

CIHUATLÁN: ANTÍGONAS DE SANTA MARTHA: THE STUMBLER AND MISSTEPS OF ANTIGONE IN PRISON¹

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CREONE: Now, Antigone, tell me shortly and to the point, did you know the proclamation against your action?

ANTIGONE: I knew it; of course I did. For it was public.

CREON: And did you dare disobey the law?

ANTIGONE: Yes, it was not Zeus that made the proclamation... God's ordinances, unwritten and secure. *They* are not of today and yesterday; they live forever; none know when first they were.... I know that I will die—of course I do—even if you had not doomed me by proclamation.... But if I dared to leave the dead man, my mother's son, dead and unburied, that would have been real pain.

— *Antigone*²

During the fall of 2017, *Mujeres en Espiral: sistema de justicia, perspectiva de género y pedagogías en resistencia (Women Spiraling: The Justice System, the Perspective of Gender and Pedagogies in Resistance)*, a research project/action which I direct, based at UNAM in Mexico City, conducted a re-reading of the text *Antigone* by Sophocles with a group of incarcerated women, with the goal of creating a short film.³

The purpose of this article is to analyze this re-reading of *Antigone*. In particular, to analyze its appropriation by inmates at a female prison in Mexico City, the Centro Femenil de Reinserción Social (CEFRESO,

2 → Sophocles, "Antigone," in *Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*, eds. David Grene and Richard Lattimore, trans. David Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 446-468.

3 → *Women Spiraling*, a project which I have directed since its inception in 2008, is an interdisciplinary academic initiative intervening in the Mexican and Global South legal and penal systems, based on artistic, pedagogical, and legal practices with women in detention. Since 2008, we (the project members and the incarcerated women) have created murals, fanzines, video fanzines, documentaries, short films, recipe books and prison dictionaries, poetry and visual narratives. With respect to the legal side, we provide advocacy, benefits, and amicus curiae. Currently, three of our cases are being processed in the SCJN (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, [Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation]), as strategic litigation. We have trained pedagogues, professionals in political science, sociology, anthropology, in art history and artistic practices and above all lawyers who are sensitive to the penal condition and the legal processes of incarcerated women from the perspective of gender.

Women's Social Rehabilitation Center) of Santa Martha Acatitla, in the municipality of Iztapalapa. It proposes strategies with which the tragedy has been re-read and visualized by incarcerated women, with the goal of transmitting their demands and making their voices heard through a short film titled *Cihuatlán: Antígonas de Santa Martha* (*Cihuatlán: The Antigones of Santa Martha*).⁴

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Using the production of that short film as my starting point, I attempt to analyze the ways in which Antigone drifts in her descent to the South, when placed in two of the most representative settings of a Latin America which is both unequal and yet at the same time engaged in a persistent fight for equity and social justice: prison (the penal system) and the academy (the public university system), two contrasting but equally strategic spaces for the construction of democracy and social justice in Mexico.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first, "The University and the Prison: Lateral pedagogies, stumbles and zigzags," I situate the project which gave rise to the intervention of the university in the prison, and I introduce the pedagogical process which allowed us to re-read the tragedy in the context of a female prison. I call this process *side-note pedagogies* [pedagogías del traspié], or pedagogies of *stumbling* and *zigzag*, because of the type of oblique maneuvers which the women developed while reading *Antigone* by Sophocles.

In the second section, "Strategies of Interruption: Tilted readings, missteps [traspié] and zigzags," I attend to the cry and call of Antigone, as the founding gesture of the tragedy. During the prison work, the cry of the female prisoners changes from a cry of lament to a call to action, a protest which urges us to reconsider the power relationships involved in the care-giving duties which women offer in the family and social sphere, and in relation to legal and criminal structures. In this section I also analyze the ways in which the bodies and the tongues (spoken language) of the incarcerated women interrupt and "cross [atraviesa]"⁵ themselves to redraw the contours of an

4 → I thank Moira Fradinger for her very thoughtful reading of this text and her valuable suggestions.

5 → Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

Antigone which we can decidedly call Latin American. In this way, we can affirm with Moira Fradinger that Antigone is one of the most translated, staged, rewritten, and re-read tragedies across the world and in particular in Latin America. This was the case particularly during the second half of the twentieth century and the subsequent coups d'état, dictatorships and authoritarian regimes which occurred in Latin America. The themes of disobedience to the state, obedience to the laws of blood and family, confinement in the cave (incarceration), the excessive punishment of women, and the unending search for a dignified grave for the bodies of the disappeared, by women (mothers, daughters, aunts, and wives) have been re-read and used narratively, pedagogically, and politically in Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, Cuba, Brazil, Puerto Rico and throughout practically the entire Latin American region.

