

Women in Greek Tragedy: Progression of the Euripidean Female through the Medium of Social Capital

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Abstract

This paper explores the progression of women through the medium of social capital within the extant works of Euripides, with an aim to ascertain the level of influence social capital held in the progression of the Euripidean female. In order to achieve this, we take into consideration how traditional perceptions and behaviours of femaleness were adjusted by Euripides to combat social conventions, and empower his female characters. We also examine how Euripides used audience familiarity to implement female progression, whilst simultaneously maintaining an adequate level of androcentrism that would appease the contemporary audience and retain a positive reception. After considering the traditional roles of women, and the familiar, we conclude that as a mechanism for change, progression, and the empowerment of the Euripidean female, the use of social capital was a crucial agency of influence.

Keywords

Euripides, Social Capital, Women, Influence, Androcentrism

1. Introduction

Fifth century BCE Athenian society was based on inequality, a patriarchal structure where women were, as Gomme (1925: pp. 1-25) surmises, powerless in law, remained mainly indoors, and were systematically treated with contempt, occupying a far lower societal position than in other parts of the Greek world. However, given the changing discourse surrounding the study of ancient Greek culture, which was in part driven by changing European attitudes towards the freedoms afforded to women, Gomme's argument could be taken as more of reflection of the time in which he was writing. In truth, a comprehensive and more

importantly unbiased depiction of the societal role of fifth century Athenian women is hard reached, due in the main to the fact that “there is very little literature of any kind that comes from the middle or lower classes of society. [And] [t]he view of women in Athens literature comes from writings of males from the upper economic class” (O’Neal, 1993: p. 116). That said, during this so-called golden age a societal shift began to emerge: “[t]here is, in fact, no literature, no art of any country, in which women are more prominent, more important, [...] than in tragedy, sculpture, and painting [than that] of fifth century Athens (Gomme, 1925: p. 4).” And a front runner in the altered representation of women in Greek tragedy was Euripides, who as Gomme also argues, should be considered as the first playwright to give a voice to the women of the stage.

2. Literature Review

The volume of works that have survived into modernity has meant that Euripides has been and continues to be one of the more researched Greek tragedians, as scholars continually try to comprehend the Euripidean world. These years of scrutiny bring a vast array of research areas to the fore, but a relatively new addition is the application of gender and mobility. One of the main barriers to the study of gender, particularly in regards to women, within the ancient world is that “it lurks beneath the radar [...] [and] rarely address[es] gender as an organising principle directly” (Foxhall & Neher, 2013: p. 2), and of course the male bias that permeates surviving sources. However, this has not stopped research into the social positioning of women from emerging. Konstantinou (2018) for instance, approaches gender mobility from the perspective of space, arguing that mobility is the movement between spaces with public spaces assigned as masculine, and private spaces (domestic settings) being feminine. Using Cresswell (2006) to form the basis of his theoretical approach Konstantinou concludes that mobility is a socially generated motion and that its representation and practices are what equip it with meaning. James & Dillion (2015) also approach gender mobility from the perspective of space, focusing on the physical ability of women to move from one space to another.

Chong-Gossard (2008) also considers space but in relation to the creation of gendered conversational space, a space in which men converse with men and women with women, and how the interaction between the different genders affects the space Euripides creates. Chong-Gossard concludes that Euripidean women are more likely to be apologetic when entering a male space, and create a gender solidarity as they are more aware of their social setting into which they have been placed.

Stravrinou (2014) presents an argument that utilises Euripides’ crossover from drama to real life scenarios, translating this as Euripides’ game with the social norms through a juxtapositional contrast. Segal (1992) on the other hand concentrates on a visual critique of the gendered roles of men and women within *Alcestis*, highlighting the domestic setting for both genders and the interplay

between expected roles, and surmising that there is a paradox of domestic heroism, that is both reassuring yet unsettling to the audience.

The women of Euripidean drama have also inspired a wealth of research from characterisation to their place within society. Adams & Adams (2015) apply their focus on the beauty of Euripides' Helen of Troy concluding that the skilful deployment and performance of beauty offers women tangible benefits. Rabinowitz (1993) and Dellner (2000) consider Alcestis' act of self-sacrifice, arguing that her act supported "Athenian social goals¹ by defining female excellence as dying on behalf of men and the family" (Rabinowitz, 1993: p. 68) and that "Alcestis has radically redefined the obligation of a wife" (Foley, 1992, cited in (Dellner, 2000: p. 8)). Gabriel (1992) critiques *Medea* in conjunction with Freud to find a juxtaposing relationship between textual narratives of fiction and its transference to real life. For Devereux (1970) and Segal (1986), however, Agave's conversation with Cadmus (Eur. *Bacch.* 1264-97) Euripides (2008), offers an insight into modern day psychotherapy. Devereux suggests that: "unless one is prepared to credit Euripides with the invention of the principles of genuine psychotherapy, the scene in question must be viewed as an important document in the history of human culture (Devereux, 1970: p. 35)", and Segal suggests that the scene is somehow "a mirror of the dramatic art itself in its power to reveal the hidden dimensions of the self [...] between unconscious and conscious knowledge" (Segal, 1986: p. 296).

