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Antigone’s burial act: a rift between bios and logos in postmodern rewritings of
Sophocles’s text

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Abstract

This thesis will discuss how modern adaptations of Sophocles's *Antigone*, such as Mac Wellman's *Antigone* (2002) and Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (2012), translate the politics of mourning and represent the shift from the practices and rituals of burial to a politics that accounts to the excluded and oppressed constituencies of the *polis*. Drawing on the political ordering of human life and its division into grievable and non grievable bodies, I will examine the current theoretical debate on biopolitics, by drawing on Roberto Esposito's most recent work.

By pursuing a comparative analysis between two modern adaptations of Sophocles's tragedy, namely Wellman's *Antigone* and Carson's *Antigonick*, I read politics of lamentation as it is recontextualized in contemporary political contexts when modern biopolitics is consolidated as a constitutive part of politics of exception and its systems of thought. More specifically, I discuss burial politics as it served American exceptionalism in Bush's political administration after the terrorist events of 9/11, when the USA projected itself as a global superpower over weaker nations. Thus, war policies against Islamic nations were presented as humanistic interventions in favor of global peace and against terrorism. Consequently, I draw on Donald Pease's theoretical analysis on the states of exception and Jacqueline Rose's theory on the states of fantasy to explain how burial politics was integrated in American exceptionalism as a mechanism first to instill the state's imaginary noble cause in the consciousness of the citizens and second to further support this cause through public praise and honor of the dead soldiers in public funerary orations. Thus, burial practices was an integral part of states of exception that enhanced the fantasized causes of the Homeland both internally (within the state) and externally (on a global level) in order to justify actions which violate the regulations of International Law and rename war practices as humanistic actions which promote global peace.

My research intends to shed light on questions of our modern era relevant to political concerns about the excluded singularities' manifestation of power that transgresses human devaluation and humiliation and triggers a desire for life under the conditions of oppressive regimes, states of exception, colonization and racist policies, war contexts and immigration issues. Throughout my research I

discuss the concept of miasma that constitutes the marginality of the other which triggers policies of exclusion and puts life and human ethics secondary to politics. The connection between *bios* and politics constitutes the social nature of the body which can only be defined through social interaction, as a member of the whole. The burial act of non-grievable dead bodies and politics of lamentation in Sophocles's *Antigone* foreshadows similar acts in Western modernity under biopolitical conditions, where the excluded minorities' rebellious performance engenders a politics and a struggle for the reinvention of the social, thus developing life through death. I read the aforementioned acts as a rift between bios and logos, which projects a powerful political message of the social, political but also ontological potentiality of the marginalized constituencies and their collectivities.

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
2.	Antigone's act of burial: the political significance of mourning under Creon's law.....	4
2.1	Introduction.....	4
2.2	Burial politics: from the heroic code of Homeric epics to the democratic <i>polis</i> in tragedy.....	9
2.3	Antigone as a political actor in Creon's <i>polis</i>	13
2.3.1	Contamination and Creon's self-contradictory politics.....	13
3.	Postmodern rewritings of Sophocles's <i>Antigone</i>	20
3.1	Introduction.....	20
3.2	Mac Wellman's <i>Antigone</i>	25
3.2.1	Wellman's postmodern aesthetics in rewriting <i>Antigone</i>	25
3.2.2	The "Broken World" or "A World orderly disordered" in Mac Wellman's <i>Antigone</i>	27
3.3	<i>Antigonick</i> by Anne Carson: a parody of the state of exception.....	37
4.	Conclusion.....	44
	Works Cited.....	49

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis will endeavor to discuss Sophocles's *Antigone* as the narrative of a transgressive burial act performed in the prohibitive context of Creon's politics. Antigone's deed is a political act that endeavors to defend the unwritten laws of the human being that are reduced to unintelligibility by the written, concrete laws of the sovereign. Written law is thus questioned by Antigone, since it is created by human beings who adjust legislation to their own needs. Hence, Antigone highlights the importance of her own *dike* that is prescribed within the framework of oral laws which remain immutable through the ages, as opposed to the written laws that are always exposed to the benefits of the sovereign and the actions of the citizens. Antigone's prohibited burial act *per se* acquires the significance of political articulation in conditions of impossibility and defines the gap between *bios* and *logos* of the marginalized singularity who claims a space between politics and life, in order to defend his/her life's value not as a matter of political ordering but as a personal issue that distances itself from the state's constant political intervention. Antigone's insistence on burying her brother Polyneices, who is considered a traitor, constitutes the conflict between her and Creon, concerning their conception of *philia* [friendship]: while for Creon a friend is only the person who defends the *polis* and obeys to its law, Antigone's love and friendship for an enemy of the *polis* manifest her own alternative politics. Antigone's love for her brother is expressed through the proper burial rituals to honor his body which include her excessive, emotional lamentation for his death. Antigone's mourning in the period of 5th century where burial politics expresses the democratic ideal and rejects excessive lamentation as it originates from the Homeric era is a powerful manifestation of political resistance in itself.