The third section "Side-notes: Strategies of interruption and irruption of the other in the original text", addresses the strategies of reading and appropriation employed by the women, understood as irruptions in the text, as a series of interruptions and stumbles with the original. Instead of the familiar and expected *footnotes* [notas al pie], in this type of reading side-notes [*notas al traspié*] emerge as the strategies resulting in a *zigzagging* and *stumbling* reading of Sophocles's *Antigone* by a group of incarcerated women characterized as "foul-mouthed" and "badly educated" in an illiterate and marginal space such as prison.

My interest is to show the seams and the borders of an academic/activist project inclined towards the appropriation of the tragedy *Antigone* by the incarcerated women, starting specifically from the slips, stumbles, and missteps of these women who came to their reading of Sophocles's *Antigone* with their own missed reading. To do this I use authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Walter Kohan, Edward Said, Diana Taylor, Pedro Lemebel, Jaques Rancière, Dolores Juliano, Jean Franco, Antonio Cornejo Polar, Bolívar Echeverría and Moira Fradinger, to name a few.

I. THE UNIVERSITY AND THE PRISON: LATERAL PEDAGOGIES, STUMBLES AND ZIGZAGS

In this section, I focus on demonstrating the ways in which the tragedy of *Antigone* is diverted to the South and re-read in the unorthodox classrooms of an academy inclined towards urgent social causes. This inclination represents an incline towards the Other, so pronounced that it can only be wandered in a zigzag. The reading of the tragedy of *Antigone* from this non-linear or lateral pedagogy allowed for a departure from the properly academic, and for an oblique descent towards the borders which allow that which has disappeared to become visible, and to articulate glances, relationships, actions and texts for the purpose of reconstructing other identities and politics which can then be attended to and heard.

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The zigzag refers to that broken movement which denotes a change in rhythm, which itself is not sustained in a direct nor straightforward manner as far as the reading of literary or academic texts by incarcerated women is concerned. Pedro Lemebel speaks not of making a face, but a profile, referring to a broken glance – not direct – inclined, coming at the text side on rather than head on, which catalyzes the creation of a many-fold wandering knowledge.⁶ The indirect side glance (very common in prison), comes from issues with visibility in an extremely policed space, such as prison. A direct and open glance could put the viewer (who sees and knows what she saw but does not

6 → It is necessary to theorize about these different ways of averting one's gaze: looking from the side, looking in zigzag, from bottom up, and with one's eyes downcast (Ayra Carrión, "La mirada cabizbaja: una escena de la violencia geológica-política en Neltume," in *Violencia política y de género en Latinoamérica: representaciones críticas desde el arte y la fotografía*, ed. Rita Ferrer (Chile: Ediciones Revista ATLAS, 2016)). I have borrowed these notions of profile, broken glance and *zigzagging* from Pedro Lemebel, as views that mark the South. Lemebel helps us express a state of uncertainty which stems from the heart of the crossed [*atravesados*], those subjects who are disposed towards crossing and interrupting. The zigzag glance posed by Pedro Lemebel means looking at an angle (or turn) in such a way that the disappeared is made visible and the articulation of glances, actions and texts to reconstruct identities and politics is made possible. For more on elusive and zigzagging maneuvers see Pedro Lemebel, *Loco Afán* (Mexico: Editorial Planeta, 2009), 166-67. See also the article by Jorge Díaz, "Imagen colonizadora/Imagen refractaria. Una crítica a las metodologías extractivistas de la academia del performance," in *Violencia política de género en Latinoamérica: representaciones críticas desde el arte y la fotografía*, ed. Rita Ferrer (Chile: Ediciones Revista ATLAS, 2016).

say what she knows) at risk. The idea of our pedagogies in zigzag is precisely to produce expression from this sidelong glance, from this invisible, hasty and urgent knowledge.

This sinuous and lateral positioning before classic and hegemonic texts allows us to see a Latin American strategy, which, as Josefina Ludmer writes, strategically works with its subaltern positioning in the face of power relationships unfavorable to the subaltern subject. The subject in prison develops her knowledge by denying that very knowledge (the knowledge of “what can’t be said” or of “how to speak about not knowing”⁷) which results in an academy which zigzags, deviates and even suspends the linearity of reason and discipline as a driving force. This kind of knowledge resides in the borders between academic disciplines and university practices, in their nooks and crannies and limits.

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According to Rancière in his text *On the Shores of Politics*, contact between those who are different is achieved at the limits, and it is precisely there where politics resides, as the possibility of contact and covenant with the other.⁸ The reading of the tragedy as enacted by incarcerated women, some of them illiterate, others of them speakers of Náhuatl and other indigenous languages, almost all of them mothers and the majority of whom did not complete high school, is particularly important. These “foul-mouthed” enunciations (cursed and badly spoken [*mal-dichas*, *mal-ditas*]), produce scenes and characters which transform the action of the tragedy and *Antigone's* contours, changing it into an agent of transformation for the contracts between state and subject. To understand this transformation, I will give an account (as a way to report and list) of seven visual, corporal, and narrative strategies with which the incarcerated women navigated across the text using different forms of appropriation - stumbling and zigzagging - of their reality.

