highlights the interconnectedness of human experiences, underscoring the common thread of displacement and the search for identity. The way it is presented in Syrian arts festivals and on the international stage highlights the role of art in fostering cross-cultural understanding and challenging societal norms. Saad’s *Antigone’s Emigration* appears to be a poignant piece of theater that delves into profound existential questions. Its ability to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries speaks to the universal human desire for liberation and a sense of home. Ziter’s analysis reveals that in *Antigone’s Emigration*, Saad skillfully adapted classical texts, blending elements from Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King* with Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*. Additionally, he incorporated a new text that he wrote to explore themes such as “the desecration of human remains, violence against female survivors of war, forced migration, and the relentless determination of authoritarianism to obliterate all opposition” (Ziter, 2011).

Antigone’s Emigration, although rooted in Sophocles’ classic play, carries a contemporary essence in its exploration of losing one’s homeland and the emotional ties to it. Saad’s adaptation focuses on two critical relationships: the conflict between the tyrant Creon and the dissident Antigone and the dynamic between the patriarch Creon and his son Haemon. In this adaptation, Saad trims several characters (Ismene, Eurydice, Tiresias, and the messenger) and alters events to accentuate the modern narrative. The play employs an elevated Arabic, and its abstract setting and costumes, devoid of specific temporal or geographical markers, create a timeless atmosphere, emphasizing the universality of the themes explored (Ziter, 2011).

Ziter (2007) asserts that, according to Saad, Antigone’s emigration transcends specific contexts, encompassing a broad notion intricately linked to the inquiry of altering one’s destiny. In a May 2007 interview, Saad elucidates to Ziter that the issue of Antigone’s emigration

intertwines with three overarching queries: “What is fate? What is choice? What is freedom?” For Saad, the connection between emigration and free will emerges as a recurrent motif in “Attic drama: ‘A great many ancient plays end with an emigration, a removal from the site of catastrophe, whether that’s a death, or a departure, or even an internal withdrawal. The hero flees from his fate.’” The lingering inquiry in Saad’s play revolves around the possibility of opting for a divergent fate through emigration or whether the clutches of catastrophe persist unyieldingly (Ziter, 2011).

The play’s closure lines and stage directions hint at this emigration being a metaphorical death, emphasizing the profound loss of one’s homeland. Antigone’s deep connection to Thebes is portrayed vividly, highlighting her struggle between preserving her ties to the city and seeking liberation. The play contrasts the lush memories of her homeland with the dry, barren desert where her brother lies buried. Antigone’s act of burying her brother becomes an act of defiance against Creon’s authoritarian regime, representing her quest for freedom amid political oppression. Creon, portrayed as a typical fascist ruler, symbolizes absolute power and intolerance of any form of independence. His attempts to erase Antigone’s existence, even to the extent of denying her a proper burial site, underscore the regime’s unwavering desire to eradicate opposition (Ziter, 2011).

In *Antigone’s Emigration*, the confrontation between Creon and Antigone is framed as a conflict between an authoritarian power seeking to eradicate any notion of resistance and a dissenter whose very existence is considered a grave transgression. Antigone’s defiance in Saad’s adaptation is not solely driven by religious piety or familial duty. Instead, her actions symbolize resistance against dictatorship and the refusal to live under oppressive rule. The representation of power’s attempts to obliterate dissenting voices adds a compelling layer to the play’s narrative, highlighting the resilience of the human spirit against oppressive forces. Antigone’s punishment went beyond mere imprisonment or death; the intention was to obliterate her existence. Her body was to be hidden from all, even the worms, or reduced to dust and scattered along the city’s borders. This extreme measure aimed to eliminate any trace of her opposition, erasing any memory associated with her remnants or a burial site.

