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Oedipus and the Dawn of Freud's Oedipus Narrative: His very Selective Approach

Eleni Timplalexi
University of Athens

Abstract

The "Oedipus narrative" is one of the most prominent axioms of modernity, put forward by Freud in 1899. The Ancient Greek, mythical figure of Oedipus, king of Thebes, and his unspeakable fate, became a source of inspiration for the articulation of the theory according to which a child develops latent erotic attachment to the parent of the opposite sex and, through conflict with the parent of the same sex, emerges identified, maturer and emancipated. This narrative shifts the focus of attention from mythical Oedipus' original literal but unintended taboo transgressions (patricide and incest) to any child's alleged inner psychological symbolic transgressions of the same taboos, rendering it a pre-requisite element of the human condition. Did Freud read the myth selectively in its first stage? Did he read just the myth or are there other "texts", contexts, notions, understandings that are a part of Freud's interpretation? The article re-visits Freud's introduction to the Oedipal theme in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (pub. 1899). It then re-traces the myth mostly through the path of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* and at times converses with other contexts and disciplines, focusing on Oedipus and the Other, taboo transgression as a metaphor, superiority complex and theological input.

Keywords: Oedipus, Sophocles, Freud, myth, interpretation, the Other, taboo transgression, superiority complex, interior colony, guilt

1. Introduction

Writing about Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth of may appear like a megalomaniac endeavour; however, it may spring out from feelings of existential suffocation. Since the establishment of psychoanalysis, the special province of "the field of possible transformations of the wish, of disguised satisfaction" (Van Zyl 1998, 82), we are told how thoughts, feelings, instincts, impulses, urges in our everyday lives,

dreams and inner monologues may be perceived and analyzed, while seeking disguised traces of traumas that need to be resolved. We are reminded via media products[1] that we should want to know ourselves, not only in relation to our spatiotemporally synchronous condition, but also in accordance with bygone times as well as hypothetical states, such as wishes or fears. Apart from being required to establish a vigilant awareness of this quantum, personal, social, and political "soup" as well as our movement through it in the present, we are also required to keep track of our past navigations through it, as well as of virtual ones, in possible worlds of dreams, wishes, fears and instinct impulses. This has occurred since the conception of Freud's Oedipus narrative and the articulation of the subsequent Oedipus complex. Fundamental is a primal crime, the first repression that forms the complex lurks, awaiting to cause trouble.

Until Freud, a human life could contain mistakes, crimes, forgiveness, repentance, atonement. Psychoanalysis diagnosed a "normal" pathology present in any human psyche. The figure of Oedipus is emblematic in the psychoanalytical process, despite the fact that Oedipus may have been an unwanted child and a very unlucky man, though perhaps a caring king.

2. A brief outline of Freud's Oedipus narrative (and complex)

Oedipus is a "master narrative" that Freud (1899) introduces for the public eye in Die Traumdeutung (The Interpretation of Dreams)[2] about how sexuality becomes heterosexual and non-incestual (Van Zyl 1998, 93) by repressing "the profound and universal power of the incest-parricide fantasy" (Brown & Sugarman 2002, 250-51).[3] The Ancient Greek mythical figure of Oedipus, king of Thebes, and his unspeakable fate, became a source of inspiration for the articulation of the theory according to which, a child, mostly a boy, develops latent erotic attachment to the parent of the opposite sex, and, through conflict with the parent of the same sex, emerges with their identity, maturer and emancipated.[4] This narrative shifts the focus of attention from mythical Oedipus' original actual but unintended taboo transgressions (patricide and incest) to any

child's alleged inner psychological symbolic transgressions of the same taboos, rendering it a pre-requisite element of the human condition. Did Freud actually read the myth efficiently to put forward what later came to be known as the "Oedipus complex"? Did he just "read" Oedipus or are there other "texts", contexts, notions inscribed in Freud's understanding of the myth that are superimposed on Oedipus or are critical elements in the Oedipal Freudian narrative? The current analysis evolves around some sub-themes, including colonialism and the Other, taboo transgression, and the superiority/inferiority complex.

3. Mythological background: the myth of Oedipus and the Sophoclean plot

Drawing upon several sources[5] but mostly upon the Sophoclean tragedy,[6] a thorough mythological account of Oedipus' background, as well as an outline of the plot of Oedipus Rex is provided. It was deemed necessary for the subsequent discussion about Freud's reading of the tragedy, as it proves a much richer data matrix than the one Freud proffered, so the reader, if they wish, can keep track of Laius' past with Chrysippus, for example, or the fact that Delphi oracle features twice – or whatever may attract their attention.

A descendant of the house of Labdacids, Oedipus, is the mythical king of Thebes, son of Laius and Jocasta. His grandfather, Labdakus, died young and young Laius was sent to the Peloponnese. There, Pelops king of Pisa, assigned him to protect his son, young Chrysippus. Laius raped the king's son, who then committed suicide (or was killed by relatives). Laius returned to Thebes, where the former kings had died, married Jocasta and became king. The couple did not have children for a while and Laius sought advice from the Delphic oracle. He was told not to have a child or it would kill him and marry Jocasta. However, one night, Laius was drunk and inhibitions were neglected.

Jocasta gave birth to Oedipus, who, following Laius' orders, was to be exposed on Mount Cithaeron with his feet somehow maimed, pierced or bound. The baby was taken by a shepherd and given to the childless royal couple of Corinth, King Polybus and Queen Merope, and grew up like a prince.