7 → Josefina Ludmer, “Las Tretas del Débil”, in *La sartén por el mango. Encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas* (Puerto Rico: Ediciones El Huracán, 1985), 48, 52.

8 → Jacques Rancière, *On the shores of politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007).

II. STRATEGIES OF INTERRUPTION: TILTED READINGS, MISSTEPS AND ZIGZAGS

In what follows I attempt to analyze the strategies of interruption and intervention in the text, understanding them as stumbles, missteps, and movements in zigzag. To be able to read from that cry, the noise and racket which are persistent in prison, requires actions in zigzag which break the linearity and discipline of both the academy and the prison. One form of rupture is to invert the topology of the citation and redirect what is understood as legitimate knowledge: from the footnote to the side-note.

Footnotes substantiate knowledge with what is considered to be a voice of authority, which cancels out the noise and racket and accredits an authorized version of knowledge; *side-notes* are capable of validating non-authorized voices and unexpected archives (not only those which are not considered authorized by the academy, but also by modern rational knowledge). I am alluding in this manner to a concept which is capable of embracing the noise in an attempt to read from below, from the place of the subject who produces the noise: a boisterous and unauthorized space, such as prison. The *side-notes* and call outs perform the function, as in citations, of calling other sources of knowledge and expertise, recognized or adjacent – and at times ordinary – which give authority and sense of place to the text.

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Bolívar Echeverría translates this as a decolonial act, a contact – or “roce/rajada” (a chafe or brush against) – with modernity from the South. The contact with modernity, according to Bolívar Echeverría, does not represent a way of life adopted by those others, rather it seems to be a fatality, an unquestionable and tragic destiny to which we must submit.⁹ The sideways glance, the stumble or misstep and the zigzag, is the way in which the “South” rejects the modernity that devastates it, which stems from an overwhelming capitalism, from a violent and racist patriarchy. One way of resisting this modernity is to introduce the logic of diversion or of secrecy, though the indeciphera-

9 → Bolívar Echeverría, “Imágenes de la ‘blanquitud’” in Bolívar Echeverría, Diego Lizarazo, y Pablo Lazo Briones, *Sociedades icónicas. Historia, ideología y cultura en la imagen* (México: Siglo XXI, 2007).

ble and the chaotic; that is to say as an unrecognizable noise.¹⁰

The concept of side-notes comes from a pedagogy of trial and error, of errancy – of sideways and zigzagging motion – and from an approximation starting from strategic ignorance. Lacan speaks about a learned ignorance, Walter Kohan takes up this proposal, interpreting it as an “as if...”, of acting as if we didn't know, a kind of pedagogy of a knowing ignorance: as if each attempt were new, as if mistakes didn't count. In doing so we play with something which is impossible to avoid, in order to continue a process. We know that something happened, we recognize the event, but even so we continue, “as if” nothing happened.¹¹ These stumbles add to the principal text a knowledge acquired from slips of the tongue, from interruption, and from diversion. Attending to side-notes forces us to interrupt the text as it is read, we zigzag, we tilt, we stumble: we err [*erramos*]. Walter Kohan describes it thus:

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The wanderer [*El errante*] is he who takes chances with his own body through encounters with other bodies, he who, in his thoughts, in his writing, plays out life through the body in order to change his life, to interrupt the life that has been no life, to allow for the birth of another new life, in-existent up until the present moment.¹²

The side-notes incorporate knowledge acquired from a place of stumbling (slips of the tongue, interruption, diversion) into the principle text. The side-note consists of a note-encounter, which links the

10 → I took my cues about the logic of secrecy as a decolonial tactic from the conference presentation of Rian Lozano, “Maniobrar la Ausencia” (Maneuvering the Absence), presented at the colloquium *Pedagogies of Art and Violence in the Américas*, 26-29 of April, 2019, at the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, New York University. For more on the act of rejection as resistance see Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, “R. Words: Refusing Research”, in *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, eds. Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), 223-248.

11 → This is how Walter Kohan puts it: “It is as if every station, every city, every stage of his travels was to make him start from the beginning, as if every school he opened was the first, as if every day he entered a school it was as if it was his first time entering it.” Walter Kohan, *The Inventive Schoolmaster: Simón Rodríguez* (New York: Sense Publishers, 2015), 24. My emphasis.

