

RECOGNIZING FEMALES

Hegel's Antigone-device

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Abstract

In what terms can the model of recognition theorized by Hegel be applied to the man–woman relationship? Following a long period, since the 1970s of the last century, of clear rejection of Hegel's dialectics within feminist circles, in recent decades, within the same feminist movements and gender studies, Hegel's ideas have been newly explored precisely to try and answer this question. The main claim of this contribution is that, rather than looking at the slave–master dialectic, in order to find Hegel's best account on the process of subjectivation and the claim to recognition by women, insightful pages are those dedicated to the figure of Antigone, to whom Hegel devotes a strikingly articulated and consequence-bearing reading in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The model of recognition spelled out there also shows universal traits, which are particularly useful in addressing urgent issues of misrecognition typical of our society.

Keywords: Misrecognition, Tragedy, Feminism, Ethics.

1. *Antigone beyond Mastery and Servitude*

The notion of “recognition” is one of the most complex in Hegel's texts. Precisely this complexity has prompted from the start numerous interpretations. In particular, the section on *Mastery and Servitude* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which develops from the *Kampf um Anerkennung* (struggle for recognition), has been a place of constant confrontation and clash with Hegel's philosophy. From Marx to Fanon, Hegel's speculative system has been exposed as essentially bourgeois, Eurocentric, white. Undoubtedly one of the strongest attacks, however, has come from the feminist movements, which have denounced the macho and

violent character of those pages written by Hegel.¹ It is not about this radical rejection, however, that I wish to speak here.²

My goal is instead to show, also in reference to recent contributions, that Hegel's philosophy includes another model of recognition as well, and, more importantly, that this latter offers namely a possible way out of asymmetrical relations. This model can be found in the figure of Antigone.

Even before Judith Butler's disruptive analysis,³ numerous accounts – from Luce Irigaray to Patricia Jagentowicz Mills⁴ – have been devoted to Hegel's reading of Sophocles' heroine. Attention has been drawn in particular to Antigone's act, which can be understood as a request for recognition. Its form notably presents an alternative to the violence implicit in the life and death struggle.⁵ Antigone's act is presented indeed as an act of insubordination, through which the woman rejects the "natural" destiny imposed on her by patriarchal institutions,⁶ and claims a new role for herself. Moreover, by placing this figure in the section on the *Spirit* of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel makes it clear that we are no longer within the "anthropogenic" dimension of the human being and its typical struggle for recognition. Center stage is now given to the relational dynamics between

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- 1 C. Lonzi, *Let's Spit on Hegel* [1970], in P. Jagentowicz Mills (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, Pennsylvania University Press, Pennsylvania 1996 (henceforth FI), pp. 275-298.
 - 2 On this point, starting from Axel Honneth's contribution, a vast critical literature has developed, which has provided an account of the potential and richness of the struggle for recognition. For one of the most recent and most representative texts see, among others: A. Honneth, *Recognition. A Chapter in the History of European Ideas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020.
 - 3 J. Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Columbia University Press, New York 2000.
 - 4 N. Bauer, K. Hutchings, T. Pulkkinen, A. Stone, *Debating Hegel's Legacy for Contemporary Feminist Politics*, in K. Hutchings, T. Pulkkinen (eds.), *Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought. Beyond Antigone?*, MacMillan Palgrave, New York 2010, pp. 233-252. For a detailed reconstruction of the debate on Hegel's *Antigone* interpretation and an accurate analysis of "the eternal irony of the community", see: F. Campana, *L'ironia di Antigone nella lettura di Hegel*, in L. Illetterati, A. Manchisi, M. Quante, A. Esposito, B. Santini (eds.), *Morality, Ethics, Religion between Classical German Philosophy and Contemporary Thought. Studies in Honor of Francesca Menegoni*, Padova University Press, Padova 2020, pp. 457-472.
 - 5 PhS, p. 111.
 - 6 An attempt to identify in the slave–master dialectic a model that can account for conflict but also for reconciliation between male and female was recently made by J.-B. Vuillerod, *Retour sur la Reconnaissance chez Hegel. Une perspective féministe*, in "Polemos", 3, 2019, pp. 183-202.

masculine and feminine, and the issue at stake is not the early development of self-awareness, but rather the need to overcome a naturalization of roles. Although in many passages Hegel seems to trace back, like Aristotle before him, the difference between man and woman to their natural constitution, his approach to the issue in these pages also betrays the belief that sexual discrimination is a political issue, or more generally second-natural, and that therefore it must be dealt with on the level of the spirit.⁷ The recognition of females is therefore a cultural question, and a necessary phase of the spirit, as the reading of *Antigone* shows.