But despite the breadth of scope, a theme that has been lacking in the treatment of Euripides, and in particular the Euripidean female, is how social capital impacts women and how influential it is to their overall progression. This is not to say that social capital has never been considered; Thompson (2006) for instance uses the concept to analyse modern performances of Euripides but steps away from considering social capital in the context of fifth century Athens. Therefore, this gap in the application of social capital as a means of female progression is the reason behind this paper's focus.

3. Theoretical Framework

For all Gomme suggests a rebirth in female representation within the arts, the process of actually altering the suppositions of Athenian women, from a dramatised perspective, was a more gradual affair, as playwrights tussled with how best to portray the female within a deeply embedded androcentric culture. The progression of the Euripidean female, as we shall discuss, twists and turns, but where he could, Euripides championed the female character, empowering them beyond the social norm. The ability to present a more complete female character was intricately entwined with a character's ability to collect, hold and, when required, dispense social capital.

Several theorists have offered an insight into how social capital should be de-

¹Alcestis, as Rabinowitz (1993) points out was written as Athens was on the verge of the Peloponnesian War and on the back of Pericles' Funeral Speech were he indicated that the model of male excellence should be defined as dying for democracy, dying for others.

fined. Putnam (1995, 2001) leaned towards an economics based discourse, a narrative also suggested by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1990). The premise is that conceptually, social capital is essentially supported by three principal pillars; relationships, reciprocated trust, and resources. Relationships incorporate the networks created between individuals and groups, trust characterises the strength of these bonds, and resources are the benefits gained through social ties and from active participation within those networks. However, Field (2003) critiquing Putnam, suggests an ambiguity of conceptual definition when social capital is removed from an economic setting and placed within the social sphere. Addressing this conceptual vagueness and one-directional narrative of his predecessors, Field (2003) puts forward that social capital can and should also be considered as a source of social inequality, as one group or individual will inevitably hold more power over the other, prompting the phrase “the darker side of social capital”². It is therefore social capital’s application to the social sphere that is of concern here. Adhering to the fundamentals of social capital (relationships, reciprocated trust and resources) we can demonstrate how important social capital was to the overall progression of the Euripidean female.

4. Playing with Convention

One of the main problems facing Euripides was how to represent female characters in a way that demonstrated social progression but also achieved a positive audience reception; how could he redress the contemporary narrative and bring forth a new understanding, and acceptance, of femaleness whilst simultaneously adhering to the expected androcentrism? Euripides’ answer was to subtly include acts that chipped away at patriarchal authority. Euripides understood the need to refrain from trite matriarchal inclusion, a gesture that would detract from the importance of the female role, which is why the Euripidean female always joins the stage with a distinct narrative purpose. Their inclusion had to be of sound reason and hold meaning, even if that was to be inferred on an unconscious plane, if Euripides was to undertake the pursuit of changing and challenging the contemporary narrative of femaleness.

This subliminally inferred importance first becomes evident through Euripides’ title selections: *Alcestis*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *Medea*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Elektra*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Helen* are among Euripides’ extant works. And if we were to compare the titles of what are essentially the same take on an Oedipus tale, we see a rival playwright, Aeschylus, opt for the more generic sounding *Seven against Thebes* whereas Euripides opts for *Phoenician Women*, which is all the more interesting from a subliminal context considering Jocasta has little narrative involvement. This illustrates the intrepidity of Euripides’ pursuit to alter an audience’s perception of the dramatised female.

On stage the Euripidean female takes on many guises: victim, murderer, lost,

²The imbalance of power that results from the misuse of social capital is referred to as the “darker side” of social capital; see Field (2003)’s *Social Capital*, where this angle of inquiry is discussed further.

weak, insightful, misunderstood, to name but a few. So in relation to how best to present a different form of femaleness, Euripides uses two overarching themes: the traditional, and the familiar.

The traditional embodies female characteristics and behaviours that fall into line with the conventions of social functionalism, and are then presented through imagery that is sympathetic towards the male gaze. In essence, contemporary audience members were, arguably, more receptive to female characters that mirrored similar traits to those found within their own lives, which goes some way to explain the genre's tendency to gravitate towards gender stereotypes.