12 → Ibid.

original text with something from the present, with what is current and local to subjects at the limits of modernity. It is about validating the knowledge that comes from noise (the echo, the shouting, the exclamations, the murmurs, the racket) where the message is incomprehensible. Attending to the side-note forces us to interrupt the text as it is read, and in doing so we diverge, we err. This maneuver allowed us to include, in the production of our short film, both the vacillations as well as the stumbles and “slips” which occurred during the reading of texts in prison, such as *Antígona Furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro and *Antígona González* by Sara Uribe, which themselves are derived from the descent of Sophocles’s original Antigone to the South.¹³

One example is the side-note in the text *Antígona González* by Sara Uribe, who displaces Antigone’s voice in Sophocles’s tragedy onto Sandra Muñoz, a woman in Tampico looking to bury her brother who has disappeared. “I am Sandra Muñoz, I live in Tampico, Tamaulipas and I want to know where the missing bodies are. For all those lost to appear. I want rest for those who are searching and for those who have not been found. I want to name the voices behind the stories that take place here.”¹⁴

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A reading of a classic from this pedagogical logic in zigzag demands the appropriation of the “original” text by politics and epistemologies of place (in this case, from the South). This allowed us to intervene in the classical text in the only way that Žižek (taking from Benjamin) describes as possible: generating the chemical product, the ink, which allows for the original film to be revealed. This gives rise to a discovery of the original by the newcomer, where the reading is a descent, understanding the text as open to interpretation, as if its power could only be uncovered in the future, in the hands of its readers. See Žižek:

Only one thing is sure: the only way to be faithful to a classical work is to take such a risk – avoiding it, sticking to the traditional letter, is the safest way to betray the spirit of the classic. In other words, the only way to keep a classical work alive is to treat it as

13 → Griselda Gambaro, *Antígona Furiosa* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1997); Sara Uribe, *Antígona González* (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2016).

14 → Uribe, *Antígona González*, 8.

'open', pointing towards the future, or to use the metaphor evoked by Walter Benjamin, to act as if the classic work is a film for which the appropriate chemical liquid to develop it was invented only later, so that it is only today that we can get the full picture.¹⁵

This special maneuver, derived from the footnote, opening up and giving footing to non-hegemonic authors and experiences, built ways of reading filled with interruptions, a reading with visible stitches, a stumbling and tilted reading: a true forward stride brought about through missteps [*traspis*].¹⁶ Paradoxically, the women's vacillation with respect to the original harbored the different calls [*llamados*] which inscribed a certain corporealization of presence,¹⁷ which included the experience, the understanding, and the knowledge of these detained and incarcerated bodies. Sara Uribe's encounter with the original tragedy describes it thus: "Who then is Antigone within such a scene and what are we to make of her words? ...what are we going to do with all the other Antigones? I didn't want to be an Antigone... but it happened to me."¹⁸

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Thus, in our classes at the university and from these lateral and tilted pedagogies we have engendered unexpected encounters (stumbles) between the personal experiences of the incarcerated women and academic concepts. During our re-visioning of Antigone from the South, in class with the students invited to participate in the cinematographic project *Cihuatlán: Antígonas de Santa Martha*, we read Foucault through Ann Stoller's intervention, as well as Octavio Paz through Gloria Anzaldúa's interruption, Chela Sandoval stumbling through Jacques Lacan; and Rivera Cusicanqui and Maria Lugones interrupting the texts of decolonial authors critical of modernity (Dussel,

15 → Slavoj Žižek, *Antigone* (London and NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2006), xii.

16 → Jorge Huertas in his work *Antígonas: Linaje de Hembras* speaks about the action of Antigone as a series of stumbles: "Here it is, my sisters, summarized in the pinched font of few articles, a long history of struggle, stumbles, and hopes." Jorge Huertas, *Antígonas: Linaje de Hembras* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2002), 28.

17 → Diana Taylor, "Presente. Políticas de la Presencia," trans. Antonio Prieto, *Investigación Teatral* 8, no. 12 (Agosto - Diciembre 2017).

18 → Uribe, *Antígona González*, 10.

Quijano, and Mignolo).

The objective was to disrupt the hegemonic academy and canon, with female authors who deviate and relocate this hegemony, producing parallel errantries and deviations in the carceral and academic disciplines. Consequently, each time we cite a recognized academic intellectual, we stumble into his double or his shadow “detained” occasionally in the footnote. That is how we interrupt the hegemonic canon,¹⁹ by using a liminal text in the margins of the page. The theoretical act (as critical thought) is thus possible from the South – creating a process of diversion and erring,²⁰ of interruption of the origin and destiny of knowledge, deferring its arrival as Said alluded to in his text “Traveling Theory.”²¹ In this way, the possibility of theorizing is given to erring, interrupting, and deferring or suspending the process of signification.²²

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Within these codes of suspension and diffraction, we were able to “enlist” seven side-notes, seven different deviations, errantries and stumbles with the original text,²³ which I now present.

III. SIDE-NOTES: STRATEGIES OF INTERRUPTION AND IRRUPTION OF THE OTHER IN THE ORIGINAL TEXT.

FIRST SIDE-NOTE

Resistance to care work: *Antigone* as a bad mother. Constructing a political subject

When we address Antigone's descent to the South, the transformations which take place in her character as mother/sister and in the figure of caregiver/protector acquire special relevance. Moreover, the strategies which I have called side-notes (stumbles across the

19 → Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 2-10.