2. *When the marriage fails*

Antigone is not a cursory presence in Hegel's work. The Greek heroine and more in general Sophocles' works not only play a key role in the European culture of the late eighteenth century, but also act as a significant springboard for exchanges between Hegel and Hölderlin in the years they spent in Tübingen.

Already in 1787 a very young Hegel tried his hand at translating the *Oedipus at Colonus*. An attempt that also Hölderlin made, about ten years later, in 1796, and from which he would then transition, in the autumn of 1799, to *Antigone*. As is well known, the final – and much criticized⁸ – German

7 Even the possibility of emancipation from black slavery is identified by Hegel in culture. As one reads in the *Encyclopedia*: “Negroes are to be regarded as a nation of children who remain immersed in their uninterested and indifferent naivete. [...] they do not show an inner impulse towards culture”, G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, transl. from the 1830 Edition, together with the *Zusätze* by W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, revised with an *Introduction* by M. J. Inwood, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007, *Zusatz* § 393, p. 41. However, it should be clarified that for Hegel spirit and nature are not separate. Therefore, placing the issue of female emancipation on the level of the spirit does not mean dismissing the natural dimension. This latter remains at any rate the condition of possibility for the development of the spirit. According to Hegel, natural dispositions, corporeality, sensations, and feelings are in the spiritual dimension not irrelevant.

8 Cf. G. Steiner, *Antigones. How the Antigone Legend Has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1996, in part. pp. 66 f. About Hölderlin's translation, Steiner writes: “To Goethe and to Schiller, Hölderlin's treatment of the Greek text gave palpable evidence of mental collapse, of the *Umnachtung* (literally, ‘benightedness’) in which the poet endured from 1804 to his death in 1843. The same view is taken in Schelling's letter to Hegel of July 1804”, cf. G. Steiner, *Antigones*, cit., p. 66.

edition edited by Hölderlin was later printed in 1804.⁹ Also Goethe, the two Schlegels, and Schelling developed a passion for *Antigone*. A widespread revival of interest in those years for the ancient Athenian political and poetic culture certainly explains the great fascination for Sophocles, and in particular for *Antigone*, in Germany, during the Romantic era. Athens stood indeed for the triumph of an unparalleled political ideal. And the form in which that political ideal took shape aesthetically, that is to say, the form of the tragedy, appeared particularly suited to a description of modern sensibility.¹⁰ Tragedies express the incomplete split spirit of modernity; they translate in metaphorical terms the fall of human beings, their insubordination to destiny and, even in their defeat, their irreducible freedom.

For Hegel, Greek tragedies convey the moment of most extreme fracture, the explosion of contradiction, and thereby the possibility for the emancipation of humanity. The way in which, however, he includes Sophocles' tragedy in his *Phenomenology* implies also something more.

First, the reference to literary characters is Hegel's recurring device employed in order to effectively narrate the dismantling of traditional schemes. The protagonists of the great dramas, in fact, establish, by acting, the rule of their actions.¹¹ In *Hamlet*, in *Don Quixote*, and of course in *Antigone*, Hegel sees staged not only the description of great subjectivities, but also and above all their actions, namely the contradictions not only logical but also practical in which the protagonists find themselves, and the discovery, at the end of their dramas, of a new possible form of life. Moreover, as Kojève remarked, the clash between Antigone and Creon, "shows the conflict between two plans of existence,"¹² hence between two forms of life. Antigone, therefore, not only expresses the tragic spirit of modernity, but also the rebellion against a life plan pre-established by a natural order which makes no room for freedom, but only allows a blind necessary movement of obedience.

9 Hölderlin published in 1804 only two volumes of the *Trauerspiele des Sophokles* for the Frankfurt publisher Friedrich Wilmans. The first included the *Ödipus. Der Tyrann*, the second *Antigonae*.

10 In Steiner's words: "A theory of tragedy is not an adjunct to Hegel's construct. It is a testing ground and validation for main tenets of Hegel's historicism, for the dialectical scenario of his logic, and for the central notion of consciousness in progressive conflict", G. Steiner, *Antigones*, cit., p. 21.

11 A. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

12 A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Gallimard, Paris 1947, p. 102 (my transl.).

Human beings, however, cannot be reduced to nature alone – nor to culture alone. The established tie between the world of nature and women, and between that of culture and men signals, according to Hegel, a dangerous perspectival partiality, which needs to be overcome. This opposition, Hegel makes clear, “only expresses the superficial opposition of both aspects to each other.”¹³ Once the ethical sphere is reached, the gap and laceration between the form of life of the *polis* – which is the sublimation of the male model – in which the individual is recognized in his universality, and the *oikos*, in which individuality – thanks to the female – recovers its dignity, is bound to be overcome.