The familiar focus was upon situational behaviours that were not necessarily driven by functionalism, but still sought to retain an element of relatability. In other words, the how and why of how women acted based upon the scenarios that they found themselves in.

Social capital is omnipresent within all aspects of our everyday lives, irrespective of whether or not we consciously make the connection. We still have a tendency to subconsciously revert back to economics and think of social capital from a business perspective; the work place networks that could help with a promotion, or the partnership with a fellow business that boosts financials, and forget about our constant exposure to the more mundane interactions. Therefore, by considering Euripides' use of these lesser consciously registered connections (through the traditional and the familiar) we can gain a greater understanding of how and why social capital grows, and once that growth is understood we can come to appreciate how influential social capital was to the progression of women in the context of Euripidean drama. Additionally, given that Euripides was renowned for his fictional/factual thematic crossovers we can then also better comprehend how social capital could function as a progressive tool for enabling women offstage.

5. The Traditional

Alcestis (Euripides, 2003) (J. Davie, Trans.) Euripides' first extant play, is another example of where the title could have arguably been taken by another character, given Alcestis' early exit and the ensuing male focal dominance. That said, *Alcestis* does offer an insight into how a female character, with limited onstage presence, can embody this idea of Euripides shifting the expectations of dramatised femaleness and play with social conventions.

From the outset *Alcestis* assumes a domiciliary tone, with the eponymic Alcestis portrayed as an exemplar of the traditional female Athenian: wife, mother, homemaker, dutiful, respectful and subservient to a fault, a picture that Euripides wastes no time in embedding into the minds of the audience through his use of domestic staging. Descriptions of how Alcestis prepared the household for her death, from the laying out of clothes, hanging garlands, praying to Hestia, all add to the traditional female narrative. Even the act of dying in her husband's

stead expresses marital subservience first and foremost. But before Alcestis's untimely death Euripides embarks on his subtle play with social conventions via Alcestis' challenge to the status quo. A simple request is made by Alcestis, but one that would not have sat too comfortably within the male-centric society:

Do not marry again and give them a stepmother to
 ill-treat them, your children and mine [...]
 I beg you! A stepmother approaches the children she
 inherits like an enemy, yes, a viper would show them more
 affection.
 (304-310)

Do not marry, a simple yet provocative request by Alcestis, given the social expectation for Admetus to take another wife, coupled with the fact that Admetus, her husband, is under no obligation to conform to her request. So why does Euripides include it? By having Alcestis take such a stance, circumstances aside³, Euripides can begin to challenge those social norms, and alter the audience's perception of relational power dynamics. Positioning Alcestis in such a fashion challenges the entrenched social order of male authority, and gives the contemporary audience an alternate perspective from which to view Alcestis; as something more than the stereotypical wife; a new, nonconforming, and empowered woman now stands before them. So when Alcestis says "I beg you!" (307) it is not a request but a demand; the inference is not "I beg", but "I am telling you, you will not remarry". To strengthen her demand Alcestis brings their children into play, and it is with this inclusion that we can see further the influence of social capital.

Alcestis draws upon the most important social capital relationship at her disposal, her marriage. It is a relationship that has developed over time and been tempered with the addition of children; and as Euripides gives no indication to the contrary we can take the strength of that marital bond at face value. The marriage itself creates a harmonious environment in which further collection of social capital can be readily achieved; opportunities to make new alliances, immediate access to wider networks, the opportunity to gather direct and indirect resources, and the option to nurture reciprocity. Marriage, in terms of social capital, is a relationship that is mutually beneficial for as long as it holds true. The breakdown of that union and trust is Alcestis' opening.

Having broken both union and trust, Admetus may well feel compelled to comply with Alcestis' wishes, so to reinforce the point Alcestis brings their other shared relationship to the fore, one that she knows Admetus holds dear, their children: "Children, you heard your father, you heard him say that never would he marry another woman to be second mother to you, never would he disho-

³From a modern perception an argument could be made that because Alcestis is forfeiting her life Admetus should be willing to do anything; but when viewed with an Athenian lens we know that Admetus has no reason to do anything that his wife demands; such is the social and gender imbalance.

nour me (371-373).” Alcestis’ inclusion of all the family members reiterates the connective bonding of social capital that exists within a family unit. And although addressing the children, Alcestis’ subtext is clearly instructive towards Admetus: do not remarry and do not dishonour me; the children’s presence provides Alcestis with an emotional pressure to further leverage Admetus into acting accordingly. Euripides has Alcestis ask to not be dishonoured, which is rather ironic given the run of play; nevertheless, the addition transfers the audience’s attention back to Admetus’ own dishonourable act (sacrificing his wife), an inclusion that again upsets the power dynamics by questioning Admetus’ virtues. Admetus’ dishonourable act could be taken as weakness by the audience, a slight on his masculinity; whereas Alcestis’ self-sacrifice resonates only virtuous strength.