When he became a young man, he heard a rumour he was not truly the son of the Corinthian royals. He sought an answer about his parents from the Delphic oracle, but, instead, received the prediction that he would kill his father and mate with his mother. Oedipus decided not to return to Corinth, still thinking Polybus and Merope were his parents. Instead, he headed to the city of Thebes, on the road to which, at a fork in the road, he quarreled with an older man, accompanied by servants, over the right of way and killed him, while defending himself. The old man was Laius, king of Thebes and father to Oedipus. The latter went to Thebes where he encountered the Sphinx, a chimeric beast feasting on the human flesh on anyone failing to solve her riddle. Her famous question was "what is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?" Oedipus emblematically answered "ἀνθρωπος", "man", triumphing over the Sphinx. The Thebans welcomed him as the saviour of Thebes and he married queen Jocasta, his mother, not knowing he was her son.

Sophocles' play opens up with a plague tormenting Thebes. Oedipus had sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to ask the advice of the Delphic oracle, which delivered the information that the plague is an outcome of miasmatic pollution, as Laius' murderer had never been discovered. King Oedipus vows to find the murderer and casts a curse upon him for causing the plague. The blind prophet Tiresias arrives at Thebes somewhat reluctantly, encouraging the king to halt his search. Oedipus accuses him of complicity in Laius' murder and the prophet unveils that the murderer is Oedipus. Oedipus accuses Tiresias and Creon as accomplices in efforts to usurp him, and even mocks Tiresias' blindness. Tiresias reveals even more details before leaving the place.

Creon denies Oedipus' accusations while Jocasta arrives and comforts Oedipus, advising him not to take seriously prophecies and omens, confessing that it was foretold to her husband that he would be killed by his child, though in fact bandits killed him at a fork in the road. Prompted by Oedipus to provide more information on the place and Laius' appearance, Jocasta does so. Oedipus sends for the only surviving witness of the attack to be brought to the palace and

confides in Jocasta that, having had doubts about the royal couple of Corinth being his parents, he sought the truth from the oracle. Their mysterious answer was that he would kill his father and mate with his mother. He chose to come to Thebes to avoid returning to Corinth. Oedipus shares his truth with Jocasta, resting assured since several bandits had killed Laius.

In the meantime, a messenger from Corinth delivers the news that Polybus has died. Oedipus is happy that the oracle's prophecy cannot be fulfilled – at least partly. The messenger thinks he should comfort the king more: Merope is not his real mother. He recounts the story of the Theban servant giving a baby from Laius' household he was supposed to dispose of to a shepherd who then gave it to childless Polybus. Oedipus seeks to identify this shepherd who happens to be the unique survivor who had witnessed the murder of Laius. Jocasta begs Oedipus to stop asking questions, the king refuses and the queen runs into the palace. Oedipus inquires of the shepherd and discovers the baby was Laius' son, who Jocasta gave to the shepherd to be disposed of on the mountain. Oedipus is devastated and asks for his sword to kill Jocasta, who had already hanged herself in her bedchamber. Oedipus removes the brooches from her dress and blinds himself with them. He asks to be exiled but Creon argues that the oracle should be consulted first, and, until then Oedipus should stay away from the public eye. Oedipus begs Creon to watch over his daughters, Antigone and Ismene, wishing them to have a better life than him. Creon agrees.

4. Freud's reading of Oedipus myth and Oedipus Rex: what's kept and what's left (out)?

Freudian thought was shaped by the tragedy of Oedipus. Chase (1979) argues that Freud makes a reading of Oedipus. To rethink Freud's concept, it does not suffice to trace the similarities between Oedipus' cognitive unfolding and psychoanalysis, but also to reconsider its primary source, which she claims as being Sophocles' version of the myth (54). An initial examination of how the theme of Oedipus is publicly introduced in the Interpretation of Dreams (2010), originally Die Traumdeutung (1899) is necessary.

A rather arbitrary combination between the terms "hypocritical", "Oedipus" and "dream" produces the coined term "hypocritical Oedipus dream" appearing in the sentences "I have reported elsewhere [1910/, reprinted below, p. 408 n.] a 'hypocritical Oedipus dream,' dreamt by a man, in which the hostile impulses and death-wishes contained in the dream-thoughts were replaced by manifest affection" (Freud 2010, 170), which establishes our first understanding of the use of the term as a curtain of deceit performed by unconscious mechanisms, hiding a guilt burdening truth from the subject's inner sight. Prior to the explanation of what an "Oedipal dream" might mean, the dreamer is deemed an (unintended) "hypocrite" for reversing the dynamics of impulses and disguising them. Of course, it is a mere hypothesis that an organic pre-requisite for a dream should necessarily "employ" replacements.

The main block of information on Oedipus is delivered by Freud (2010) later:

> Oedipus, son of Laïus, King of Thebes, and of Jocasta, was exposed as an infant because an oracle had warned Laïus that the still unborn child would be his father's murderer. The child was rescued, and grew up as a prince in an alien court, until, in doubts as to his origin, he too questioned the oracle and was warned to avoid his home since he was destined to murder his father and take his mother in marriage. On the road leading away from what he believed was his home, he met King Laïus and slew him in a sudden quarrel. He came next to Thebes and solved the riddle set him by the Sphinx who barred his way. Out of gratitude the Thebans made him their king and gave him Jocasta's hand in marriage. He reigned long in peace and honour, and she who, unknown to him, was his mother bore him two sons and two daughters (278-279).

There are a few differences already worth highlighting in terms of the mythological background provided mostly in Sophocles' drama, although other sources may have been used by Freud.