One should however remark that it is only during his studies that Hegel came to reach the standpoint that the relationship between masculine and feminine needs to be addressed in the spiritual sphere. In fact, in his first attempts at writing, back in the Frankfurt years, the relationship between lovers was handled by Hegel according to a quite different attitude. Back then Hegel seemed to explore the possibility of forming an intersubjective relationship, far removed from any external interest, which could effectively achieve equality in the relationship between human beings. Hegel’s solution, perhaps influenced by the prevailing Neoplatonism of the time, is to resort to a metaphysical theory rather than to an ethical one. The main force is in fact love as a superior instance expressing the reconciliation of life with itself. And, as a finite expression of this metaphysical level, the couple seems to be able to embody a model of recognition, that does not give in to forms of domination and hostility toward one another. It is not about defeating the enemy, as this model rather indicates the defeat of hostility. Love is the moment of recognition of the other without going through the struggle. As a result, the bond that unites lovers is seen as a relationship of duplication that takes the form of a mirroring, through which the process of recognition takes place. Love, to take up Hegel’s well-known formulation, stands for the ability to see in the other the equal to oneself, at least potentially.

Yet Hegel does not fully indulge in this Platonic aspiration. In the love relationship, he remarks, either there is a fusional relationship, and in this case, whoever dissolves in the fusion loses their status of autonomous subjectivity; or the parties remain in their obstinate singularity, which is expressed in possession, from corporeality to material

13 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. and ed. by T. Pinkard, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018 (henceforth PhS), p. 257.

goods. This latter is a relationship of mutual externality, that can only be superseded through the act of marriage, therefore on the juridical level. The result of the Frankfurt analysis is finally that the couple's love relationship fails to be a place of mutual recognition. It is either too much or too little.

It is perhaps on this ground that a few years later, in 1802, in the article *Über die wissenschaftliche Behandlung des Naturrechts*, the couple's relationship appears deprived of amorous ambitions and is delivered hands down to the practical level of the relationship between the individual and the state, between legislative decrees and ethics based on custom, to which Hegel also adds the "natural" contrast between male and female.

And in the texts drafted between 1805-06, Hegel delves even deeper in this distinction. The differences in constitution mean that in the desiring relationship a division is produced between the one who wishes, who is therefore an active part, the subject – the male – and the one who is desired, the passive part, the object – the female¹⁴: "The male has desire, drive; the feminine drive is far more aimed at being the object of drive, to excite, to arouse drive and to allow it to satisfy itself in it."¹⁵ Moving away from fusional love, Hegel lands on the acknowledgment of the asymmetry in gender relations: the male reduces the female to an object, and thus deprives her of the status of subject, making it impossible for a dynamic of recognition to take place in the love or marital relationship. Moreover, Hegel also writes: "the slave can become property as an entire personality, and so can the wife."¹⁶ Hegel seems then to agree with later feminist readings that the relationship of recognition cannot be applied to the man–woman relationship, but it can at best bear witness to the misrecognition of female otherness.

14 Here Hegel takes up the Aristotelian theory of the natural distinction between male and female. As a result, as long as women remain tied to their natural determination, they cannot be "recognized" in their process of autonomous subjectivation. Cf. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, transl. by A.L. Peck, Book I–II, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1943, 766a 30–31, pp. 391-393.

15 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit. A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–6) with Commentary*, ed. by L. Rauch, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1983, p. 105.

16 G.W.F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. and ed. by H.S. Harris, Th. M. Knox, State University of New York Press, Albany 1979, p. 128.

3. *Rejecting misrecognition*

It is precisely at this point that the remarks on *Antigone* come into play. In the history of the experience of the spirit, Antigone stages the archaic world and its clear contrasts between human and divine law, between masculine and feminine, between culture and nature. In the process of the spirit moving toward its own self-realization, Antigone therefore comes to embody the contradiction of this separation, declaring it no longer acceptable. Moreover, Hegel must have noticed that, right in her name, Antigone opposes her purpose/destiny (*Bestimmung*) to bear children. As a result, despite being called to defend the values of the family, and therefore of nature, in doing so she inexorably shows the impossibility of maintaining a clear distinction of realms. In representing the natural values Antigone is already outside and beyond them.