Hence, in the first chapter I will draw on lament studies and theories to elaborate on burial politics as a shift from individuality and irreplaceability from the Homeric epic to its democratic re-conceptualization in the *polis* as it is expressed in the discourse of *epitaphios logos* (public funeral oration) and its reflection on the fifth-century Athenian tragedy. I will also draw on Nicole Loraux's historical analysis of the fifth-century city-state's structure, which is

based on a very significant dichotomy concerning the two opposite realms that constitute life in the city-state, the areas of the *oikos* and the *polis*. Based on this structure, I will discuss the private, peaceful and ritualistic aspect of life that is reduced to the boundaries of the *oikos* as opposed to the political, war-waging character of the *polis*. Thus, I interpret Antigone's violation of Creon's decree that banned Polyneices' burial, as the decisive moment when she interfered with the political realm of the *polis* by resisting the written laws of the state which reduce people's lives to political manipulation. I will further draw on Olga Taxidou's theories on mourning in tragedy, in order to explain how burial politics is consolidated in the fifth-century context as a way of sustaining the patriarchal *nomos* that reduces women within the boundaries of the private, non-public and non-political sphere of the *oikos* and as a medium of giving feedback to the democratic ideal of the times that promoted *isonomia* among the citizens and restricted the hegemony of aristocracy which was manifested in funerals. Hence, I will highlight the fact that it is a woman who, despite her delimited gender role, resists the political ethics of the times in the Sophoclean tragedy, as a medium of enhancing her political *logos* and making it sound louder and more dramatic. In order to discuss *Antigone* as a political actor in the ancient Greek tragedy, I will also draw on Bonie Honig's theorization on Antigone's lamentational politics as her agonistic means that is achieved through her "conspiracy with language", which allows her to resist exclusion policies under Creon's law.

The focus of my thesis will be the issue of pollution as it is reflected on both, the miasmatic image of Antigone, whose violation of the law entails the possibility of a threatening contagion for the *polis*, and Creon's self-contradictory politics of avoiding the threat of contamination through violent practices that further sustain and gender it via his death-doing policies. I will thus present the issue of contagious contamination as the key-point that foreshadows contemporary political settings, including states of exception and biopolitical regimes, where the image of the *miasma* triggers a negative protective politics that defines death practices and policies of exclusion imposed on minorities. Hence, revisiting the issue of contamination will allow me to discuss the twenty-first-century rewritings of *Antigone* through postmodern aesthetics as the sign of the singularity who claims the right for

lamentation for his/her beloved dead by interrupting the dominion of sovereign's power over the citizens' lives.

In the second chapter of my thesis I will draw on Roberto Esposito's recent theories on biopolitics, in order to further discuss the issue of contamination as it is integrated in states of exception and biopolitical regimes, a source that triggers exclusion policies bound with violent practices imposed on ethnic, racial and social groups—thus the image of the transgressive figure of Antigone, originating from the discourse of ancient Greek tragedy is recontextualized in Western modernity and allows a further discussion of the paradox of biopolitical practices, expressed in life-protective policies that both defend life and annihilate it. Hence, the antinomical relationship between policies of exclusion and moral ethics is the space between politics and the human being, namely the space that defines what constitutes and what negates polity and inclusion of the singularity within the ideological, ethical and social frames of political administration: this becomes the decisive point where life is enclosed within the borders of politics or politics per se is included within life and death decisions. Drawing on Esposito's theorization of biopolitics, I will discuss the weakness of conceiving or defining the term, due to the fact that *bios* and politics are two trajectories that are tightly linked, interwoven in an interdependent still antinomical relation: “How are we to comprehend a political government of life? In what sense does life govern politics or in what sense does politics govern life? Does it concern a governing of or *over* life?” (Esposito's emphasis; 15). Hence, the theories of Esposito on the political government of life, which is practiced in biopolitical policies, sheds light on my reading of *Antigone* as it is revisited in modern rewritings which present the weakness of politics to interfere with people's *bios*, without having already been framed within the ethics of life.