In his article, “Antigone on the Syrian Stage”, Dr. Raad Kareem Abd-Aun examines the adaptation of the Antigone myth by two Arab playwrights, Saadallah Wannous and Jihad Saad. The plays under discussion are Wannous’s *the Unknown Messenger in Antigone’s Funeral* and Saad’s *Antigone’s Migration* (Abd-Aun, 2020). Wannous penned his play *The Unknown Messenger in Antigone’s Funeral* based on Sophocles’ *Antigone* in 1963. The play, along with its companion piece and first of the duology, *The Tragedy of the Poor Molasses Seller*, derived from Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, was published in 1965 in a book titled *The Tales of the Chorus of Statues* (Abd-Aun, 2020). *The Unknown Messenger in Antigone’s Funeral* is a one-act play that tells the story of Khadhra/Antigone, the oppressed daughter of Khadhur/Oedipus, a molasses seller. She faces persecution from Hasan/Creon, a former petty spy turned head of authority, echoing the oppressive forces that led to her father’s demise in the preceding play of the duology. The play employs a chorus of statues, reminiscent of Greek drama, in the town center, representing societal negativity and inaction. A significant departure from Sophocles’ *Antigone* is observed in the character of Khadhra/Antigone, who transforms from a defiant figure to a broken, incoherent victim of authority’s brutality. The play unfolds as a continuous narrative, integrating Khadhra’s monologues, the chorus’s commentary, and dialogues with Hasan. The central conflict lies between Hasan’s authoritative violence and Khadhra’s powerlessness, with the first play ending in Hasan’s victory and the second in his defeat. Khadhra’s deterioration, a consequence of

oppression, is depicted through fragmented monologues, emphasizing her disconnection from reality (Abd-Aun, 2020).

Antigone's anxiety in Saad's *Antigone's Migration*, according to Dr. Abd-Aun, centers around the fear of being dispossessed, evident in her complex relationship with the polis. A poignant dialectic unfolds through her dialogue, highlighting her reluctance to abandon Thebes while refusing to live under a dictatorship. The complexity of the debate surpasses a mere dichotomy: staying in Thebes entails risking her life without proper burial while leaving means losing her homeland and a burial place. The concluding stage direction, "Silence... Antigone stands... she leaves the city... towards void and darkness" (Saad), presents a bleak outlook with no glimmer of hope. Antigone, the dissident, departs after experiencing the loss of her father, brother, and lover to the shadows. This narrative of dispossession mirrors the tragic experiences of Syrians, Iraqis, and others forced to flee their homelands amidst the violence that has ravaged the region over the past two decades (Abd-Aun, 2020). Saad's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* masterfully captures the essence of political resistance, human connection, and the struggle for identity in the face of displacement. By exploring these themes, *Antigone's Emigration* transcends its ancient origins, resonating with contemporary audiences and sparking critical reflections on the universal pursuit of freedom and belonging.

In her work *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Butler revisits the story of Antigone to examine the refusal of the San Francisco Chronicle to publish the obituaries of Palestinian victims despite the verifiability of their deaths and its implications for public speech and expressions of grief (Butler, 2004). Butler explores the political dimensions of mourning, emphasizing the ways in which specific lives are deemed to grieve and mourn publicly while others are not. She illustrates this point through the example of a Palestinian citizen of the United States who sought to submit obituaries to the San Francisco Chronicle for two Palestinian families killed by Israeli military actions in May 2002. However, the newspaper insisted on verifying the deaths before accepting the obituaries. Despite the individual's willingness to provide statements "in memoriam," the newspaper insisted on verifying the deaths before accepting the obituaries. The individual, complying with this request, resubmitted the content in the form of memorials. Surprisingly, the newspaper rejected the memorials, citing a reluctance to offend anyone as the rationale behind their decision. In defying the king's order and burying her brother, Antigone, the heroine in Sophocles' play, steps into the public sphere—a space from which she was structurally excluded as a woman in Greek. Butler sees Antigone's act of disobedience and public mourning as a powerful gesture. By insisting on burying her brother and mourning publicly, Antigone challenges the normative boundaries of who is allowed to grieve and be recognized as a mourner in the public sphere. In the contemporary context of the San Francisco Chronicle's refusal to publish obituaries of Palestinians, Butler draws a parallel. The rejection of these obituaries reflects a form of public interdiction, denying specific lives the acknowledgement and mourning they deserve. This denial goes beyond a simple refusal to publish; it represents a more profound disqualification of the mourner's capacity for public speech. The refusal to acknowledge these lives in a major daily newspaper exemplifies a more extensive pattern where specific lives and deaths are rendered invisible or insignificant, preventing those who mourn from speaking publicly about their grief. By referencing *Antigone*, Butler highlights the enduring relevance of this ancient story. Antigone's act of mourning becomes a symbol of resistance, emphasizing the need to challenge societal norms and structures that exclude certain voices and experiences from the public discourse. In this context, Antigone's story becomes a potent metaphor for contemporary struggles