1. Laius' past offense and its outcome, namely his raping of Chrysippus, resulting in the latter's death (either by suicide or killing by relatives), does not attract Freud's attention at all. However, in Ancient Greek thought, this act surely constituted multiple taboo transgressions. Laius offended Pelop's hospitality, and this had severe religious

connotations, as it was an irreversible breach of the hospitality conventions coming under the sovereignty of Xenios Zeus. His act had a homosexual character, and was, of course, a transgression of the pedophilia taboo; it also led or was connected to the child's death. Hence, Freud appears to have neglected a very important point in the mythical background, possibly also dramaturgically connected to Laius', Jocasta's, Oedipus' and the latter's children's bloody fates.

2. A totally strange and incomprehensible element of the myth that Freud dismisses is that after Laius had committed his crime, the Thebans made him their king. A very bizarre coronation, especially as taboo transgressors would surely have led to possible malcontent amongst the people, as obviously underlined in Oedipus Rex.

3. Another element remaining in the dark is that, despite the Gods not blessing Laius and Jocasta with children easily, which resulted in their consulting the Delphic oracle, the couple had sexual relationships, presumably following the contraceptive method of coitus interruptus, to avoid an unwanted pregnancy. This whole frame explains how Oedipus is an unwanted baby, hence he is exposed after his birth. Laius had to choose between accepting the fate to die, killed by his son, or his family line stopping having a male successor to the throne of Thebes. A lost challenge for the reconsideration of patriarchal royal descent has not been highlighted by Freud; on the contrary, he reproduced Laius' patriarchy by imposing a male prototype of the Oedipus narrative onto females too.

4. Freud makes no mention of Oedipus marks on his famous feet or ankles, competing only with Achilles' heel. His feet were somehow maimed or marked. Such an important element that exists as a token of Oedipus' fate and verifies that he is Laius' dreaded son, remains irrelevant to the Freudian discourse, at least in the part of his text where we are introduced to Oedipus.

5. A puzzling Delphic prophecy does not stop Oedipus from killing nor wedding. Although the mythical hero had received such a descriptive answer, he did not refrain from killing the older man at Daulis, Laius, nor marrying Jocasta. Freud surprisingly omits any reference to this. It could have

been a major element in his narrative, as it betrays the power of the instincts he so much supported.

6. Interestingly, the riddle of the Sphinx is not mentioned by Freud, a rather unexpected omission, bearing in mind he was struggling with dream riddles at that time. Although Freud capitalises on the openness, vagueness and virtuality of the riddle to use it as a source for his analogy and discussion about dreams, at this point, neither Sphinx's question nor Oedipus' answer are provided to the reader.

7. The way Freud (2010) refers to Laius' killing betrays that he subconsciously thought Oedipus sensed somehow that the man he killed was Laius, his father: "On the road leading away from what he believed was his home, he met King Laïus and slew him in a sudden quarrel" (278-79). Is this slippage an indicator of the writer's strong identification with Oedipus or a big indication for an extremely biased reading?

8. Furthermore, Freud does not highlight, against all the odds, that Jocasta did not pay attention to Oedipus "feet" issue. How often had she met such feet or ankles? This could have been taken advantage of in Freud's reading, it could have enforced the reciprocity of the oedipal gesture from the side of the mother – but, thankfully, was not taken into consideration.

9. Laius' murder is never empirically established in Sophocles' drama, Oedipus just affirms he is guilty of killing Laius. What finally convinces Oedipus of his guilt is the Herdsman's implication that he, Oedipus ("Swellfoot"), is the child exposed with pierced ankles by Jocasta and Laius in response to the oracle's prediction (Chase 1978, 59). Despite Freud reproducing Oedipus' textual act via psychoanalysis, he never doubts Oedipus' parrincest, whereas Sophocles allows the spectator to decide the grade of certainty for Oedipus' taboo transgressions.

Then, Freud (2010) proceeds in unfolding the Sophoclean plot:

> Then at last a plague broke out and the Thebans made enquiry once more of the oracle. It is at this point that Sophocles' tragedy opens. The messengers bring back the reply that the plague will cease when the murderer of Laïus has been driven from the land.
>
> But he, where is he? Where shall now be read

> The fading record of this ancient guilt?
>
> The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of a psycho-analysis—that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laïus, but further that he is the son of the murdered man and of Jocasta. Appalled at the abomination which he has unwittingly perpetrated, Oedipus blinds himself and forsakes his home. The oracle has been fulfilled (279).

It is just unbelievable how Freud simplifies a tragedy and a plot worth gold in Philosophy, Classics and Theatre Studies, with tons of ink having been shed about it. In fact, although Freud claims he also be visiting Oedipus Rex("What I have in mind is the legend of King Oedipus and Sophocles' drama which bears his name", 278), he does not dedicate many lines in his book on the Sophoclean tragedy. A few more mentions of Oedipus do occur in the Interpretation of Dreams; however, these belong to the sphere of interpretation, as they are injected into his discussion and used to support arguments, rather than standing out as denoted plot elements. Such an example can be found a couple of pages later:

> King Oedipus, who slew his father Laïus and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfillment of our own childhood wishes. But, more fortunate than he, we have meanwhile succeeded, in so far as we have not become psychoneurotics, in detaching our sexual impulses from our mothers and in forgetting our jealousy of our fathers. Here is one in whom these primaeval wishes of our childhood have been fulfilled, and we shrink back from him with the whole force of the repression by which those wishes have since that time been held down within us. While the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognise our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found. The contrast with which the closing Chorus leaves us confronted—
>
> ...Fix on Oedipus your eyes,
>
> Who resolved the dark enigma, noblest champion and most wise.
>
> Like a star his envied fortune mounted beaming far and wide:
>
> Now he sinks in seas of anguish, whelmed beneath a raging tide... (280).