The importance of Alcestis’ transition from dutiful wife to empowered mother has a tendency to be trivialised, brushed aside as nothing more than expected motherly behaviour. Despite that, we need to remember context, and appreciate that for women such as Alcestis to question and challenge the functionalism of a rigidly male-centric society was no mean feat. It is a feat that Alcestis achieves through the use of social capital as a mechanism for her empowerment; demonstrated through her ability to ensure that Admetus abides by her wishes, and does not remarry and takes on the responsibility for their children’s care, two decisions that, societally speaking, Admetus didn’t have or need to make. Alcestis’ use of their social capital bond allows her to place such demands, and playing upon their mutual capital connection to their children reinforces the point. Euripides, in a short space of time, gives the audience an alternate female persona; one that challenges the social norms by simply tweaking the traditional image of femaleness.

Euripides’ *Hecuba* (Euripides, 2012) (D. A. Svarlien, Trans.) also adopts a similar stance to the traditional projection of the female form witnessed within *Alcestis*. However, one of the main differences to be found is within spatial allotment; Alcestis, having died early on in the play, returns briefly for the play’s conclusion (although no dialogue is assigned to her), whereas Hecuba is ever-present in a plot that centres around her; we could, given the chronology, put this down to Euripides’ own artistic growth and increasing comfort with spotlighting the female character. To maintain Hecuba’s onstage presence, with sound reasoning, the play is effectively divided into two halves: the first half concerns Hecuba trying to save her daughter Polyxena’s life; and the second half shifts focus onto Hecuba’s son Polydorus, and her quest to avenge his murder. This son and daughter combination by Euripides gives Hecuba a genuine reason to be spatially dominant.

The traditional female form becomes instantly recognisable as Euripides’ Hecuba dons the motherly mask, and akin to Alcestis, both women seek to protect their children. But this is where the similarities between the two plays begin to dissipate. Euripides’ Hecuba is considerably more forthright despite

being a spoil of war, a slave for all intents and purposes, and as such having no discernible social bearing, yet Euripides gives her a far more dominant presence both physically and conversationally than Alcestis who was a free woman; a transition that supports the artistic strengthening of the Euripidean female.

That said, *Hecuba's* first half sees Hecuba adopt a similar tactic to Alcestis and stealthily challenge male authority. Odysseus is the subject of that challenge, and what is of interest is that to engineer Hecuba's stealthy advance, Euripides switches around the traditionally female act of supplication; and to achieve this anomaly Euripides takes the bold decision to distort Homer's *Odyssey*, an alteration that would have been instantly recognisable to the original audience:

Hecuba: You were humbled, and took hold of my knees?

Odysseus: I gripped your robe so hard my hand went dead.

Hecuba: Well, then. I saved you, and sent you from our land?

Odysseus: Because of that, I live to see this daylight.

(244-247)

This alternative version⁴ of Homer's *Odyssey* allows Euripides to then manufacture Hecuba's empowerment through the assertion that a debt is indeed owed, a tally that dramatically alters the power dynamics in Hecuba's favour. Secondly, from a social capital perspective, the debt also implies a formed bond, and with any social capital bond a certain amount of reciprocal trust is then presumed, a power shift that is confirmed through Odysseus' recollection of the supplication⁵ ("I gripped your robe so hard my hand went dead (245)"), a seemingly simple dramatic inclusion by Euripides, but one that carried significant ramifications nonetheless. As aforementioned, the dramatised act of supplication was traditionally reserved for female characters and came from a position of weakness; so by reversing the usual gender roles of supplication, Euripides can firmly place Hecuba into a position of strength, a transference of power that elevates Hecuba's standing, confirms the presence of social capital (through the debt owed), but also, and more importantly, alters the audience's perception of male power; a hero of Troy needing to offer supplication to a woman in order to save his life would surely have been a slap to the face of societal masculinity.

Having drawn out Odysseus' confirmation of debt owed and the subsequent relational bond created, Hecuba has secured a greater conversational flexibility in which to assert herself against Odysseus; she can now converse as a projection of her former self, the queen of Troy, and not as the captive she is: "Listen: you must pay me back; I'll tell you what I'm asking in return. [...] And your prestige, even if you don't speak well, will strengthen your appeal (271-296)." Hecuba's use of social capital has been an effective tool in negotiating a stronger conversa-

⁴Within Homer's *Odyssey*, Helen, not Hecuba, recounts the tale of how she recognised Odysseus when he came to Troy as a spy and did not give him away.