20 → Kohan, *The Inventive Schoolmaster*, 22-24.

21 → Edward Said, “Traveling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

22 → Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diáspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. John Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222-37.

23 → Žizek, *Antigone*, xii.

classical text), when contrasted with the footnotes (indicators of legitimized and literate textual bodies), reveal how the reading of the tragedy by the incarcerated women transforms the story of the classical text, as they lean across it with a critical eye towards caregiving. The practice of caregiving is made visible right at the beginning of the tragedy when Antigone invites Ismene to disobey authority, to protect the family. "There you have it; soon you will show yourself as noble both in your nature and your birth, or yourself as base, although of noble parents."²⁴

Antigone rebukes Ismene for her reluctance in helping bury their brother, alluding to her duty towards their parents. The critique of the systems of care work situates Antigone in the foreground, recalling her filial sacrifice and consequent capture and confinement. Antigone gives her life for her brother. Dolores Juliano speaks about the "desire to care" and about who fulfills it as an issue of gender. Caregiving is a "form of the extension of the duties of 'motherhood,' that is, the duties which take place after birth and which do not have a direct relationship with the biological aspects of motherhood, which is a way of extending to adults the benefits which they enjoyed as children."²⁵

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In the text *Binding Violence*, Moira Fradinger traces the descent of Antigone to the South as a transformation of the tragedy into an account which narrates the construction of women as collective political subjects.²⁶ The European critique, according to Fradinger, has not recognized these transformations, which have been taking place in a particular way in Latin America since the 1960s, as a valid intervention or re-reading of the classical tragedy. They have not looked at these derivations from the perspective of gender, that is, as relative to the power relationships which take place between the masculine and the feminine, not to mention the many other racial, temporal and linguistic variations on the tragedy in its southern derivations. Fradinger remarkably demonstrates how the bodies shift from representing the mother

24 → Sophocles, *Antigone*, 36-39.

25 → Dolores Juliano, *Tomar la palabra. Mujeres, discursos y silencios* (Barcelona: Editorial Bellaterra, 2017), 97.

26 → Moira Fradinger, *Binding Violence: Literary Visions of Political Origins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

searching for her son to representing all the disappeared and all the bodies searching for a resting place. It seems that Antigone's descent to the South transforms her, the caregiver and the protector, into a political subject which collectivizes her agency.

In this way, motherhood and the women who sustain it are constituted as political subjects. In *Antígona Vélez* – for example – it is established that “they have forgotten that Antígona Vélez was the mother of her brothers.”²⁷ At a lecture at the Free University of Berlin, Fradinger affirmed that Antigone also represented “a collection of women surviving in their attempt to be women.”²⁸ Huertas's Antigone in *Linaje de Hembras* or that of Sara Uribe in *Antígona González* represent mothers who do not fit the mold, who question the institutions of family and nation. In its descent to the South, the short film *Cihuatlán: Antígonas de Santa Martha* precipitates the feminine subject as a collective subject, as women seeking rest and reparation rather than as women mourning the loss of a child, sibling or other family member on the individual level. Thus, they transcend the unique subject – the maternal one – which buries another individual body, a characteristic of the original text which, according to Fradinger, is mostly upheld in Europe.

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From the perspective of these side-notes, *Antigone* is constituted as the subject of an opening up, ambiguity, multiplicity, and interruption of the original version in which a sister/daughter disobeys and dies in solitude.

SECOND SIDE-NOTE

The bodies and tongues of the incarcerated women: stumbling against one's own tongue

Many of the incarcerated women with whom we worked on this short film spoke Náhuatl as their mother tongue. Some of them proposed that Antigone should speak it. Incorporating Náhuatl in our short

27 → Leopoldo Marechal, *Antígona Vélez* (Villa Constitución, Córdoba: Ediciones Clásicas Literarias, 1998), 40.

28 → Moira Fradinger, “Margherita von Brentano Lecture” presented on May 30, 2018, at the Free University of Berlin.

film was also a *zigzagging* process, just like the small detours of Spanish towards indigenous languages. To do this we had to stop and think collectively. These moments of being tongue-tied between the text of *Antigone* and the other language moved us to consider the real risks of the appropriation of its drama by different languages, scripts, characters, and stagings which were not only alternate, but altered. These moments allowed us to include authors or directions which hinder and redirect the texts as they are traditionally read.

One example of this diffraction was the intention of the incarcerated women that the character of Antigone in the short film be dark-skinned, speak Náhuatl and that she be both great in size and in years. Antigone would be an indigenous dark-skinned Náhuatl speaker, and she would be incarcerated. She would come from Cihuatlán, a place which one of the indigenous women in the workshop translated as cave, in Náhuatl.

One specific side-note occurred when choosing a title for the film. Some of the incarcerated women had already taken to the logic of the stumble and wanted to take *Antigone* out of the cave, like in Griselda Gambaro's version, and set her roaming about the prison.²⁹ Thus, they centered the title of the short film around the translation of cave as *Cihuatlán*, settling on the title: *Cihuatlán: Antígonas de Santa Martha*.