The form in which this contradiction takes shape in the tragedy, through the clash between Creon and Antigone, translates into the contrast between *the law of the day*, that of the *polis*, and the law of the family, *the law of the night*. In the background, the contrast between masculine and feminine. According to Hegel, this distinction of competences is also exemplified by the different “elaboration” of death. It is no coincidence, on a side note, that death is the undisputed protagonist of Sophocles’ tragedy.

Within the political community the individual dies, must die, to generate the immortal universality of the community; therefore, the individual is not recognized as this individual. Within the family, instead, death allows individuals to rediscover their own individuality through the funeral ritual organized by their relatives.¹⁷ Whereas, Hegel argues, the (male) individual obtains his true recognition only in the transition from the family to the community, the recovery of his particularity occurs instead in the family, which through a worthy burial and funeral rituals saves him from total dissolution (symbolic, in the community, biological in nature) and fully recognizes his peculiarity. The lifeless

17 The Hegelian argument here echoes Giambattista Vico’s pages in which the Neapolitan philosopher explains that humanity “began with ‘humare’”, that is, with “burying”, so that being human actually means giving burial to bodies, respecting the bodies in their sacred value. The “burials” therefore indicate the devotion that is owed to the dead, to the bodies of the dead. At § 337 of the 1744 *Scienza nuova*, Vico effectively draws attention to a scenario of this kind: “imagine a feral state in which human corpses remain unburied on the earth to be bait for crows and dogs [...]; men like pigs would go about eating acorns grown inside the rot of their dead relatives”, G. Vico, *Principi di Scienza Nuova*, Naples 1744, p. 117 (my transl.).

body would in fact return to a state of “*pure being*,” inorganic nature. Instead, the family retrieves its being no longer as a natural being but as a member of a community.

The family keeps the dead away from those dishonoring acts of unconscious desire and abstract creatures, and in place of them, it puts their own acts; it weds their kin to the womb of the earth, to the elemental, imperishable individuality. The family thereby makes the dead into a member of a polity which instead overwhelms and keeps in check the powers of the particular elements of matter and the lower living creatures which come to be free from him and which sought to destroy him.¹⁸

This is the “ethical” task of the family: to recognize and save the particularity of the individual. The family therefore stands as a place of recognition for the individual. But does this recognition hold true for the male and the female? The answer is definitely no.

As he already anticipates in Jena, Hegel is well aware that families feature relationships of asymmetry; he namely focuses on three types of family bond: husband-wife, parents-children, brother-sister.

In the marriage relationship, as already explained in the Jena years, the real moment of unification takes place in a third party (i.e. the engendered child). The couple is not enough in itself to recognize each other.

Differently, in the parent–child relationship recognition occurs indirectly: parents see in their children a relationship which becomes other, “they see their children come to their own being-for-itself without the parents being able to get it back;”¹⁹ also on the part of the children the recognition process refers to something other than themselves: their “having their own in itself in an other who is vanishing, and in achieving being-for-itself and their own self-consciousness only through separation from their origin – a separation within which the origin recedes.”²⁰

Clearly, for Hegel, marriage does not establish a true recognition-based relationship, inasmuch as it unites two unrelated persons, who therefore remain biologically distinct. Similarly, within the family, the child remains different inasmuch as it has a separate existence. As a place for recognition marriages are a failure.²¹ The definition of family in the ethical sphere is

18 PhS, p. 261.

19 PhS, p. 263.

20 PhS, p. 263.

21 Here it is useful to remind the reader that, in the famous Frankfurt fragment on love, Hegel identifies the limit of recognition between husband and wife in property (whether understood as a body or as real property), while in the Jena years

“an immediate consciousness of itself” and “a natural ethical community.”²² This lack of recognition is all the more true for women, who, in their role as mothers and wives, remain a universal function deprived of individuality. “In the household of ethical life, it is not *this* man, and it is not *this* child; rather, it is *a man, children as such* – these female relationships are grounded not on sentiment but on the universal.”²³

On the contrary, as the tragedy of Antigone testifies, the male in the family gets his recognition as a particularity, and he becomes *this* father, *this* husband. However, this recognition remains partial, because there is no conflict in it, and therefore, the relationship remains linked to the biological, natural dimension,²⁴ without reaching a conscious ethical intention. This is why the adult male leaves the family and turns to the *polis*, the only institution capable of recognizing or realizing the universal aspect of human action – leaving the sphere of the particular to the family.²⁵

A man turns to the city, writes Hegel, “because it is only as a citizen that he is actual and substantial, the individual, so far as he is not a citizen but belongs to the Family, is only an unreal insubstantial shadow.”²⁶ From being a biological being, defined in Aristotelian terms by his particularity as a mere living being, as he transitions to life in the city, a man obtains a status of universality, and thus comes to live in and for the universal.