2. ANTIGONE'S ACT OF BURIAL: THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MOURNING UNDER CREON'S LAW

2.1. Introduction

To discuss Antigone's deed as an act of political articulation embedded in the social, cultural and political context of the 5th century B.C. that is depicted in Sophocles's tragedy, I elaborate on the historical setting which represents the democratic ethics of that period. Therefore, I draw on Loraux's historical analysis of the city-state in classical times, constituted by the rift between the private and the public spheres: the *oikos* and the *polis*.¹ This distinction will facilitate my interpretation of Antigone's burial act as a deed of resistance that engenders her political *logos* in a context of the democratic ideal, which stressed the importance of the citizens' sacrificial task to the *polis* and underestimated kinship values. The importance of the citizen proper of a democratic city-state as a friend of the *polis* was further enhanced when democracy was triumphantly restored in 401 and 403 B.C., after a period of tyranny in Athens. (Loraux, *The Divided City* 29). Hence, as Loraux argues, the city in classical times is a political context that wages wars, makes political decisions and reduces the lives of women, slaves and foreigners to silence (17). The time setting of Sophocles's play defines women's role confined within the boundaries of the *oikos* and women are viewed as the bearers of male offspring who will serve the city at war: therefore, women's excessive mourning is considered as an act of political intervention and is thus prohibited to be publicly practiced, since it is associated with expressions of individuality, such as *páthos* [passion], excessive *thrēnos* [mourning] and emotion that may threaten the stable foundations of political order in the democratic city. Consequently, by drawing on Taxidou's speculations of the public funeral oration as “ . . . spoken over the absent bodies of dead soldiers” which “ . . . reclaims those dead bodies through the body of the state” (9), I view burial politics in 5th century B.C. as the political mechanism of democracy of the time to visualize the integrity and the health of the *polis* through the citizens' sacrificial attitude at war. Therefore, dead bodies are not seen as lost lives but as the foundation upon which the healthy structure of the *polis* is based; mourning along with personal grief for the loss of lives is substituted with glory and *kleos aphthiton* which praises

the dead soldiers' bravery and self-sacrifice. Hence, dead warriors are viewed as constituent parts of the state's corpus and are treated as such; their sacrifice for the democratic state and their substitution with other members becomes a necessary process in 5th century city-states. Hence, burial politics and lamentation practices acquired great political significance as a mechanism of the internal dynamics of democracy to sustain the normative profile of the community and the citizen in the *polis*. Drawing on Taxidou's theorizing about mourning as it was represented in both discourses, tragedy and funeral orations, namely the aesthetic and the political, the importance of the banning of female lament in around the 6th century B.C. is a way of letting mourning be practiced publicly by men, moving thus from the private to the political realm. Thus, the realization of burial politics of the times functioned as a way of public praise towards the model of the citizen who complied with the democratic ethics by sacrificing his life at war. Funerary orations, in the form of the *epitaphios logos*, took the place of individual laments and exalted the replaceability of dead bodies, in order to construct the identity of the Athenian democratic citizens, whose sacrificial death to defend the *polis* signaled their inclusion to the grievable deceased, who were honored with public mourning and praise. The function of burial rituals in the 5th century, as the public expression of official mourning that placed the individuality of the deceased secondary to their civic sacrificial duty, emerged through historical changes from the end of Athenian imperialism after the Peloponnesian war in 405 B.C. to the civil war in 404 B.C., the tyrannical administration and finally the restoration of democracy in 403 B.C.² Hence, I read Antigone's burial act against these significant changes which mark a shift from tyranny to democracy; this shift was expressed through the amendments in legislation, concerning politics of burial, including Solon's ban of excessive lamentation.³