for visibility, recognition, and the right to publicly mourn those who are unjustly marginalized or silenced.

Andrés Fabián Henao Castro examines the character of Antigone from Sophocles' ancient Greek tragedy in his article "Antigone Claimed: 'I Am a Stranger!' Political Theory and the Figure of the Stranger." The study explores the relevance of Antigone to the modern concept of the "stranger." Through a close examination of Antigone's character and her actions in the original Greek tragedy, Henao Castro argues that it is both politically and literarily feasible to reinterpret Antigone for the 21st century. Antigone, a character who defied civic laws to follow unwritten divine laws in the ancient play, is presented as a figure who symbolizes those who exist on the margins of political and legal recognition in contemporary society (Henao Castro, 2013). Henao Castro draws attention to Antigone's references to the figure of the stranger throughout the play, suggesting that her defiance signifies the oppositional politics enacted by modern-day strangers, including "refugees, undocumented immigrants, and noncitizens". These individuals often find themselves divided between two political entities and face the challenges of securing political membership in a globalized world. He also extends the relevance of Antigone's struggle to contemporary contexts, particularly in cases such as the struggle of Palestinian women against the occupation of their territories by Israel. The construction of the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, which infringed upon a Muslim cemetery with significant historical and cultural value, is a real-world example (Henao Castro, 2013).

Henao Castro refers to an event titled "What If Antigone Was a Refugee?" in his article, "Antigone Claimed: 'I Am a Stranger!' Political Theory and the Figure of the Stranger." The event, arranged by the Freedom Theater at St. Paul the Apostle Church in New York in 2010, demonstrated the impact of the ancient Greek tragedy, particularly *Antigone*, in a contemporary context. During the panel discussion titled "Reading *Antigone* in the Jenin Refugee Camp," a noteworthy adaptation of *Antigone* by young Palestinians in the Jenin Refugee Camp was highlighted. In this impoverished area of occupied Palestine, *Antigone* was not merely read; it was performed, providing a powerful voice for Palestinian refugees in their struggle for existence against the backdrop of the Israeli state's efforts to obliterate their identity (Henao Castro, 2013). In February 2006, a group of young Palestinians staged a performance of the ancient Greek play *Antigone* in the Jenin Refugee Camp, located in the northern West Bank. This performance was not merely a cultural endeavor but a powerful form of protest. The backdrop to this event was a controversial and contentious issue: constructing the Museum of Tolerance on the grounds of Palestine's largest and most significant Muslim cemetery, which had been in constant use for centuries, spanning from the era of the Crusades until the uprooting of Palestine in 1948.

In the Palestinian context, the choice to perform *Antigone* held significant symbolism. Much like the protagonist of the play, the Palestinians were resisting what they perceived as blasphemy against their heritage and identity. The construction of the Museum of Tolerance on the sacred grounds of a Muslim cemetery was viewed as a violation, sparking deep-seated emotions within the community. By staging *Antigone*, the young Palestinians were drawing a parallel between their situation and the ancient Greek tragedy, emphasizing the struggle against the Israeli occupation and the preservation of cultural and religious sanctity. This performance of *Antigone* became a creative form of dissent, highlighting the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It demonstrated the enduring relevance of ancient texts in contemporary struggles and the power of theater as a medium for political expression. The event not only served as a testament to

the resilience of the Palestinian people but also underscored the universal themes embedded in classical literature, which continue to resonate across time and cultures.