As a result, whereas women in marriage never separate the ethical (universal) dimension from the affective (particular) one, this separation occurs in the case of men. In this respect, men transfer the ethical dimension to the public sphere, while placing desire in the private sphere. “The husband’s authority and position in the *polis* allow him to have sexual domination over the wife in the family and simultaneously keep him ‘detached’ from

the gap is much more a “spiritual” matter. Preventing mutual recognition in the couple is the inequality and the essential gap featured by ancient Greek ethics and culture. This signals the development of a different approach in Hegel’s understanding of the man–woman relationship. On the subsequent evolution of this relationship in the *Outlines*, see E. Rózsa, *Von Antigone zur anständigen Frau Hegels Frauenbild im Spannungsfeld zwischen der Phänomenologie des Geistes und der Rechtsphilosophie von 1820*, in OF, pp. 259-275.

22 PhS, p. 268.

23 PhS, p. 264.

24 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel’s Antigone*, in FI, p. 60.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–88. Jagentowicz Mills’s account, some key passages of which we will include in the following pages, arrives however at a very radical conclusion: “the modern world described by Hegel, like the pagan world, is made at woman’s expense and [...] Antigone is misused to represent woman in the family in transhistorical terms”, *ibid.*, p. 78.

26 PhS, p. 270.

his desire for her: Man rules woman in the private sphere because he rules in the public world. And as he rules in the public world and in the family he rules himself."²⁷

An insurmountable contradiction comes to the fore here: "In the pagan world the family and the *polis*, the particular and universal spheres of man's existence, are mutually exclusive [...]. This conflict between the familial and the political makes for the tragic character of pagan life and creates a fundamental antinomy between family life, as the natural ground of ethical life, and ethical life in its social universality, or 'second nature,' in the *polis*."²⁸ This creates a separation of competences: the family world is the female one and embodies the divine law, while the world of the *polis* embodies virility and the law of the male.²⁹

It is at this moment that the misrecognition of women appears in all evidence. While both, male and female, do not fully achieve their recognition in the family, men find their fulfillment in the *polis*, but women remain "condemned" to the hearth. Women are therefore missing the recognition of their particularity, since they dissolve in the natural ethical universality of the family, and, what's more, they never reach that universality that only the *polis* can grant.

It is therefore clear that the relationship between husband and wife cannot be one of mutual recognition.³⁰ "Husband and wife are 'others' for each other."³¹

27 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel's Antigone*, in FI, p. 62.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

29 Patricia Jagentowicz Mills writes that: "The family represents life and the *polis* represents the risk of life. The conflict between these two spheres is inescapable and unalterable. Man cannot renounce the family since he cannot renounce the particularity of his existence nor can he renounce the universality of his action in and for the *polis*." Cf. P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel's Antigone*, in "The Owl of Minerva", 17, 2, 1986, pp. 131-152, here p. 132.

30 Hence the critique moved by the feminist movement, starting with contributions like the one by Carla Lonzi, who rejects any merely formal recognition of equality, reiterating instead the request for concrete participation in the management of political power (cf. C. Lonzi, *Let's Spit on Hegel*, in FI, p. 276). For a different perspective, see S. Benhabib, who instead emphasizes how, in various passages of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel refers to women as not naturally but culturally and socially defined. These passages would prove Hegel's "awareness of the cultural, historical and social variations in family and sexual relations", S. Benhabib, *On Hegel, Women and Irony*, in FI, pp. 25-44, here p. 30. Hence also Hegel's criticism of the abstract equality of modernity, since distinctions connected to sex and age are still maintained in citizen life.

31 S. Doğan, *Reading Hegel on Women and Laughing. Hegel against or with Women / Other?*, in S. Achella, F. Iannelli, G. Baptist, S. Feloj, F. Li Vigni, C. Melica

4. *Is it enough to have a brother?*

The relationship between brother and sister appears to Hegel in different terms.³² They are free individuals who do not depend on a third party but are linked by the same blood. This is so because desire does not intervene to make the relationship uneasy and unequal. They are ὁμαίμος, because they share the blood of the same mother and of the same father.³³ In the sister–brother relationship, therefore, the fracture between desire and ethics that produces the inequality between male and female is overcome: “To the sister, the brother is the motionless essence itself, equal to her, and her recognition (*Anerkennung*) in him is pure and unmixed with any natural relation. The indifference of singular individuality and its ethical contingency is thus not present in this relationship. Rather, the moment of the singular self, as recognizing and being recognized, may here assert its right because

(eds.), *The Owl's Flight. Hegel's Legacy to Contemporary Philosophy*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2021 (henceforth OF), pp. 225–237, here p. 234.