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The original text – the classical one – is just as capable of being marked by the language, the color and the experience with which it is possible to interrupt, defer and suspend the original meaning; as we see Antigone of the South is an expert in suspense, errantry and diffraction. Said recommends that we read and produce theory with gestures such as these. Reading from the point of appropriation, which causes the diversion and interruption of the expected or hegemonic meaning of the text.

The stumbling of a few of the incarcerated women with their mother tongue – Náhuatl – allowed us to take a position vis-à-vis the original text. Taking a position means taking back possession of the body. When language appears, so too does the body as a politics of appearance and of embodiment, understood as “politics of

29 → Gambaro, *Antígona Furiosa*, 1.

presence.”³⁰ Making Náhuatl present enabled the bodies of the women to be present. The language – Náhuatl – tells its own story. The body made present – material – brought to life inclined towards presence, from the most intimate and proper: the mother tongue. We are speaking of this short film, where Antigone moves beyond being the one enacting the burial to being the one seeking rest. The incarcerated women were able to shift from considering Polynices the one to be put to rest, as a subject of love and care, to considering themselves as worthy of love, care, and rest.

This shift towards becoming their own object of care allowed us to decipher patriarchal, judicial (related to the Law), and punitive frameworks, highlighting the two systems which turned these women into caretakers before being subjects (the familial patriarchal system and the legal and carceral system). By using their native language, they were able to slip into Polynices's body: they were the ones who needed to be cared for and covered. Polynices's body thus became a body marked by race and gender, spoken by these women, in their own language.

THIRD SIDE-NOTE

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Protest and disobedience:

Antigone as the one who pays [*pagadora*]

While shouting is common in prison, the cry which gives voice to disobedience – like that of Sophocles' Antigone – is not. With the aim of representing the crime, and thus the type of disobedience from points of view outside of the legal one, we proceeded to “suspend” the legal sentence and its arguments and instead to emotively and narratively amplify the experience of the incarcerated women in relation to the act which led to their detention (small-scale drug dealing, theft, homicide). In general, these were crimes linked to the care and protection of the family.

The incarcerated women coined a new category to describe the very common way through which women enter into prison: Pagadoras

30 → Taylor, “Presente,” 11.

(the ones who pay or are held accountable). The pagadoras are women who fall into the criminal system often times at the behest of a family member: husband, father, or brother.³¹ The role of the pagadora - and thus of the caregiver woman/mother - can be seen in the following excerpt from Sophocles' *Antigone*. I'm referring to a way of understanding disobedience or committing a crime as connected to "those below", i.e. the family, and not connected to power, i.e. "those above":

Be as you choose to be; but for myself / myself will bury him. It will be good to die, so doing. I shall lie by his side, loving him as he loved me; I shall be a criminal—but a religious one. The time in which I must please those below is longer than I must please those above. For there I shall lie forever. You, if you like, can cast dishonor on what the gods have honored.³²

The incarcerated women understood this passage as a justification for their disobedience, and thus as justification for committing a delinquent act linked with the protection of familial caregiving. The revelation that obedience to the family could have shaped the circumstances of a crime disrupted their identities as women and as delinquents. They were no longer criminals flouting the law, rather they were women obeying another system, another law: the patriarchy.

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We want to point out here what Jean Franco calls the challenge "to the state's appropriation of meaning."³³ The side-notes can reinforce these struggles for reinterpretation, against the appropriation of the legal and political meaning of the actions linked to the criminality of these women. I am referring to the *pagador* quality of these actions: women tend to enter crime at the invitation or coercion of the men in their families and enter prison through a judge who has determined that their participation is actually autonomous and central to the criminal act. Two

31 → Elena Azaola, "Mujeres invisibles: las cárceles femeninas en América Latina," *Revista Nueva Sociedad* 208 (March-April 2007).

32 → Sophocles, *Antigone*, 71-77. Translation lightly modified to match the Spanish translation.

33 → Jean Franco, "On the Impossibility of Antigone and the Inevitability of La Malinche: Rewriting the National Allegory," in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 134.

sides of the same power subjugating these women to a law which is blind and unconcerned with their context.

FOURTH SIDE-NOTE

Interrupting carceral time and space

The detour provided by dead time (i.e. the time spent in detention) is one of the essential stumbling blocks which allowed for a re-reading of *Antigone*. Prison has a peculiar relationship with time. In prison time is controlled through three daily calls or headcounts, under the threat of punishment you have to stop whatever you are doing and report to the headcount to stand in line and shout “Present.” The bodies in prison play out an oxymoron: they make a cry which evidences their presence, in a body which is involuntarily absent.