Like Palestine, Syria stands as a testament to the enduring power of culture and heritage in the face of adversity. Syria, a country rich in history, heritage and culture, has faced significant political and social challenges over the decades, and the early 21st century has brought considerable unrest to the nation with the eruption of the Arab Spring, a series of pro-democracy uprisings that swept across North Africa and the Middle East, including Syria. What began as peaceful protests against the government of President Bashar al-Assad in 2011, demanding political reforms and ending corruption, eventually escalated into a devastating and brutal civil war, leading to a humanitarian crisis. The Syrian conflict drew in regional and international actors, resulting in widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and immeasurable human suffering and loss. In the midst of this turmoil, Sophocles' ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone* has found a profound echo on the Syrian stage, where adaptations and performances have adeptly woven the themes of the original play into the fabric of the Syrian context. Antigone, the defiant daughter of Oedipus, who stood up against the oppressive decree of King Creon, determined to honor familial bonds and uphold moral justice, resonates deeply with Syrians in their struggle for dignity and liberty. Her embodiment of an unwavering commitment to justice and resistance against unjust authority struck a chord with Syrians challenging authoritarian rule, where citizens found themselves grappling with similar themes of oppression, defiance, and the struggle for fundamental human rights. Antigone's story has become a powerful allegory for the Syrian people's fight against tyranny. Its adaptations in the Syrian context provide a platform to confront the pressing questions of human rights, societal obligations, and an individual's role in the face of oppressive regimes and societal upheaval. Adaptations of *Antigone* on the Syrian stage, particularly exemplified by productions like *Antigone of Syria*, have become a vehicle for artists and audiences to channel their collective experiences and express their yearning for justice and freedom.

First staged in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2014, *Antigone of Syria* transposes the narrative of Sophocles' *Antigone* to the backdrop of the Syrian civil war. This theatrical performance, brought to life by Aperta Productions, a charity dedicated to supporting refugees in building relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, and developing coping strategies, encourages participants to engage in recovery-oriented activities. These activities include writing poetry, singing, drawing, and theater, all aimed at aiding the refugees in their healing journey. *Antigone of Syria* is skillfully directed by the Syrian playwright Omar Abu Saada, a graduate of the High Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus. The play's transcript is penned by the Syrian playwright and dramaturg Mohamad Al Attar, with actor training conducted by Hala Omran (Al Attar, 2024). This remarkable production has emerged in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, offering a glimmer of hope and empowerment to thirty-five Syrian refugee women in Lebanon whose lives have been uprooted and shattered. These women have been brought together to embark on a transformative experience, culminating in a powerful performance demonstrating their talent, resilience and newfound confidence. Many of these women had never left the confines of their refugee camps before their involvement, and their exposure to the world outside had been severely limited. Within the safe confines of the theater, these women found the courage to speak up against abuse and discrimination. They shared their desires to roam the streets freely, pursue employment opportunities, and even compose rap music. The theater production has become a platform for them to fight for what remains of their lives after their devastating losses (Lang, 2015).

On stage, the women are dressed in black and red. Individually, each of them shares her own story, primarily centered around stories of dispossession, recreating the ordeal of trauma. The audience is prompted to reflect on their connection to the text and subjects within. These personal testimonies interweave with the original Greek text presented in the form of a monologue. Positioned at the center of the stage, the remaining cast occupies a line of chairs, embodying the role of the Greek chorus. Behind the women, a screen projects a backdrop of videos, texts, and images (Al-Saadi, 2014).