- 32 The scholarly literature has dealt extensively with this topic in reference to the particularly strong relationship between Hegel and his sister, discussing as well the topic of incest in this regard. Here we are not interested in addressing the issue highlighted by Lacan and in part redefined by Butler of the tabooization by Hegel of the topic of incest. On this point, see J. Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Muller, transl. by Dennis Porter, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1992; J. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, cit., p. 66. For a detailed discussion of Hegel's relationship with his sister and with women in general, see F. Iannelli, *Hegel's Constellation of the Feminine between Philosophy and Life. A Tribute to Dieter Henrich's Konstellationsforschung*, in OF, pp. 239–255.
- 33 Cf. E. Caramelli, *Antigone and the Phenomenology of Spirit Between Literary Source (vv. 925–928) and Philosophical Reading*, in OF, pp. 293–303, here pp. 296–297. As Caramelli remarks, Antigone's ethical constitution is determined by the logic of the *same*, clearly expressed in the heroine's will to do everything by herself. In this regard, mention should be made of Nicole Loraux's study, which, starting from this feature of Antigone's attitude, provides an account of her monadic identity. Cf. N. Loraux, “La main d'Antigone”, in “Metis”, 1, 1986, pp. 165–196, here p. 170. In this regard, Caramelli remarks: “What is paradoxical is that, while obviously wanting to break free from the curse of the Labdacids – the inexorable logic of the same – on which, except a few words from Ismene, Antigone places the veil of silence and oblivion, she is fatally, once again, αὐτόνομος and αὐτόγνωτος, up to the extreme of self-destruction. Therefore, as regards the treatment of immediate ethics, Antigone gives an exemplary account of how ancient subjectivity, characterized by unilateral pathos, was not equipped to accept otherness in itself and therefore did not know how to cope with contradiction”, E. Caramelli, *Antigone and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, cit., p. 297. This self-referentiality would entrust to Antigone herself the sense of her misrecognition.

it is bound up with the equilibrium of blood relations and with relations utterly devoid of desire. The loss of a brother is thus irreplaceable to the sister, and her duty towards him is the highest."³⁴

Since there is no mixing of external elements (neither biological extraneousness, nor the separation introduced by desire with respect to the ethical bond), each of the siblings recognizes and is recognized.

The brother–sister relationship is a unity of male and female that is not recognition as separation, distinctiveness or dissimilarity: It is a relationship of identity-in-difference. Their recognition is that of ‘free individualities in regard to each other’ which transcends the indifference or ethical contingency characteristic of the husband–wife relationship.³⁵

The only way available to women to obtain true recognition in the ethical dimension is then through brothers.³⁶ In this perspective, one can better understand why Antigone is deeply devastated by the death of her brother: “the death of a brother thus becomes an irreparable loss for the sister since with his death she loses the ideal relationship with a man.”³⁷

However, as many feminist interpreters have shown, this form of recognition of women remains insufficient. This is so for numerous reasons. First of all, the absence of reciprocity. Following Luce Irigaray’s remark, one can agree that, while a brother can use his sister as a “living mirror,” to look at himself through her, a sister does not find in her brother any image that allows her to access universality.³⁸ The recognition of Antigone is made possible by the fact that she is able to identify herself, or see herself reflected, in the value of Polynices, but not in her own.

But there is more. As Patricia Jagentowicz Mills pointed out,³⁹ this recognition occurs when the brother is still in the family, meaning that he is a man only “potentially.” His recognition of his sister is therefore also quite potential only. Moreover, while, as *Antigone* shows, the obligation to bury

34 PhS, p. 264.

35 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel’s Antigone*, in FI, p. 63.

36 Hegel retains his understanding of the ethical purity of the brother–sister relationship in the *Philosophy of History*, where he describes Apollo as “pure” precisely because “he has no wife, but only a sister [Artemis, the virgin goddess of hunt], and is not involved in various disgusting adventures, like Zeus”, G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, transl. J. Sibree, Dover, New York 1956, pp. 245–246.

37 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel’s Antigone*, in FI, p. 64.

38 Cf. L. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1993, pp. 116–118.

39 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel’s Antigone*, in FI, p. 65.

the brother and to honor his memory remains entrusted to the woman, as guardian of family law, the same does not apply to the man who leaves his family of origin never to return.