Another example follows:

> At a point when Oedipus, though he is not yet enlightened, has begun to feel troubled by his recollection of the oracle, Jocasta consoles him by referring to a dream which many people dream, though, as she thinks, it has no meaning:
>
> Many a man ere now in dreams hath lain
>
> With her who bare him. He hath least annoy
>
> Who with such omens troubleth not his mind.1. (281).

The focus is solely on the "dreamy" aspect, not Jocasta's languor with regards to such a neglect. The information is provided to suggest that:

> Today, just as then, many men dream of having sexual relations with their mothers, and speak of the fact with indignation and astonishment. It is clearly the key to the tragedy and the complement to the dream of the dreamer's father being dead. The story of Oedipus is the reaction of the imagination to these two typical dreams. And just as these dreams, when dreamt by adults, are accompanied by feelings of repulsion, so too the legend must include horror and self-punishment (281).

The sphere of information provision has been abandoned and the sphere of connotation and rhetoric circumscribe Jocasta's attempt to comfort. From now on, information on the drama and Freud's interpretation of it become fabricated together.

Other sporadic mentions of Oedipus appear later with the term "Oedipus legend" or "the story of Oedipus" (281) or "Oedipus dream" (408-9), with the Oedipus narrative having been presented. This scrutinizing of the Freudian reading of the plot of the myth of Oedipus and of Oedipus Rex reveals that Freud, in his initial attempts at weaving the Oedipus narrative for the public eye, uses the plots of the myth and of the tragedy as sources of an analogy to reinforce a construct, rather than is rationally, solidly and strongly based upon them.

5. Tracing other influences in Freud's early conception of his Oedipus

Freud falls in the trap of phrasing a hypothesis as an axiom: that in our childhoods, we all develop erotic/antagonistic feelings towards our parents and most of us, "the normal", succeed in withdrawing our sexual impulses, repressing our

wishes. This is based in the literalisation of a metaphor "we are all Oedipus", a convention not so evident throughout his Interpretation of Dreams. This convention passes as an objective "diagnosis" based on specific cases rather than a subjective literary, philosophical contemplation. Does Freud here export his doctor status and pose it upon our thirsty need to produce a narrative of the self? A self conceived in relation to what or whom? Furthermore, how did he reach such an arbitrary generalization, are there any other synchronic or diachronic influences he draws upon? His certainty echoes other texts or contexts interwoven alongside Sophocles' Oedipus in his first Oedipal suggestions.

5.1. The Empire and the interior colony: the Other, taboo transgression and the superiority/inferiority complex

Psychoanalysis was, and still is, although more dissipated, a privilege of the modern West for the construction of "individual Western selves" and for the exploration of "the private sphere of the bourgeois family and its individuals", pervading the public sphere of politics and the state in bourgeois society (Nonini 1992, 25). A by-product of modernity, psychoanalytic theory occurs within a larger cultural context of colonial expansion and imperial crisis (Fuss 1994, 20).

Freudian thought, at least as it emerges in the dawn of the establishment of the Oedipus narrative in Interpretation of Dreams, is not free of colonial and imperialist connotations[7]. Starting from the literal dimension of the relation of Freud to the Empire, it is worth noting that Freud appears to be a devoted royalist of the Austro-Hungarian Empire:

> he was no maverick when it came to being a Habsburg subject. The Imperial charisma touched him as it did others. Freud himself transmitted to his children this fascination with the Crown. His son Martin recalled fond stories his father told about the Emperor. And: 'We Freud children were all stout royalists.' (Nonini 1992, 28)

Freud is said to have neglected "the actual history of relations of power prevailing within primitive groups and non European agrarian civilizations, and of the politics of European empires vis-a-vis these societies". (Nonini 1992, 28) The usual

imperialist and colonial borders between European civilizations and "savage" peoples manifest in his oeuvre with assumptions about the "nature" of primitive peoples as opposed to the complexities of Freud's society quotidian life. The discussion of the correlation between the primal articulation of the Freudian Oedipus narrative and the notion of colony is structured around three main axes: i) Oedipus and the Other, seen through the lens of psychoanalysis and post-colonial criticism ii) Taboo transgression and iii) superiority/inferiority complex.

5.1.1. Oedipus and the Other

It appears that post-colonial criticism has captured that Oedipus is a myth of latent pervasiveness, leaking from the domain of the drama to the domains of the individual, social and political spheres. The post-colonial Other, namely "West's representation of its Other" or the "West's misrepresentations of its Other", overlaps with the psychoanalytic Other, which comes along with other Others, as met in Hegel, Sartre, Nietzsche, Bakhtin and Adorno (Van Zyl 1998, 79-80). The paradoxical figures and qualities which haunt colonial texts, such as the puritan or eroticism mixed with repulsion are characteristically psychoanalytic (Van Zyl 1998, 82). Freud's Oedipus, in fact, appears to be an answer behind the colonial preoccupation with bodily difference and the complex play of desiring and phobic relations (Van Zyl 1998, 97).

At the core of this conceptual overlapping lies the imposing of the Freudian phantasmagoric Primal Scene, imposed axiomatically upon the non-civilized Other, reducing primitive life into a pre-repression era (Nonini 1992, 30). Is the Oedipal Other understood as a universal entity or as anchored in social – cultural processes? The tracing of the basis of the Oedipus' universality discourse is said to touch upon, among others, post-colonial criticism. Is there, for example, such a notion as an "African Oedipus" (Fortes 2018, Bertoldi 1998)? Or is it a "European Phantasy" (Hitchcott 1993, 62)?