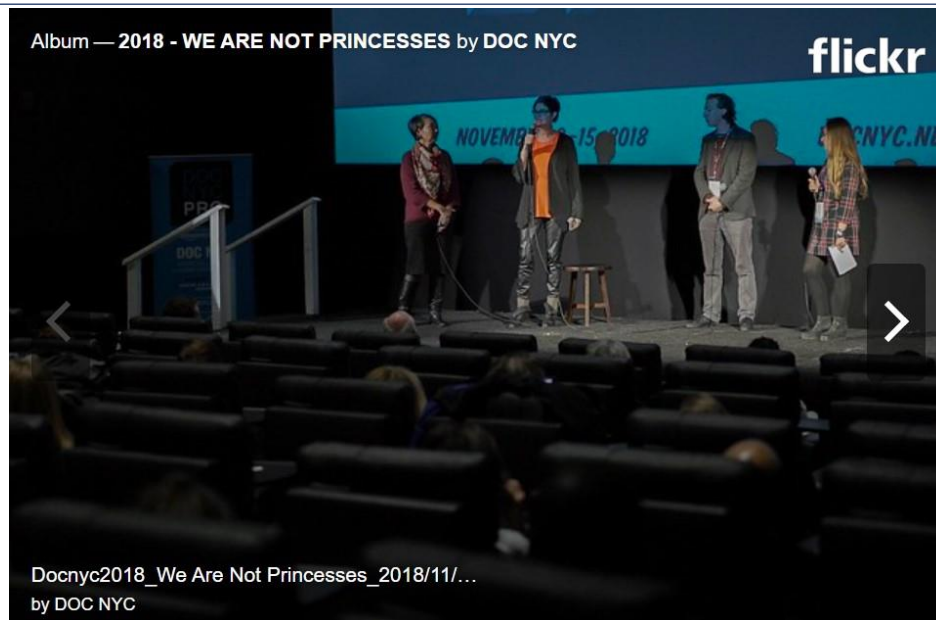
While rehearsing, 28-year-old Mona, a mother of two, expresses, “I feel that Antigone resembles me a lot” (Khamissy, 2014).



(Ross, 2015, “Antigone of Syria played at Beirut’s Al Madina Theater from 10-12 December 2014”)

Antigone of Syria has provided Syrian refugee women with an opportunity to break free from the constraints of their circumstances, explore the depths of their creativity, and immerse in the world of *Antigone*, a play that dates back over two millennia. These women find solace and strength in the ancient words of Sophocles' tragedy, embodying the characters on stage and channeling their experiences and emotions into the play. This theatrical production serves as a sanctuary, offering them a safe space for reflection, self-expression, and healing. The audience witnesses a performance and an authentic expression of the women's resilience and determination. Once silenced by the horrors of war, their voices now reverberate through the theater, challenging societal conventions and defying the limitations imposed upon them. Alice Fordham, in her article "Syrian Women Displaced by War Make Tragedy Of 'Antigone' Their Own," shares quotes from these Syrian refugee women during rehearsal. Wisam Succari says, "The play Antigone was an opportunity for us to voice everything inside of us. It's a story which takes place in the context of a war, and we, too, as Syrians, have fled a war." Mona, who only provided her first name and witnessed her neighborhood in Damascus rise in revolt, states, "I feel that Antigone resembles me a lot." She further adds, "We were not born just to listen, just to obey, just to receive orders. We should be able to stand up for something in our lives" (Fordham, 2014). Despite the vast temporal and cultural differences, the themes of *Antigone* resonate deeply with these women. The play's exploration of defiance, the struggle for proper burial, and the fight for personal identity mirror the challenges these women face. Through discussions, rehearsals, and trust-building exercises, they find consolation in the enduring narrative, realizing that the struggle of Antigone is, in many ways, their own.