Finally, what happens to a woman without a brother? The recognition expressed by this type of relationship is contingent and occasional and as such it cannot structure the consciousness of the feminine.

The limits of Hegel's reading of *Antigone* on this point are clear. Yet, although not directly declined in terms of gender emancipation, Hegel's remarks seem to acknowledge the inadequacy of this ethical model, which is seen as bound to collapse and precisely at the hands of Antigone. Since the polis does not recognize her in her individuality, she destroys it: "Woman, as the representative of the family principle, the principle of particularity which the polis represses, is the internal cause of the downfall of the pagan world."⁴⁰

In Hegel's words: "While the polity gives itself stable existence only by disrupting familial happiness and by dissolving self-consciousness in the universal, it creates an internal enemy for itself in what it suppresses, which is at the same time essential to it, or it creates an enemy in the feminine itself. By intrigue, the feminine – the polity's eternal irony – changes the government's universal purpose into a private purpose, transforms its universal activity into this determinate individual's work, and it inverts the state's universal property into the family's possession and ornament."⁴¹

Ironically, in this interplay between recognition and misrecognition, it is the latter that prompts Antigone⁴² to leave the sphere of the family and to act in the public world, turning her gesture from private to political.⁴³

While it is true that she is in the polis on behalf of the family, nevertheless she experiences the duality of pagan life and has the potential to become this particular self. Through the conscious risk of life in the sphere of the polis, Antigone transcends the limitations of womanhood set down by Hegel.⁴⁴

40 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel's Antigone*, in FI, p. 67.

41 PhS, p. 275.

42 On this point, see Adorno's analysis, which distinguishes between particular and particularity, Th. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, transl. E.B. Ashton, Seabury, New York 1973, p. 173. As Jagentowicz Mills comments: "for Adorno the concept of the particular is a concept of the dialectics of non-identity whereas the concept of particularity eliminates the particular as particular in order to absorb it into a philosophy of identity dominated by the universal", P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel's Antigone*, in FI, p. 68.

43 Cf. J.B. Elshtain, *Moral Woman and Immoral Man: A Consideration of the Public-Private Split and Its Political Ramifications*, in "Politics and Society", 4, 1974, pp. 453-473.

44 P. Jagentowicz Mills, *Hegel's Antigone*, in FI, p. 73.

Antigone's agency marks the abandonment of the static sphere of being, to which the woman is naturally confined, to move on to the dynamic act of doing. As a result, while experiencing her tragedy, Antigone establishes the rules that guide her action. There is no absolute norm based on which she can describe herself – and discriminate. Antigone “generates” her own norm and, “In taking upon herself the inevitable guilt of action, in opposing the feminine-ontological to the masculine-political, Antigone stands above Oedipus: her ‘crime’ is fully conscious. It is an act of self-possession even before it is an acceptance of destiny.”⁴⁵ Despite the tragedy, Hegel seems indeed to grasp the emancipatory and self-affirmative potential of Antigone's act. This is also confirmed by his paying little attention to the figure of his sister Ismene, who on the contrary remains anchored to traditional values. While advocating her female condition, Ismene refuses to act and thereby denies her moral dimension, anchoring herself to nature and at the same time surrendering herself to an ahistorical immobility. And this is why, as it is the case in the relationship of one servant to another, Antigone cannot find recognition in the relationship with her sister. Although Ismene tries to overcome her initial fear and offers to share responsibility for the act Antigone has done, this latter refuses, considering herself solely responsible for what happened. Creon also refuses to attribute co-responsibility to Ismene. What counts is the concrete action, the effective action, and not the word. With respect to Antigone's action, Ismene remains withdrawn and passive. While based on her *agency* Antigone can be recognized.

5. Taking the recognition

This reinterpretation of *Antigone*, supported as well by feminist readings, allows to identify in the act of Antigone an alternative model of recognition, which can be beneficially applied to the reading of all asymmetrical relationships.

Antigone claims a form recognition that does not go through the life and death struggle, but rather relies on an act of disobedience.⁴⁶ This implies an

45 G. Steiner, *Antigones*, cit., p. 35.

46 On the relevance of Antigone as a warning for the respect of human rights, see F. Iannelli, *Wenn der Feind auch der Bruder ist: die unschuldige Schuld von Hegels Antigone*, in “Scientia Poetica”, 13, 2009, pp. 120-134; and A. Siani, *Unvollkommene Gerechtigkeit. Hegel, Antigone und die Menschenrechte*, in Th. Oehl, A. Kok (eds.), *Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel. Kunst, Religion und Philosophie innerhalb und außerhalb von Gesellschaft und Geschichte*, Brill,

act of responsibility, which also marks the transition from the first-natural dimension to the ethical dimension.