An interesting point that post-colonial criticism could take into account is that while Oedipus thought he was conquering Thebes, and symbolically Jocasta, he was its king and her kin anyway. What is more, Oedipus was a descendant

of Cadmus, a Phoenician who gave Boeotian Thebes the same name as the city in Egypt; his fatal encounter with the bestial Sphinx, a symbol already met in Egyptian culture, affirms the "Egyptian connection".

Freud's latent position on the universality of the Oedipus narrative and, later, complex, with Lacan also adhering to such an understanding, caused Fanon to put such a certainty under question, politically challenging psychoanalysis and western ethnologists, who are claimed to find their own psychosexual pathologies duplicated in their objects of study (Fanon 1986, 152).

"White" operates as its own Other, freed from any dependency upon the sign "Black" for its symbolic constitution. In contrast, "Black" functions, within a racist discourse, always diacritically, as the negative term in a Hegelian dialectic continuously incorporated and negated. Fanon articulates the process precisely: "The Negro is comparison" (Fuss 1994, 22).

Deleuze and Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus* (1970) highlight oedipality as an inevitable internal form of colonization, contributing in a deconstruction of its imperial politics: "Oedipus is always colonization pursued by other means, it is the interior colony, and ... even here at home, where we Europeans are concerned, it is our intimate colonial relation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1970, 186).

Bertoldi, on the other hand, attempted, more recently, to develop a critique on the implications of such post-colonial positions, which are, alarmingly, according to him, keyed around "difference":

> Thus post-colonial criticism's suggestions that Oedipus does not exist fail to take into account the implications of this non-existence of Oedipus in Africa—in effect the supposition (at least in Freudian terms) that Africans are not enculturated and have no super-ego... (Bertoldi 1998, 107).

Mitchell (1975) emphasizes the synchronic dimension of the articulation of the Freudian Oedipus narrative:

> Anthropological arguments that make the Oedipus complex general without demarcating its specificity are inadequate; political suggestions that it is only to be found in capitalist societies are incorrect. What Freud was deciphering was our human heritage—but he deciphered it in a particular time and place (409).

Freud attributed the status of a universal law to the Oedipus narrative/complex by which we are all said to find a way of acquiring our place in the world – however, this universal law finds specific expression in the capitalist family, a specificity which bears obvious or latent connotations, depending on the point of entry in the discussion.

Fuss (1994) rightly underlines that, in Freud, identification, in its psychoanalytic dimension:

> ...is itself an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation in which the Other is deposed and assimilated into the lordly domain of Self. Through a psychical process of colonization, the imperial subject builds an Empire of the Same and installs at its center a tyrannical dictator, "His Majesty the Ego." (23).

Hence, not only is the colonial-imperial register of self-other relations present as an ideological and sociopolitical influence on Freud's Oedipus; not only can this narrative be enlightened by taking into account post-colonial criticism, focusing on colonialism, imperialism and the Other; the very function psychoanalysis introduces has an imperialist character, as "the formulation of identification can be seen to locate at the very level of the unconscious the imperialist act of assimilation that drives Europe's voracious colonialist appetite" (Fuss 1994, 23).

5.1.2. Transgression: land/taboo connotations and the unconscious

The original Polynesian term "tabu" or "tapu" has come to bear even in the enlightened West specific religious connotations Freud (1913) highlights in his book Totem und Tabu (The full title of reads "Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics", 1919, confirming the criticism about colonialist, imperialist and racist ideology that pervades Freud's oeuvre). Taboos, overlapping with social norms, are behavioral guidelines that a culture or a society employs to guide the behaviour and the thoughts of their members, suggesting agreed upon expectations, restrictions and rules (Fershtman, Gneezy, Hoffman 2011, 139-140). However, taboos are sometimes referred to as doing the "unthinkable": "a taboo is a form of "thought police" that

governs not just human behavior, but also its thoughts", penalizing for merely considering a deviation, as opposed to social norms, which impose sanctions for realized behaviours. A taboo as a cognitive mechanism allows perpetual negotiation between the private and the public (Fershtman, Gneezy, Hoffman 2011, 141-2).

The notion of "transgression", especially in its stochastic dimension, renders possible simultaneously a discussion about body, taboo, and territory. Originally from a Proto-Indo-European root, the word came to signify in Latin "step across, step over; climb over, pass, go beyond," and in 15c., from middle French, "to sin" (Online etymology dictionary 2022). It somehow correlates "sin" with the prohibited act of trespassing on someone else's property or a forbidden territory, hence a latent spatial quality may be diagnosed. Private or protected areas are often transgressed (for example, Ponta et al. 2021); taboos are also transgressed; bodies are transgressed when violated or objectified. This spatial dimension of the taboo and the prohibiting dimension of the territory complement one another. Civility in the Western world is constructed around the notion of property:

> Transgression and civility are, by default, co-dependent: the contours of each being defined in relation to the other. To breach the limits of the acceptable is to simultaneously define them, and as those limits expand to encompass that which once contravened them, so are the limits of transgression temporarily affirmed (Foley et al. 2012, xi-xii).