The short film *Cihuatlán: Antígonas de Santa Martha* was crafted in workshops at the prison every Monday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (2017-2018), with workshops on screenplay writing, critical reading, and camera use. Participation in the short film invited the voluntary presence of the body of the incarcerated women – a body otherwise involuntary and absent – and opened up a free and autonomous time, in which the incarcerated women were where they wanted to be, inhabiting a productive time instead of the dead time in the controlled space of detention. Students of pedagogy, law, visual arts, anthropology, political science, social services, students on scholarships, students writing their theses, activists, artists, and researchers debated and worked with the incarcerated women. These students also manufacture presence in the university classroom, a presence which is constructed within the classroom, which appears at the limits of academic knowledge and that which it is urgent to resolve as a society.

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This work on the border between the academy and prison allows for the negotiation of the three headcounts in prison. The women who worked in the classroom were able to – on certain occasions – miss one of the headcounts. In this errant³⁴ classroom, free time and open space are thus created in prison, among voluntary and involuntary

34 → Kohan, *The Inventive Schoolmaster*, 22.

presences, between academic and prison classrooms.

4.1 INTERRUPTING ACADEMIC SPACE AND TIME

During our displacement from the academy to the prison the norms of academic discipline were also interrupted. On the days when we entered the prison to work on the short film (every Monday for 2 years), we spent the entire workday there (the students negotiated their absence from their other classes, a central element of this project). Moreover, filming requires not only time, but often continuous stretches of time.

Working in a prison demands that attention be paid to the space, to what is said in the middle of relentless noise, and it means working in an open space which is constantly interrupted and policed. The Palapa (hut) which we used as a classroom – located in the small patio (the area for the women who are awaiting sentencing) – does not have walls, it lies in the middle of the yard and it picks up smells, sounds and presences. Work which comes out of the perspectives of zigzagging and errant pedagogies requires us to construct a classroom with free time and open space, capable of working with all types of women who have committed all types of crimes, with neither distinction nor selection.

The words of the text *Antigone* by Sophocles emerge from that time and space recreated as free, collecting themselves and gaining new meaning. Jason Wozniak speaks about the reinvention of the classroom as a gift of time: “in school the future is opened up, students have time to become who they want to become; they are given time to become in a multitude of manners.”³⁵ In this space we interrupt the value judgement placed on women considered criminals, and we incorporate critical analysis, so that they are present and so that they experience the possibility of transforming – fictionally – into that which they had not ever anticipated becoming.

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As an example of this transformation, for one of the scenes from

35 → Jason Thomas Wozniak, “Translators Introduction,” in Kohan, *The Inventive Schoolmaster*, xvi.

the short film the incarcerated women elected to veto the blue and beige (colors which in the prison indicate which women are sentenced and which are in the sentencing process) and instead to film themselves colorfully dressed upon escaping from the cave. The colorfulness reverses both the act of sentencing and thus the status of perpetrator of the crime, who then discovers other times and spaces by not dying by hanging, as occurs in the tragedy: “On the command of our despairing master we went to look. In the furthest part of the tomb we saw her, hanging by her neck. She had tied a noose of muslin around it.”³⁶

FIFTH SIDE-NOTE

Incarcerated women as experts

One defining event, which gave footing to the plot of the short film (as another side-note that worked with that which is crossed), was the earthquake in Mexico City on the 19th of September in 2017. We had just been working on the ending of the film in the days before. We had already filmed the scenes of Polynices's burial, which invoke the disobedience of the burial through the cry of protest and the colorful scene in the cave, but we were lacking an ending which reckoned with the power of the presence of the incarcerated women, of their missteps when integrating Náhuatl, of the stumbles which occurred during their critique of caregiving practices and of the interruption of punitive and disciplinary space and time.

The scenes of desolation wrought by the earthquake throughout Mexico City – the collapsed buildings and family members looking for the bodies of their loved ones – were broadcast on television, allowing the incarcerated women to envisage their place as women who were qualified for survival and care, from another angle. Their destinies were not going to be like that of Antigone, hanged in the cave. They would come out of the cave – full of color – to work, looking for and digging up the bodies buried by the earthquake. They would become Antigones who excavated and unearthed.

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36 → Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1219-1221.

The earthquake allowed them to see themselves as experts in personal and collective collapses, women who could search for and dig up lost bodies, including their own. That they lived through the tremors on September 19, 2017 unscathed was due in part to the manner in which they confronted the prison rules, disobeying them by refusing to return to their cells immediately after the earthquake.

From this place of collective resistance and disobedience, the incarcerated women constituted themselves as a collective of Antigones and from there they built the end of the short film. They, the tragic *Antigones of Santa Martha*, experts in slumps and falls, specialists in collapse and cataclysm, knew the way to the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico [UNAM]). Every Monday they had walked that path to their classroom to participate in the workshops with the project *Spiraling Women*. They asked that the documentary end with them in front of an audience in an auditorium, speaking with the university community about strategies to avoid becoming buried by the debris of a society and a city which is collapsing. Disinterment rather than burial was their task.