The laws that constitute the order of the *polis* as a male domain engendering war practices and performing policies of inclusion only towards the friends of the *polis* are described by Creon in his first public speech to the chorus: «καί μείζον' ὅστις ἀντί τῆς αὐτοῦ πατρὸς φίλον νομίζει, τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω» (Sophocles 182-83) [and him who rates a dear one higher than his native land, him I put nowhere] (21). Creon's concrete laws are the structure of political order in the democratic polis: «τοιιοῖσδ' ἐγὼ νόμουσι τήνδ' αὖξω πόλιν» (Sophocles 191), [These are the rules by which I make our city great] (21). In the light of interpreting Antigone as a transgressive figure who violates Creon's law by performing the prohibited burial act

on her brother Polyneices twice, I discuss her *agon* that claims justice as it resists Creon's conditional and concrete law, in order to defend her own unwritten, unconditional law: «οὐδέ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὥρμην τά σά κηρύγμαθ' ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῇ θεῶν νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητά γ' ἄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν» (Sophocles 453-55), [nor did I think your proclamations strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods] (45). Thus, she interrupts Creon's sovereignty that prescribes the prohibitive area of burial rituals towards traitors who he considers as enemies to the *polis*, by projecting the unwritten laws as the force that justifies her claim to bury her brother. Creon, in his attempt to explain that an enemy to his *polis* will continue to be such even after his death, namely that he will be excluded from proper burial rituals, says: «οὔτοι ποθ' οὐχθρός, οὐδ' ὅταν θάνῃ, φίλος» (Sophocles 523), [An enemy is never a friend, even when he is dead] (51). In her agonistic manifestation against Creon's decree, Antigone not only transgresses the limits of her gender but also her human identity to become a «δαιμόνιον τέρας» (Sophocles 376) [a godsent portent] (37), a woman who acts demonically by overcoming the political and patriarchal *nomos* [law] of her times to articulate her political *logos* and perform religious burial rituals on her brother's cadaver. Therefore Antigone is metaphorically described as a beast and not simply a woman who disobeys the law but a person who causes the awe and the wonder of a transgressive actor that implies the not yet of being a *politēs* [citizen] or a human. Antigone's *philia* [friendship] towards her brother extends beyond kinship and becomes her love for the radical other in the *polis*, namely a traitor and a political enemy: this is the point which constitutes the manifestation of an alternative politics by Antigone. Her friendship towards Polyneices is transgressive at its very root, since it signals her resistance to Creon's law, which exhausts the concept of friendship to its realization within the boundaries of the democratic ethics of the *polis*. Hence, she is viewed by Creon as a *miasma* in the *polis*, a virus which will spread contagion to the citizens; she is thus buried alive in a cave and she is reduced to livability instead of the full potential of life, given «φορβή» instead of «τροφή»⁴ (Gsoels- Lorensen 115; 127). Sophocles's tragedy offers, as Honig explains, “ . . . an insight into why a woman's mourning should be so socially disturbing” (96). Hence, drawing on Honig's analysis of *Antigone*, which elaborates on the play as it represents a series of conflicts originating from “ . . . honor-based versus law-based conceptions of justice, individuality and replaceability, aristocracy and democracy [and] Homeric honor

versus democratic unity and membership”, I read Antigone as the figure that defies Creon’s written laws that concern the reduction of burial politics to the service of the *polis* and the conception of *philia* as it defines the relationship between the *polis* and the citizens that defends and promotes military service and obedience to the written law; instead, she projects her own realization of friendship that transgresses the political ordering of life and she defends the oral laws that promote the social imaginary of the *polis*; she expresses thus her own alternative politics by breaking Creon’s decree. Through her transgressive act, Antigone reminds the audience the arbitrariness of the written law, since it is constantly exposed to changes that respond to the occasional needs of the *polis* and she questions the sovereign’s institutional right to suspend the law by imposing urgent decrees which have the force of written regulations. Antigone’s claim for justice, as her own *dikē* that prescribes her transgressive desire to bury her brother Polyneices, overcomes the legal boundaries that exhaust the concept of justice within the limits of the sovereign’s power, expressed in the written law. While for Creon justice is the law, Antigone’s transgressive act of burial promotes the concept of justice as an event contingent on time conditions. According to Honig, Creon’s response to Antigone’s act is considered by him as anarchism: “Creon treats her [Antigone] as a merely anarchic force” (106) but modern scholars revalue Antigone’s so called anarchism as a positive, inner, primordial force that claims *dikē* which comes before the written, conventional and mutable legislation. According to Stathis Gourgouris, who elaborates on the issue of law as it is performed dramatically in ancient Greek tragedy projecting thus its agonistic perception “ . . . as a dramatic problem whose solution is possible only in its indefinite (re)staging” (125), *nomos* or the law in the Athenian *polis* bears a plethora of significations ranging from the religious to the historical, the social and the political as they are expressed by different opposing protagonists in ancient Greek tragedy. Gourgouris further elaborates on the intelligibility of unwritten laws in ancient Greek tragedy as the ground of ethics that is contingent upon a mythological project and responds to modernity’s need for its own mythmaking (125). Scholars such as Cornelios Castoriadis and Gourgouris talk about the law “ . . . as one of society’s foundational poetic acts, an act of socially imaginary creation” (Gourgouris 126) and Gourgouris sees tragedy as the fertile ground for the “unique creation of a specific social-imaginary” (126), not only because of the historical significance of the specific democratic *polis* but also because of the poetics of