Freudian thought exploits enormously this analogy between body and territory, through the notion of taboo transgression. First of all, the ego appears to have the quality of an interface, with the true psychic self thought to be buried in the unconscious and become randomly accessible by the ego in a distorted form, with dreams being the most emblematic example of such eruptions. Lacan, a few decades later, recognizes the id, the Other that Freud identifies with the instinct, as a "'locus or site where the 'treasure of the signifier' is to be found and in which the Speaking subject is constituted" (Van Zyl 1998, p. 85) (emphasis to highlight the spatiality of the Other in Lacan as well). The id becomes, hence, understandable through the metaphor of the unexplored territory, a bit like a

mythical land emerging from a mist, an Atlantis within the analysand: the body of the analysand becomes the container of a land; hence, the analysand becomes an unclassifiable Other, a hybrid, transitional organic/inorganic entity. The discovery of the id, which refers to "bodily" concepts (instincts and needs, for example), rephrases the Cartesian mind/body split as it is based on the process of objectification within the analysand and in between analyst and analysand. Within the analysand, the mind becomes a medium, a transitional entity that reads distorted stimuli and interprets them into meaning. This is a manipulated process by the analyst, in which the analysand becomes a body producing meaning, while the former retains the role of the intelligent mind that, even through silences, dictates the collaborative articulation of some compulsive narrative, the absence of which can be problematic. By identifying a new, unexplored, shape shifting, inexhaustible, virtual territory with the id, Freud attributed to the id the same spatial qualities, in parallel giving birth to the desire and fear of taboo transgression. By having the id hosting a primal repression, this space acquired wild, savage characteristics: the analyst, as a transgressor, an imperialist, a colonialist, violates the analysand to elucidate a misty landscape, this mystic jungle, inhabited by the Other. Freud reenacts colonialism by demarcating the id as an unmapped territory, also drawing his "scene"[8] from different cultures of the Others, and becomes a high priest capable of initiating rites of passage, establishing totems and diagnosing transgressions of taboo as having already taken place – in other words, by the encouragement to consider the unthinkable, a session of taboo transgression is performed. At a moment when imperialism was playing its last fin-de-siecle cards, the colonies had to be discovered within.

5.1.3. Oedipal roots of the superiority/inferiority complex

Freud uses Oedipus' drama to construct his version of the apparatus of psychic and sexual development in human existence. The socializing developmental process is interpreted as a substitution process in which alleged familial sexual entities are replaced by canonical, culturally appropriate non-familial choices. This process of substitution is said to spring

out from an inferiority feeling towards the father, that leads to a competition with him and eventually to identification, accomplishment and success.

Freud, drawing upon Oedipus, negotiates superiority/inferiority complex on two levels. On one hand, he obviously identifies the young child as striving for superiority, a disguised thirst for the mother's erotic response, when competing with the father and killing him, with Oedipus' acts of killing Laius and mating with Jocasta. Freud (1919) supported the view that the violator of taboos becomes taboo himself. Thus, Oedipus in the myth becomes a taboo himself, as he transgresses the taboo of incest and patricide. Uranus was a violator, Chronus was another - the Olympians were the victims of infanticide attempts and they rephrased the incest taboo as sibling mating; Oedipus dies at Colonus a blind, peripatetic taboo. By guiding the analysand through the identification trip with Oedipus, Freud makes the patient a winner in the competition of sexual entities substitution. On the other hand, although, arbitrarily, presupposing a movement of erotic love from the side of the patient toward the analyst, which when disrupted brings forth the cure of the neurosis, the system of psychoanalysis lies on an agon, a struggle between analyst and patient or Freud and reader (Nonini 1992, 30). Bloom outlines how Freud identified totem with the psychoanalyst and taboo with analytical transference, rephrasing a superiority/inferiority complex (Nonini 1992, 25).

The success of these two agonistic sessions, one leaking from the domain of the fiction and the other springing out from the psychoanalysis system function, leaves the analysand with an air of inner superiority, bold, cured, ameliorated – a living taboo, a winner at a personal level as well as at a class level: the analysand constructs a sense of primitive historicity, a lineage likened to aristocracy, they ascend class, entering the realm of the myth of gods, queens and kings. The house of Labdacids was of divine descent, with Cadmus and Pentheus in the list, bearing the responsibility for introducing the cult of Dionysos, which played a crucial part in Greek mythology. Oedipus derives from that family line; he is not exactly "anyone". Those not having been analysed were the losers,

"savages" of the winners' empire, fantasized as existing prior to repression, the Primal Scene and civilization. Ferenczi highlights that the relationship between the psychoanalyst and his patient presupposes an economic contract, accessible only to middle classes and up (Nonini 1992, 30).

Female analysandes of the European bourgeoisie had to (and still have to) even fit in the costume of a narrative/complex tailored for males, which introduces a canon for the occurrence of a feeling of inferiority, topped up by the hostile binary projection of "penis envy". Fortunately for females, the Oedipal threat of castration works only in male Oedipus, and the fetishized, stereotypic responses to the Other characterize mostly men (Van Zyl 1998, 92). Also, the compulsive pre-requisite of heterosexuality pervades the Freudian Oedipus as it is based on attraction towards the parent of the opposite sex. It is suggested that the substitution of first sexual entities (mothers, fathers, siblings) "normally" occurs with culturally appropriate substitutes of the same sex as the former. An underlying binary logic deluges the stabilization of sexual orientation, the substitution achievement and the acquisition of a gender identity (Van Zyl 1998, 95).

5.2. Behind Freud's Oedipus: diagnosing theological input

As the alleged source of the "Oedipal dream" conventionally pervades all human life, paralyzing rational counterarguments and leading to the succumbing of the literal to the metaphorical, it could be argued that perhaps its appeal and power are not drawn solely upon scientific sources.