Antigone of Syria, captured through the lenses of photographers and journalists, shines a light on the profound influence of art and resistance in the face of adversity. Tabitha Ross, a correspondent for The Guardian, a British daily newspaper, has documented this empowering experience, revealing the profound impact of participating in a theatrical performance on the lives of these women. In Ross's article "Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon Take Heart from Antigone," published on December 10, 2014, the powerful images depict moments of vulnerability, strength, and camaraderie. The photographs capture the determination etched on the faces of these women as they breathe life into the characters of Antigone and her companions. In contemplating her participation in this project, Hiba Sahyl, who tragically lost two brothers in the war, remarked: "I understand why Antigone does what she does. If I could go to Syria and bury my brother with my own hands, I would do it" (Ross, 2015). Simultaneously, the UNHCR's coverage provides a comprehensive account of the production and the journey these women undertook, offering invaluable insights into the significance of their participation in this theatrical endeavor (Martinez, 2018). This transformative experience has also been captured in the documentary film *We Are Not Princesses* (2018), directed by Bridgette Auger and Itab Azzam and produced by Susan Kimberlin, Hal Scardino, and Sara Maamouri. Through this documentary, the individual stories of these women are brought to the forefront, allowing them to narrate their own experiences and struggles. The film has become a testament to the power of storytelling and self-representation, breaking the mold of refugees as mere statistics and presenting them as individuals with unique narratives (Zambrano, 2018).



(Zambrano, 2018)

In tracing the diverse adaptations of *Antigone* across different regions in the Middle East, the focus now shifts to the Gulf region, where the ancient Greek play has found resonance in unique contexts. In a groundbreaking theatrical endeavor reported by Gulf Times on July 09, 2014, Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) witnessed the mesmerizing transformation of a classical Greek masterpiece, *Antigone*, into a powerful Arab adaptation. This innovative rendition came to life on the stage, brilliantly executed in English by a dedicated ensemble of Georgetown students, capturing the hearts of an audience comprising 150 students, staff, faculty, and family members. The play, a production of GU-Q's newly inaugurated Theater Group, was a testament to the creativity and determination of the students, with the guiding support of university faculty and staff who meticulously managed the logistics of this ambitious project.



(Georgetown University Qatar, 2014)

At the helm of this adaptation was Layanne Malluhi, a sophomore majoring in Culture and Politics at GU-Q, who embarked on the arduous task of modifying the script initially crafted by the Greek playwright Sophocles and later revised by Bertolt Brecht. Her mission was to infuse the play with relevance to the contemporary Middle Eastern context, a journey that commenced in January and culminated in a transformative theatrical experience (Gulf Times, 2014). Following the meticulous refinement of the script, open auditions were held, drawing the enthusiasm of over 20 students vying for the 13 pivotal roles. Notably, an email campaign was launched to encourage male participation, aiming to balance the overwhelming presence of female auditionees. Eventually, one male character was reimagined for a female actor. Qatari student Hessa al-Noaimi masterfully portrayed the titular role of Antigone, while Waleed Hachicho assumed the role of King Creon, Antigone's uncle and the ruler of Thebes (Georgetown University Qatar, 2014). For Hessa, this production marked her debut in theater, a profound experience that resonated deeply with her. The themes explored in *Antigone* resonated deeply across millennia, highlighting parallels with the challenges faced by the modern Arab world. In her portrayal of Antigone, she found striking similarities to contemporary struggles – references to wealth, overspending, and the erosion of moral values mirrored the very dilemmas confronted in today's Arab society. Her character's powerful monologues on the status of unmarried women connected with the audience, eliciting a shared understanding of the complexities of societal expectations (Georgetown University Qatar, 2014).

The dean of Georgetown University in Qatar, Dr. Gerd Nonneman, lauded the students' achievement, acknowledging the demanding academic environment in which they successfully balanced their scholarly commitments with this exceptional theatrical production. He underscored the enduring importance of theater as a cultural platform, a medium that has historically facilitated profound discussions on crucial societal issues. The adaptation's exploration of social, legal, and spiritual dynamics within a war-torn dynasty in Thebes, coupled with the resilience and determination of Antigone in the face of adversity, captivated the audience, leaving an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of GU-Q (Gulf Times, 2014). This singular performance, though presented just once, serves as a testament to the profound impact of theater, a force capable of bridging ancient narratives with contemporary challenges. The adaptation of *Antigone* not only portrayed the talent and creativity of Georgetown students but also reinforced theater's role as a mirror reflecting the human condition and a catalyst for meaningful dialogue. As the curtain fell on this remarkable production, it left behind a legacy of artistic innovation and intellectual discourse, inviting further exploration of classical texts in the context of the modern Arab world.