This model, which has been applied to the possible forms of emancipation of women in the 1970s, can now also be applied to new rights. The issue connected to Antigone is in fact how to assert a right not yet recognized. Let's think about migrants today.⁴⁷ Acting as "illegal citizens"⁴⁸ or as "unauthorized citizens,"⁴⁹ they state without mediation, just like Antigone, their belonging to the ethical community.⁵⁰ They demand their right to life and dignity to be recognized. Against positive law they exercise an eternal right. They therefore introduce a dynamic and emancipatory potential and set in motion what appears to be standing still. As we read in the *Phenomenology*,

The agent can neither deny the crime nor deny his guilt. – The deed consists in setting the unmoved into motion, which thereby brings forth what had been sealed off as mere possibility, and it links the unconscious to the conscious and the non-existent to being. In this truth, therefore, the deed comes to light – as that in which the conscious is combined with the unconscious and in which what is one's own is combined with what is alien.⁵¹

Leiden/Boston 2018, pp. 191-212. On the later use of the figure of Antigone, see S. Fornaro, *Il disordine di Antigone*, in C. Cao, A. Cinquegrani, E. Sbrojavacca, V. Tabaglio (edd.), *Maschere del tragico*, "Between", VII, 14, 2017, <http://www.betweenjournal.it/>, here pp. 14-15. Cf. H.-T. Lehmann, *Erschütterte Ordnung – Das Modell Antigone*, in *Das politische Schreiben*, Theater der Zeit, Berlin 2002, pp. 28-43.

47 Today this model takes on a very precise form in the proposals of thinkers such as Étienne Balibar and Engin Isin, who, while analyzing the disavowal of migrants' rights, propose the ideas of "insurgent citizenship," "activist citizenship," and "acts of citizenship," which "inevitably imply a break with habits." In these cases, migrants directly claim and exercise, regardless of their legal status, their rights. Cf. E. Balibar, *At the Borders of Citizenship: A Democracy in Translation?*, in "European Journal of Social Theory", 13, 3, 2010, pp. 315-322; E.F. Isin, *Theorizing acts of citizenship*, in E.F. Isin, G.M. Nielsen (eds), *Acts of Citizenship*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2008, pp. 15-43, here p. 18.

48 E. Rigo, *Citizenship at Europe's Borders: Some Reflections on the Post-Colonial Condition of Europe in the Context of EU Enlargement*, in "Citizenship Studies", 9, 1, 2005, pp. 3-22.

49 S. Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2006, pp. 294-296.

50 Cf. Butler's notion of performative acts, in J. Butler, G.C. Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-state?: Language, Politics, Belonging*, Seagull Books, Calcutta 2007.

51 PhS, p. 272.

In carrying out the act, what is ethical becomes actual, and that crime reveals its necessity.

Antigone chooses to act by breaking the rights delimited by the *jus*. With her act she shows that new needs and new rights, which society still does not accept or recognize, must be taken into account. “This makes of Antigone a promise of social transformation that does not move from abstract hypothesis, but rather from effective livable units, striving to make of its forms of life new units of social recognition.”⁵²

Each breaking of the law of the day becomes a wound, a necessary crime in the recognition process, and, Hegel concludes, “Because we suffer, we recognize (*anerkennen*) that we have erred.”⁵³

This is the fracture introduced by all those who do not see themselves recognized in their otherness by the common nature of powers (language, knowledge, forms of life). *Antigone* then stages not only the confrontation between the *oikos* and the *polis*, but also the requests of all those who refuse to submit to family, social, and political ties that appeal to an unjustified eternal norm. As Sophocles and later Hegel show, that of Antigone is not an act that threatens the social ethical order tout court, but a request for recognition. This model of recognition is not dialogic, but also not violent. It goes through an impact, through an act of negation, of disobedience, a determined negation, which advances a claim to universality challenging the different powers in conflict, in view of a rethinking of the ethical order.⁵⁴

52 N. Sánchez Madrid, *Giving an Account of Precarious Life and Vulnerability. Antigone's Wisdom after Hegel*, in OF, pp. 151-162, here pp. 159-160.

53 PhS, p. 272. This is the translation, presumably made by Hegel, of verse 926 of the *Antigone*: “Weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, daß wir gefehlt”, G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [1807], in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, W. Bonsiepen, R. Heede (eds.), Meiner, Hamburg 1980, here p. 255.

54 N. Sánchez Madrid, *Giving an Account of Precarious Life and Vulnerability*, cit., p. 160.

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