⁵Within supplication, the supplicator would touch the chin and kiss the hand of the supplicated, thus seeking protection from Zeus.

tional position, and the suggestion that Odysseus' very own social capital⁶ could grow is another clever interjection to help support her argument and try to sway Odysseus' decision. Unfortunately, Odysseus' prior social capital bond created with Achilles proves too strong to overthrow, thus sealing Polyxena's fate: Odysseus' assertion that "I will not take back the proposition I made [...] we should offer to the army's greatest man the sacrifice he asks for: your child" (307-311), draws the play's first half to its conclusion and reinstalls a sense of homosocial unity.

Hecuba's request for revenge, the second theme of *Hecuba*, is delivered to her captor Agamemnon (785-873) in a run of play that concludes with Agamemnon becoming agreeable to her demands: "I'll help you out, your struggles are mine, I'll run to your side (890-891)." But how did Hecuba come to achieve this? How did Hecuba, as a slave, manage to directly influence a king? The answer, again, stems from the collection and usage of social capital.

Firstly, Hecuba begins by reclaiming the traditional role of supplication: "O Agamemnon, I beg you by your knees and by your beard, and by your right hand, which is blessed by fortune (780-782)." She then lays out Polymestor's wrongful deeds: taking gold from herself and Priam in exchange for the safekeeping of their son Polydorus, Polymestor then "killed him and cast him out...to drift on the sea" (pp. 810-811). In a quite deliberate move, Hecuba firstly draws attention to the fact that Polymestor has broken the bonds of *xenia*⁷ before telling of her son's death. Polymestor's disregard of this socioculturally significant construct, an ancient construct that is directly relatable to modern day social capital inasmuch as both concepts are built around relationships, resources and reciprocated trust, is the act that Hecuba gambles will turn Agamemnon to her cause.

Agamemnon, although accepting, remains unconvinced of Hecuba's ability to actually carry out her vengeance: "Agamemnon: But you're women. What use is the female race? Hecuba: What—? Didn't women kill Aegyptus' sons and every male on the isle of Lemnos (917-919)?"⁸ The deliberate inclusion of the tale of Lemnos by Euripides reinforces the underestimated strength of women in general to the audience, and coupled with Hecuba rising from supplication as she

⁶Odysseus' renown is built upon the relationships and networks he has forged during the course of the Trojan conflict, amassing social capital along the way. And just as Hecuba is playing upon the bond created between the two Odysseus could in turn use his collected capital to the same effect.

⁷Xenia—the concept of hospitality and guest-friendships that played an important part within Athenian culture. Agamemnon went to war with his brother Menelaus over Paris' disregard for *xenia*, and knowing the importance placed upon following *xenia* is what Hecuba is seeking to exploit.

⁸The fifty daughters of Danaus, son of Belus, king of Egypt, were forced to marry the fifty sons of Aegyptus; instructed by their father the daughters—with the exception of Hypermestra—killed their husbands on their wedding night; see also *The Daughters of Danaüs* in Morford et al. (2010) *Classical Mythology*, p. 555.

As punishment for neglecting to worship Aphrodite the women of Lemnos were made unattractive to their husbands. When the men took Thracian concubines the women murdered them all bar one in revenge. The king Thoas was spared by his daughter Hypsipyle. The tale of Hypsipyle is retold in Euripides *Hypsipyle*, of which only a fragment survives—see also *Hypsipyle and the Lemnian Women* in Morford et al. (2010) *Classical Mythology*, pp. 617-8.

replies, further adds to the symbols of female empowerment. This exchange, albeit brief, substantially transforms the power dynamics between captive and captor, creating bonds of social capital in the process.

Hecuba, having regained some of her lost social capital, sets about her revenge: lured by Hecuba's promise of more riches, Polymestor is taken to meet his fate. After losing his children and being blinded by the gouging brooches⁹ of Hecuba and her co-conspirators, Polymestor returns to Agamemnon seeking justice. In a reversal to Hecuba's first half social capital bond with Odysseus that broke down, Hecuba's bond with Agamemnon remains strong, and Polymestor is left wanting.

The empowerment of Hecuba came through the understanding of how best to utilise her social capital. Hecuba began by calling upon a preformed social capital bond with Odysseus; when that failed she adopted the traditional role of supplicant to soften Agamemnon, and in the process created a social capital bond that gave a slave the ability to act as the queen she once was.