Building upon Ricoeur, who claims that mythic figures "generalize human experience on the level of a universal concept or paradigm in which we can read our condition and destiny" (Ricoeur 1970, 38-39), Humbert (1993) holds that behind Oedipus stands Adam, with the narrative of the original sin not being "purely a work of the imagination, but the distorted remnant of an historical event, the primal killing of the father" (293). Freud is said to have reconstructed the primal historical scene, demythologizing the original sin, "only to replace it with his own semi-mythic historical construction"

(292).The "Oedipus complex" is thus interpreted as "the myth of human fallenness", "a displacement and surreptitious return of primordial sin... Adam returns, but without the opportunity of salvation which once was the prospect opened up by his fall" (296). Humbert, furthermore, traces that the Oedipal responsibility is not of an ethical quality, but of a dramaturgical one:

> Only after the event is a measure of self-conscious freedom and responsibility acquired, when conscience, morality and religion take shape in the wake of the primal event...when Freud uses the word 'guilt' then, it is clear that he means tragic rather than ethical guilt...In the Sophoclean myth, Oedipus is brought to his doom, not by his wicked instincts, but by the combination of chance and his own impetuous desire for knowledge. The essence of his tragedy is that he suffers a tragic guilt decreed by fate and not by his own will. Freud's teaching, however, is that Oedipus did will his own fate. He did harbour the intention to kill his father and sleep with his mother, only he was not aware of it. Every infant, at least in fantasy, is guilty of the same crime, tainted as he is by inherited sin (295).

Freud expels the doctrine of childhood innocence, condemning infants as guilty before they are even capable of meaningful praxis[9]. On the contrary, the mythology of Ancient Greeks, especially in terms of the gods, contains ample examples of "mother-son incest" (Uranus was also Gaia's son and Aphrodite a surrogate mother to Adonis), "infanticide" attempts (Chronus ate his children, Hephaestus was thrown down from Olympus by Hera) or doings (Niobe lost fourteen children all at once), even castration (Uranus' castration by Chronus). In this universe, for example, Uranus' castration is not understood nor experienced as a primal sin but rather as a plot evolvement - how else could in a good narrative an immortal god "grow up" and hand over the throne if not usurped, an occurrence that gave birth to the goddess of harmony, beauty and love. Oedipus' fate, a series of facts and occurrences, fatal coincidences, resulted in his total transformation into a semi-god, echoed in his mysterious "death" at Colonus and the fact that his relics would protect the city of Athens.

Freud's thesis that circumcision is a symbolic substitute for castration as a result of the Oedipus conflict was tested. The

results unveil that circumcision is likely connected to either proximity and bodily contact between son and mother during sleep in the nursing period (which may vary in cultures) or to the father's superiority over the son as a competing male, especially when the father sleeps in a different place. One thing that Freud seems to have grasped is the conceptual connection between his Oedipal trip and dreams, belonging of course to the realm of sleep (Kitahara 1976, 535).

Hence, not only did Freud selectively read Oedipus Rex, but he imposed upon it a layer of guilt. Was Freud's unresolved Oedipal issue repressed aggression about circumcision, which he disguised and projected as "castration complex" for females, said to be leading to "penis envy"? In fact, the Oedipus narrative could be read, in a "reverse engineering" rationale, as based on the anger and frustration a male child feels when he realizes his symbolic castration by his expel by the mother, as she is involved with the father, possibly accompanied by sexual control by the father, sometimes literally performed.

6. Discussion

Hopefully, Freud's focal selectiveness when reading Oedipus Rex in his Interpretation of Dreams and putting forward his Oedipal narrative is now clearer, as well as other parameters influencing its shaping, such as the interiorized colony and sin connotations.

Post-colonial discourse on Oedipus' universality tends to attach it to the Freudian Oedipus complex. Indeed, Freud's reading of Oedipus in his Oedipus narrative shifted our focus so much from whatever it was we would want to focus on, so that it is almost impossible to read or watch without the Freudian concept crossing at all our minds. On the other hand, it cannot be neglected that the multi- inter- and trans-disciplinary interest in Oedipus indicates that there is something in it that triggers a massive appeal. However, it does not necessarily have to do with the Oedipus complex. Can what is at stake in the universality of Oedipus be identified as an ethical stance towards choice and politics (Bertoldi 1998, 124)? Possibly, but such an assumption just rolls the issue of universality over to another plane, that of politics, our rules, social relationships.

Is there a universal dimension in a philosophical and political approach to an ethical stance relevant to the Oedipus complex? Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949) recognized the prohibition against incest as a universal law and this as a minimal condition differentiating "culture" from "nature". The relevant literature seems to support the view that incest avoidance is widespread among vertebrata and "built into the wiring", while incest avoidance in humans, elaborated into a cultural taboo, serves to motivate exploration of and attachment to a wider social nexus than the family, by preventing fixation at a relatively undifferentiated psychological stage of development, as:

> Only by participating in progressively wider networks of relationships does the individual form a distinct and differentiated concept of self. Thus the incest taboo functions importantly in boundary maintenance and identity formation, without which a cultural mode of life is not possible (Parker 1976, 299).

Taboo, as "thought police", indicates a subtle, constant negotiation of the possibility of transgression, leading to private and/or public profit, which is as old as choice and politics can get. Refraining from transgressing a taboo makes people acknowledging their restrictions on freedom. This allows a certain agency and acceptable freedom in the public sphere as well as respect for the private spheres of others. There is a latent virtuality in the process of negotiation of a taboo transgression that the aftermath of such a transgression cannot any longer host. A movement from the level of thinking to the level of doing, felt like a "fall". Democracy is based on a process of negotiation; tyranny, on the other hand, sometimes on bold transgressions.