tragedy, which allows “the imaginary of the polis in the theater for collective interrogation” (126). Hence Antigone, through her conflict with Creon who represents the written, unquestionable law in the *polis*, manifests her *agon* to defend justice through the ethics embedded in her own unwritten law; this struggle constitutes tragedy as a context open to criticism. Creon’s decree is thus put under critique, since its notion is arbitrary; the sovereign’s decree and its legitimate enforcement in the *polis* manifests not only the accessibility that the governor has to the written laws, but also his unquestionable right to suspend it, in case of emergency or necessity. Concerning the validity of the written law and the sovereign’s legitimate right of suspending it in case of emergence, one is led to pose questions relevant to the above issues: “What is ultimately the place of the sovereign concerning the applicability of the law and its suspension?” Giorgio Agamben defines sovereignty as a paradox which “... consists in the fact” that “the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order” (15). This ambivalence concerning the location of the sovereign inside or outside the law, is reflected on the sovereign’s power to suspend the validity of a law or proclaim a state of exception in order to sustain his political power or to protect the citizens at a given time of danger when at the same time, he rejects his locus outside the law, since he insists that nothing or nobody can be outside the law. Agamben further explains the exceptional character of law since its existence and applicability is contingent on the inclusion of an exclusion; however antinomical and contradictory this correlation may sound, it is still the basis upon which the written law is relied to defend itself as the official, legislative rule of the state which is constructed out of the exclusion of illegal constituencies. Agamben further explains the law’s contingency on the exception that justifies its existence as the obligatory rule in the state: “Law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself *through the inclusive exclusion of the exceptio*: it nourishes itself on this exception and is a dead letter without it. In this sense, the law truly ‘has no existence in itself, but rather has its being in the very life of men’” (emphasis added; 21). However, before the state’s law is documented in written form, its existence is questioned; thus the written documentation of the law becomes the proof of its validity as it is opposed to its imaginary vision articulated in the ambiguous unwritten law. Thus, because written laws are always exposed to changes according to the state’s needs and the sovereign’s occasional aspirations, written laws are ambiguous and unstable as they are adjusted to the *prattein/poiein* of the members of the polis. Gourgouris further

explains the exposure of law to indefinite changes according to the needs of the state and defines the character of the law which is neither eternal nor systematic but constitutively differential and agonistic: “. . . the question of law’s emergence is always open since its authorization is constantly renewed by the *poiein/prattein* of the citizens” (126).

In her agonistic attitude Antigone transgresses the ephemeral value of the written law and projects the eternal ethics of life as it emerges through oral laws and ritualistic burial practices on the dead. By breaking Creon’s decree she not only questions the validity of written laws but she also constructs her own alternative politics of friendship towards an enemy of the polis, a fact that further supports the political significance of honoring the body of her brother with proper burial rituals. Therefore, Antigone’s miasmatic figure in the play implies a threat to the *polis* and her violation of Creon’s decree signals her dramatic and loud political articulation via the performance of a prohibited burial ceremony which she defends in her dirge as her own act of claiming justice against the tyrannical decree of Creon. However, her dirge is the final act of transgression when she laments herself, in a manifestation of a conflict between her words and her acts: her dirge becomes the rift between her verbal and performative expression. The above speculation leads to the *aporia* of what is intended and what is performed as a meaning in Sophocles’s play.

In order to further discuss Antigone’s *logos* first as it is juxtaposed with her actions in the play and second as it is opposed to Creon’s function of speech, it is imperative that I distinguish three types of discourse in her dirge: first she uses language as a way of lamentation, second as a political speech and finally as her *phonē* or *logos* [reason] in order to justify her action as a political one. From another perspective, *logos*, in the case of Creon, works on a collective, communal level which validates his authority as a political ruler and his objective to define his *polis* and the law.