Euripides' subtle play on the traditional representations and associated behaviours of women within *Alcestis* and *Hecuba* demonstrates how patriarchal authority can be and was chipped away, and behind Euripides' reimagining of what traditional femaleness should look like lurked social capital, operating as an important and influential medium to the overall process of female progression.

6. The Familiar

The Athenians had an affinity for rhetoric and oration, and this love of cleverly crafted discourse provides us with our first example of how the familiar can empower the Euripidean female. We will turn first to Helen's defence within Euripides' *The Trojan Women* (Euripides, 2012) (D. A.Svarlien, Trans.).

Helen begins with an interesting merger of dialectic and rhetoric in a speech (*Troj.* 938-96) that displays epideictic rhetoric qualities (one of the three genres of rhetoric highlighted by Aristotle (Rhet. 1366a23-1368b1) (Aristotle, 2018) (R. Waterfield, Trans.), deliberative and judicial being the other two) wherein the audience are asked to refrain from making formal judgement and just observe. Furthermore, Helen employs a familiar Greek custom (most notably used within courts of law) to ask that she receives a fair trial: "I know that, whether I speak well or badly, you may not answer; you consider me your foe (938-940)." This gesture demonstrates a profound level of social astuteness, and through Helen's adoption of this familiar cultural norm, Euripides can present her as more Greek, and therefore more acceptable to the audience, shaking off the stigma of Spartan barbarism in the process. All of this provides the perfect means to soften Helen's persona and draw the audience in.

⁹The blinding of Polymestor with the brooches of their dresses echoes Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* in which Oedipus uses Jocasta's dress pins to blind himself: "And when he saw her, with dread deep cry he realised the halter by which she hung. And when the hapless woman was stretched out on the ground [...] he tore from raiment the golden brooches [...] and lifting them struck his own eye-balls" (1265-1270). Trans. R. Jebb (1887) *The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles*.

As with *Alcestis*, Helen also draws upon the relational social capital found within marriage to press an advantage. Although for Helen it is not about making demands of her husband per se, it is all about framing an argument that allows her to reapportion blame: “But you—you really are the worst—hopped on a boat, sailed off to Crete¹⁰, and left him [Paris] in your home (969-971)!” Helen insinuates that Menelaus failed in his husbandly duty by leaving her alone with Paris, which becomes an apt point for Helen to continue the misdirection and push for forgiveness: “Go punish Aphrodite—then you’ll be more powerful than Zeus! He rules over all the other gods, but he is a slave to her. I think *I* can be forgiven (976-979).” This sophist¹¹ line of argument by Helen, would have also been familiar and applauded for cleverness of premise by the original *theros*/spectators, who would have been no stranger to Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen*¹², within which Gorgias presents an argument¹³ that Critchley (2020: p. 109) summarises as the ability to use speech to defend the seemingly indefensible.

The use of the gods to excuse and/or rationalise behaviour was prevalent throughout the genre so Helen drawing upon this commonplace notion held audience appeal. The crux of Helen’s argument rests on accountability and if she was guided by fate or the gods then she cannot be held to account. Furthermore, if Helen had succumb to the uncontrollable emotion of love then should she not also be forgiven like Paris? Love being an emotion that held “the divine power of the gods” (Dillon, 2003: p. 83) so how was Helen, a mere mortal, ever going to be able to withstand it? Therefore, by Euripides’ insertion of these typical behavioural traits Helen can align herself more closely to the male characters, and adopt their default reasoning of “what will be, will be”. And if defaulting to the whims of gods is good enough for male characters, then by the same logic it is also applicable to female characters; and if this holds true with an audience, then Helen has empowered herself through the claiming of equality via this subjective reasoning.

In conclusion Helen offers: “My new husband Deiphobus¹⁴ restrained me by force, the Phrygians would have let me go. How then would it be just for me to die at your hands, my husband? How would that serve justice (989-92)?” Helen’s tactic is to draw Menelaus’ attention to her more recent indiscretion and question the justice of that (having conveniently forgotten about her escapade with Paris). By concentrating on her forced marriage, Helen positions herself as the victim, and therefore more worthy of her husband’s sympathy and forgiveness.

¹⁰In the epic *Cypria*—attributed to Stasinus of Cyprus or Hegesias of Salamis c.6 BCE—Menelaus went to Crete whilst Paris was his guest, leaving him alone with Helen, an element that the original audience would have been aware of.

¹¹Sophists were higher education experts who travelled throughout the Greek world delivering lectures and specialised training in various subject. Their form of rhetoric argument was to turn a weaker argument into the stronger one through fallacious means.

¹²Gorgias of Leontini (c485 - c380 BCE) one of the most influential sophists.