Oedipus is, simultaneously, a dramatis persona and a deity-protector of Athens. The 430 B.C. plague serves as a literal frame upon which the Theban fictional plague is superimposed. The children's plea addresses the audience at a literal and a fictional level. The suppliants in white at the opening of Sophocles' tragedy could be begging Oedipus for a solution to their problems. The virtual future citizens of Athens, became, with their parental blessings, ερώμενοι. In Oedipus' times, before 10th century BC, pederasty may have constituted

a taboo transgression, something that could have cost Laius his life and caused Oedipus' fate. Symbolically, the young of classical Athens could beg to stop being courted by adult ερασταὲς, something their fathers, as other Laiuses, seem to have decided upon, may be not piercing and tying up their feet, but making them part of a social apparatus for war. They claim virtuality over realization, the virtuality of democracy. They want a future and peace. They beg for a retrograde orbit that would undo the upcoming eradication of a polity they already saw, as angeli novi, the most inspiring political moment of human history – not necessarily the most just or the less problematic, but the most inspiring, politically speaking, virtual one. An orbit that would allow a contemplation of political, social and personal violations occurring in their present.

To conclude, the Freudian reading of Oedipus is very selective, omitting critical elements. Most crucial is that Laius' had multiply transgressed a taboo prior to becoming a father and secondly that Oedipus was an unwanted child. One could almost claim that the whole story could be decrypted as a bad trip inspired by a transitional phase in the history of birth control, where the aborted child, with heavy feet like Erinyes', sheds family blood in revenge and symbolically re-enters the womb to be born anew, or, as a fantasy about a young man springing out from some coitus interruptus, without nurturing strings attached, then taking revenge on his parents for his rejection.

Freudian injustice to the story probably gave rise to the need for an articulation of a "counter-oedipal", "Laius complex" (Devereux 1953) of repressed infanticide urges and wishes. Laplanche explains, "the slightest parental gesture bear[s] the parents' fantasies ... the parents themselves had their own parents; they have their 'complexes,' wishes marked by historicity" (Laplanche 1976, 45). Oedipus killed his father while defending himself; he mated his mother without knowing. How was Freud not tempted to ask the question: did not Laius and Jocasta recognize their son Oedipus, whose feet were so legendary? This showcases how biased his reading was. A Laius complex approach re-virtualises Oedipus narrative, and as such, would be worth exploring more widely. Freud's point of

view in the story coincides with Oedipus at the moment of the full realisation of his taboo transgression. While Freud read erotic attraction towards the mother and a patricide wish in all of us, he forgot to include in his reading all that the parents throw in the faces of the children, literally and symbolically, on an individual and a political level. He forgot to include in his schema that, if we are all Oedipus, we are merely reacting to our parents' projections, fears, wishes and choices made in our names.

The process of realization of a virtuality requires an occurrence on the symbolic as well as the literal plane. By challenging the analysand's "articulating in language" through the elusive dream world, an emergence of forced realizations takes place; the analyst traps the analysand in a "normative" situation. By making us study inner symbolic transgressions of taboos, Freud created a virtual place, a spatiality and turned our "unconscious" into a land, awaiting a visit. A promising, never ending, shape shifting land where he is king and we are his placeholders. By having the analysands symbolically transgressing taboos in real time, even if they never had before, during analysis, Freud installed a guilt that initiated a need for therapy. By using Oedipus, he invented a narrative that makes us all transgressors, and then taboos, agents metabolizing the self, interested a priori in our private profit.

NOTES

[1] For an understanding of the term "media product", see Elleström (2021) and Bruhn & Schirrmacher (2022, 4).

[2] Freud appears to have conceived the Oedipus complex already in 1897 (Letters 64 to 71 in Freud 2010, 18). However, he introduced the Oedipus theme in *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) in 1899. The edition (2010) followed in the article was first published in 1955, translated from German and edited by James Strachey. See Freud (2010).

[3] Brown and Sugarman (2002) provide an efficient historical account of the Oedipus complex.

[4] The narrative of the child's loving and aggressive feelings towards its parents has as its essential starting point the view that the child of either sex develops a strong attachment to the mother and subsequently to the father coupled with the (at the time) novel assumption that these attachments are in

essence no different in character from those usually described as sexual (Van Zyl 1998, 94).

[5] Sources used include Appollodorus 1921; Diodorus Siculus 1933; Ευριπίδης 1938 pub.; Hyginus 1960; Kerenyi and Hillman 1991; Όμηρος, 1976 pub.; Σοφοκλής. 1942 (pub.); and Sophocles and Lloyd-Jones 1994.

[6] Σοφοκλής. 1942 (pub.); and Sophocles and Lloyd-Jones 1994.

[7] The term "colonialism" refers almost exclusively to historical processes involving western Europeans in disparate areas such as North America, South Africa, and New Zealand, as opposed to the term "imperialism", which signifies the conquering of neighbouring peoples and states, added as territories to imperial domains (Adas 1998).

[8] For a "scenographic" reading of trauma with relation to Oedipus, see Fletcher 2013, 123-152.

[9] This notion is not embraced by the Christian Greek Orthodox religion.

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Eleni Timplalexi: post doc, laboratory lecturing staff member, NTLab, Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Athens.

Address:
Eleni Timplalexi
Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Athens
Grypareio Megaro Building, Sophocleous 1, 10559 Athens, Greece
E-mail: elentimple@media.uoa.gr