In a parallel vein, a unique production at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the United Arab Emirates, covered in an article titled "Antigone as the Arab heroine" by Roberta Pennington, published in The National News on November 6, 2015, brought ancient Greek theater into a contemporary Middle Eastern context. In this adaptation, a group of students reinterpret the classic tragedy, infusing it with modern relevance against the backdrop of the Arab Spring. The production, led by a Saudi national in the role of Antigone, has made notable revisions to enhance its connection with a modern Arabic audience. It incorporates elements of the Arab Spring, reflecting the political and social upheaval of that period. The characters wear modern regional clothing, and a Bedouin character has been introduced into the narrative, adding cultural depth to the story. The adaptation goes beyond just changing the setting. Characters are given Arabic-sounding names, and some dialogues have been rewritten to incorporate Arabic phrases, adding authenticity without altering the storyline significantly. These changes are made to connect the

story with the experiences and culture of the local audience (Pennington, 2015). The play's director, Anthony Tassa, the performing arts coordinator at AUS, has emphasized the importance of infusing Arab cultural elements, including themes related to the Arab Spring, allowing the student actors to create more personal connections with their characters. By incorporating these elements, the production aimed to resonate deeply with the regional audience, making the ancient Greek tragedy not only relatable but also empowering (Pennington, 2015).



(Pennington, 2015)

Students involved in the production expressed their hope that the audience would be moved and inspired by the story's themes of courage, truth, and challenging those in power. For example, Omnia Eldahshoury, who plays an old Bedouin woman, highlights how the Arabic version of *Antigone* makes the narrative more pertinent to regional audiences, especially considering the Arab Spring's impact on the region. Nissreen Al Mansouri, who portrays Antigone, hopes the audience will be inspired by the story's themes of standing up for one's beliefs, even in challenging circumstances (Pennington, 2015). This adaptation of *Antigone* reflects the power of art and storytelling to bridge cultures and engage audiences in a meaningful and contemporary discussion. It provides a fresh perspective on an ancient Greek tragedy while highlighting its universal themes in the context of a significant period in the Arab world's recent history, the Arab Spring.

3. Conclusion

The enduring influence of classical literature, mainly when ingeniously adapted, serves as a profound medium for addressing contemporary socio-political realities. This paper explores *Antigone's* presence on the Arab stage, where tradition and innovation intertwine to create gripping narratives that amplify the voices of the marginalized, the dispossessed, and the courageous, offering a unique insight into the collective soul of the Arab world. The adaptations of *Antigone* on the Arab stage not only preserve the essence of the classic work but also reinvigorate it with fresh relevance and resonance in modern contexts. By drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, both of which emphasize intertextual processes, creative transformation, contextual and cultural relevance, multiplicity of identity and meaning, dialogical engagement, and the role of audience reception, we have come to view adaptation as a vibrant process involving imaginative reinterpretation. It is evident that adaptation is not a mere duplication or mimicry but rather a tool to contemplate, critically examine and question societal, political, and cultural norms. Through adaptation, we gain

new perspectives on familiar narratives and characters, fostering a deeper understanding of the underlying complexities and promoting cultural dialogue across different eras and societies.

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Ethical Declarations

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and research ethics. Since the research did not involve human participants, there was no need for informed consent or other participant-related ethical procedures. However, all data sources and materials used in the research were handled responsibly and with due regard for intellectual property rights. The research process adhered to the principles of accuracy, transparency, and reliability to ensure the integrity of the findings

Data Availability Statement

The datasets collected and analyzed during this study are available from the researchers upon reasonable request.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

- Maram Al-Dweik and Mahmoud Al-Shra'ah conceptualized and designed the study, collected and analyzed the data.
- Maram Al-Dweik and Mahmoud Al-Shra'ah contributed to writing, reviewing, and editing the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

Consent for Publication

The researchers agree to submit this paper for publication and acknowledge that its consideration and publication are subject to the editorial and peer-review process. They also confirm that this work has not been previously published and has not been submitted to any other journal for consideration.

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