¹³Gorgias explains by listing the possible reasons for Helen’s behaviour: “For either it was by the will of Fate, and the wishes of the Gods, and the votes of necessity that she did what she did, or by force reduced, or by words seduced, or by love possessed” (Dillon, 2003: p. 78).

¹⁴Deiphobus, another son of Hecuba and Priam, married Helen following the death of Paris.

But moreover, through her own victimisation, Helen is seeking to reignite their relational social capital. And by calling upon Menelaus to take her life, Helen is subconsciously asking Menelaus to recollect the fonder memories of yesteryear—a manipulative, yet effective manoeuvre that seeks to provide Helen with a possible path towards absolution for her infidelity.

Helen’s understanding of how and when to draw upon the social capital bonds of marriage grants the opportunities for her to gain self empowerment. But alongside the short, Helen is also playing the long game even though her life hangs in the balance; because reestablishing trust and the marital bond offers Helen a resurgence of social capital; the ability to reassume her position as the queen of Sparta, sitting at the pinnacle of social stratification; and once there the possibilities for social growth and dominance would be without limit. Even in the face of death Helen continues to use and collect social capital, a key resource to empowerment, demonstrating an awareness by Helen of how to successfully navigate a male oriented society in order to progress.

Alongside oration, civic duty was another cultural aspect that resonated with the contemporary audience, and within Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, 2008) (J. Morwood, Trans.) we see the play’s namesake adopt both to great effect within her patriotic speech, a conversational space where Euripides challenges the audience’s perception of women through the medium of age.

Euripides builds up to the patriotic speech (1368-1402) by first giving Iphigenia a voice reflective of her tender years; wishing she had the vocal qualities of Orpheus¹⁵ Iphigenia laments: “But as it is I shall offer the only skill that I possess, my tears. They are my only resource (1214-1215).” “Do not kill me before my time. It is sweet to see the light of day. Do not force me to look on the underworld (1217-1219)”, and even though Iphigenia’s voice is one of downheartedness, Euripides instils an eloquence that belies those tender years:

What do I have to do with the marriage
of Helen and Paris? Why must I die because he came to
Sparta? look at me, turn your eyes this way, and kiss me so
that as I die I may have this at least as remembrance of
you, if my words cannot persuade you.
(1238-1240)

By referencing Helen and Paris, Iphigenia can emphasise her own innocence, but moreover via the inclusion of “look at me, turn your eyes this way” what Iphigenia is actually petitioning for, is for her father to acknowledge and take accountability for the decision that he has undertaken. A small interjection, but one that outperforms her mother Clytemnestra’s prior argument emphasising the juxtapositional play between maturity of mind and immaturity of years.

¹⁵Orpheus is the type of singer, musician and poet who played the lyre and cithara—which he is often credited with inventing. Orpheus could sing so sweetly that beasts would follow him, plants and trees would bow to him and the wildest of men would become gentle. As part of the Argonauts he is said to have calmed the crew and waves of the sea during a storm.

Iphigenia's concise oration (1211-1252) combines a meekness of oral delivery with the power of audible messaging given over to the audience. Iphigenia's powerful and thought provoking oration exploits the emotions of the audience and the ruinous nature of events yet to unfold.

Having come to terms with her father's decision Iphigenia begins her patriotic speech and constructs a case as to why she should be sacrificed:

Mother, you must listen to my words. For I see
that you are angry with your husband for no reason. [...]
His reputation among the army
must not be destroyed. We should be no better off and he
would be ruined.
(1368-1374)

Iphigenia's loyalty towards her family is admirable and far removed from the male fidelity Euripides has on display. Although this switch from pleading for one's life to acceptance did prove problematic for Aristotle (Aristotle, 2012) (A. Kenny, Trans.), who commented that "the girl who pleads to be spared is not like her later self." (Arist. *Poet.* 1454a) suggesting an inconsistency in Euripides' character depiction, and noted that there was nothing prior to indicate that Iphigenia would herself choose death. That being said, within Iphigenia's song (1283 ff) Euripides does offer the audience brief snippets of where a change in attitude can be detected: "Artemis has won her sacrifice" (1311), "for others there is sorrow, and for others the clamp of necessity" (1329), Iphigenia's acquiescence apparent.