After the collective disobedience – an act which underlined the connection to Antigone's character – they decided that the end of the short film should follow a narrative which illustrated their power outside of the family and the state (here refusing Antigone and her submission to the family). None of them took ropes to their necks, rather they used them to escape their confinement. They plotted scenes similar to those described by Griselda Gambaro, when Antigone removes the rope from her neck and goes out to speak in the cafés and streets of Buenos Aires.³⁷

Thus, we resolved that the end of the short film would show the incarcerated women transmitting their knowledge in the heart of UNAM, and thus in the heart of academia. Using a green screen, we took them to the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (University Museum of Contemporary Art, MUAC/UNAM) to give lectures as experts in collapse, exhumation, and disinterment. They wanted to make

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37 → Gambaro, *Antígona Furiosa*, 1.

themselves present at this scene of devastation and social urgency, as agents and experts who could help heal so great a loss. The end of the short film describes this intervention into knowledge of these incarcerated women in the university, based on the creation of a Manual to Survive Collapse, a series of survival actions and strategies to avoid ending up buried, as was the case for both Sophocles' Antigone and the women in prison.

The end of the short film transforms the noise and bustle of the prison into clear words, spoken to a university community, and into precise verbal interventions about the knowledge – stumbles with the text – developed by women who have lost everything. It arose at a strategic moment when physical and social collapses were abounding in Mexico – the disappearances, the need to find bodies and bury those who are found, and the earthquake in Mexico on September 19, 2017.

SIXTH SIDE-NOTE

Pedagogies of protest

The Monday following the earthquake the women came to us with an exceptional story. They told us that the guards, in keeping with prison discipline, wanted to make them return to their cells immediately after the earthquake. The degree to which movement is impossible in a prison is already daunting, during an earthquake it is unthinkable. They resisted, disobeyed and organized a sit-in in the small patio, the space where the UNAM made itself present every Monday. They protested. They shouted. They were not going to allow themselves to be confined until it could be certified that there was no danger.

Proudly they told us about how they disobeyed. How did they make the prison administration listen to them? They generated a collective capable of rejecting a prison mandate, which was able to protest as a collective. The act of disobedience indicated by the tragedy of Antigone gets an update in the short film, with a deviation as well: disobedience for the sake of saving one's own life, not that of others. Caregiving is turned towards the women themselves.

The side-notes and the inclination/precipitation of the academy towards its limits allowed us to process and decipher the unintelligible and confusing – the noise of the prison and the silence of the women in prison – into demands, into clear and precise calls for justice, for equality and for the creation of new alliances, especially those which foster trust and solidarity between women and areas bordering the academy. Through zigzagging, stumbling and deviating, a narrative was built which allowed the words of incarcerated women to reach the borders of the academy.

SIDE-NOTE

Shortly after we presented the short film in a few theaters in Mexico City, we realized that *Cihuatlán* does not translate as cave. Columba, our active participant who learned Spanish in prison, had convinced us not only of the appropriateness of having a title in Náhuatl for the short film, but had also provided an incorrect meaning for that word. No dictionary, nor authorized speaker of Náhuatl recognized *Cihuatlán* as a translation for cave. *Cihuatlán* is, we later found out, the place where Columba was born. In Náhuatl *Cihuatl* translates as “beautiful women,” *Cihua-tlán* means place, *Place of Beautiful Women*, a town and municipality in the Costa Sur region of the state of Jalisco in Mexico. We were able to ephemerally reconcile the reference to the prison as a *place of beautiful women* by the process of translation, appropriation and re-reading of a Greek work by women who lacked knowledge, time and education.

It is important to note that Columba is accused of homicide, and that we know she has been imprisoned for 8 years without convincing evidence. Her legal process was slow and arbitrary. Columba improved her Spanish in prison, deciding after her trial to no longer speak her native language. According to what she has told us, the judge treated her as if she were ignorant when she tried to defend herself in Náhuatl rather than Spanish. She did not have a translator, which is considered a violation of her rights as someone who has been arrested. Columba's intervention in zigzag reflects, in an extraordinary way, the possibility

for her to interrupt the dominant knowledge and to include her experience and her knowledge into the textual corpus. That is what we understand as a lateral pedagogy or one of stumbling.

It was these stumbles, these errant movements in zigzag which opened unexpected spaces and times as much as for the incarcerated women as for the students, artists, activists and researchers from academia. Dark-skinned Antigones, speaking Náhuatl, dressed in colors and without the rope around their necks, arrived at the University to scatter their golden dust over the bodies of dozens of students in a ritual of unearthing and unforgettable awakening.

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The doer of the deed had left no trace. But when the first sentry of the day pointed it out, there was for all of us a disagreeable wonder. For the body had disappeared; not in a grave, of course; but there lay upon him a little dust as of a hand avoiding the curse of violating the dead body's sanctity.³⁸ ■

38 → Sófocles, *Antígona*, 9.