Iphigenia's final address is also the point where we see the full impact of social capital as a mechanism for female empowerment and a means by which Euripides can allow all of Iphigenia's subtle rhetorical nuances thus far to culminate in a flourish that recasts the dramatised female into something beyond the typical:

Greece in all its greatness¹⁶
now looks to me and no one else, on me depends the
voyage of the ships across the sea and the overthrow of the
Phrygians [...] Through my death I shall secure all this and
My fame as the liberator of Greece will be for ever blessed.
(1378-1384)

Iphigenia indicates an immediate feeling of responsibility as she echoes her father's feelings towards the importance of upholding the PanHellenic motif. However, we have to question the sincerity of Iphigenia's support. We could, for instance, argue that the inclusion of words and phrases like "I shall", "fame", "liberator", and "ever blessed" actually indicates one last act of defiance directed

¹⁶"Greece in all its Greatness"—Iphigenia here echoes her fathers' sentiment; "Unhappy Greece, it is for her above all I myself lament, for she wishes to do something good" (370-371), the idea being that all parts of Greece should unite to defeat their common foe—the Trojans

towards her father Agamemnon, who as appointed leader of all Greeks, would be expecting that kudos; an honour that is being removed by his young daughter. A single line (1384), twelve words that reshape female perception for the audience; Iphigenia, having outmanoeuvred Agamemnon for the prestige, is now firmly positioned as the saviour of the Greeks.

By shouldering the responsibility Iphigenia demonstrates a maturity that far exceeds her years, which in itself demonstrates female empowerment, and moreover accentuates Euripides' ability to place female characters into key positions that challenge an audience to reassess their expectations of how the female narrative should evolve. Euripides subtly nudges the audience towards accepting the importance of the female role.

There is a modern concurrence (Boeck et al., 2006; Edwards et al., 2003; Schneider et al., 1997) that children who have had less exposure to social capital are more inclined to make poorer choices. Iphigenia's privileged social position, as a princess, has allowed for a healthy exposure to social capital and its influence can be seen in the maturity of her reasoning: "You bore me for the common good of the Greeks, not for yourself alone [...] Greece is wronged, and shall my life, my single life, prevent all this" (1386-1390). Iphigenia's self-awareness adds to her maturity; born into royalty Iphigenia recognises that she belongs first and foremost to Greece, on both a symbolic and physical plane. And with that comes the need to carry out one's civic duty, a need that stems from the social capital associated with belonging (or feeling that you belong) to the larger network, the need to fit with the collective and uphold the ideals and aspirations of that group.

Membership in a large network brings access to a wider range of resources and more opportunities to collect social capital. However, on a more negative side, membership simultaneously yields certain exceptions and levels of commitment. The feeling that one should act for the sake of the group, irrespective of whether or not those actions sit comfortably on a moral level, relates directly to Field (2003)'s notion of the darker side of social capital, in that a single member of a collective wields less power and is therefore more susceptible, either consciously or unconsciously, to the pressures of collective compliance—a pressure that PanHellenic membership has brought to bear upon Iphigenia.

Iphigenia understands that she must be sacrificed for the good of Greece and her parting remarks demonstrates further strength of character: "This shall be my lasting monument, this shall be my children, my marriage and my glory (1399)." Iphigenia declares that through her death she will live on in the hearts and memories of the people. Her self-sacrifice is on par with Alcestis' own, but the central motivation behind Iphigenia's decision is the need to fulfil one's civic duty, in addition to the obligation felt towards her father.

Relational bonds emerging from the social capital that encapsulates the family unit combined with the strength of bond that PanHellenic membership instils becomes the influential agency that steers Iphigenia towards empowerment. And

if we were to consider social capital as an entity for either good or bad, then Iphigenia's situation is demonstrative of both; for Agamemnon, the social capital found within the PanHellenic motif helped to achieve his goal (offering Iphigenia up for sacrifice), with the relational bonds of family applying further influence to the outcome. For Iphigenia those two same strands of social capital conspired to seal her fate. And for all the negative outcome, Iphigenia's journey was one of empowerment, a journey that demonstrates how Euripides actively debunks narrative expectations of femaleness, and can, through the medium of social capital, progress his female characters into something more.

7. Conclusion

The dramatised female undoubtedly suffered from the genre's instinct to stereotype, and although other playwrights tinkered with representation none were as forthcoming as Euripides when it came to actively challenging the contemporary mindset, whether that was through title selection, plot, narration, spatial allotment, conversational intricacies or subtle inferences. Euripides pushed to demonstrate a progressive woman, pushed to show that women could be as empowered as men; pushed to have women viewed as more than society allowed, all through his dramatisation of femaleness. And at the very heart of the Euripidean female's ability to progress lay social capital. Understanding how and when to collect and use social capital was key to enabling women and challenging patriarchal authority, which Euripides achieved through his treatment of the traditional and the familiar. Euripides used the intricacies of relationships, trust and resources to dispute the on and offstage contemporary narrative of how female representation should be considered; and left in his wake an empowered and progressive collection of women.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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