2.2 Burial politics: from the heroic code of Homeric epics to the democratic polis in tragedy

Antigone’s burial engenders her political articulation in a twofold way: first the prohibited burial act speaks for itself as a political manifestation that resists

Creon's concrete law, and second her dirge towards the chorus and the citizens of Thebes projects her deed as a claim of justice, in defense of unwritten laws – this is Antigone's chance to give her first political speech during which she mimics the rhetoric of politicians in the *agora*. Her speech is a manifestation of her political resistance against the structure of the *polis* that includes cultural conventions and social issues of the times. She projects the value of the unwritten laws that do not belong to the written legal system of the *polis* which represents the power of the sovereign. Moreover, the way she addresses the citizens of Thebes and her argumentation which justify and support her transgressive deed resemble the rhetoric of politicians in courts.

The democratic reality of the city emerges through the interrelation of democracy with the politics of burial, which transforms the individual and aristocratic values of the Homeric age. Thus, I examine this shift in burial practices from the Homeric to the classical eras, as it is contextualized through the passage from epic to tragedy, two genres which reflect different political ideologies and attitudes towards lamentation: this examination facilitates my reading of Sophocles's *Antigone* as a tragedy which filters burial politics via aesthetic means and consolidates its political meaning through Antigone's violation of Creon's ban, an act that interrupts the validity and weight of written, conditional law when it is juxtaposed with the significance of the unconditional, oral laws that determine people's lives.

I discuss burial politics in 5th century as it emerged through its conceptualization in the Homeric epic, namely as a shift from the celebration of bravery (the warriors' so called *kleos aphthiton*)⁵ to the contextualization of burial rituals within the discourse of democratic ideology, in the form of public grief that exalts the individual's sacrifice in favor of the common good of the *polis*. Therefore, Homeric lamentation stresses the individuality and irreplaceability of the deceased hero, as opposed to the democratic ideology of the polis in the 5th century B.C. depicted in tragedy, which eulogizes the soldiers as the real *andres* [men], whose sacrificial duty for the common good is highly praised. Hence, Creon, who "conspires with the new democracy and adopts many of its causes as his own" (Honig 95), represents the new political reality in Thebes via his ban on lamentation and his emphasis on the threats that individuality represents for democracy. Furthermore, the shift in burial politics and the prohibition of excessive mourning constituted a social renegotiation of the democratic polis with the hegemony of aristocracy which

diminished the social power of aristocratic clans as a manifestation of wealth and glamour at funerals (Taxidou 176; Garland 21; Stears 143). Thus, burial rituals as a performance of excessive lament for the dead, with “ . . . [e]xtravagant, out of control behavior, including loud wailing, tearing the hair, and lacerating one’s face” (Holst-Warhaft 113-14), was prohibited by Solon’s laws, since it seemed alien to democratic ideology whose main ideal was *isomonia*, [equality] among its citizens; excessive mourning threatened the democratic principle of *isonomia*, since it was an expression of rich, aristocratic classes of the time..

Solon’s prohibiting laws on burial rituals restricted women and their active involvement in funerals as a disorder of the patriarchal rules in the *polis*, which was politically translated as a threat to democracy, whose structure was based on a gendered division between the *oikos* and the *polis*. Thus, female lamentation was rejected and punished as an indication of “unmanly behavior” (Holst-Warhaft 83), which threatened the democratic ideals. Additionally, Gail Holst-Warhaft further problematizes Solon’s ban and the consequent punishment of those who disobeyed the law and carried “their mourning to extravagant lengths” (83) and he poses a series of interesting questions about the intelligibility and the purposes of such a law:

What lies behind this strange law that lumps together women’s festivals and funerals, and censors female lament in classical Athens? Is it unique to Athens? Is there any basis for associating women mourners with wild or disorderly behavior? Could such behavior threaten, in any way, the society at large? (83)

The *polis* as a “political and social unit”, according to Holst-Warhaft, was “ . . . always an uneasy alliance of family groups, united for the purposes of waging war” (85). Hence, although women fulfilled their role within the *polis* as the necessary bodies for the reproduction of male offspring (as future warriors), they were still a possible threat to the democratic order as performers of excessive «γόος», [lament] for the dead warriors: expressions of women’s discursive acts that constituted their verbal expression in funerals, symptomatically revealed in acts of excessive mourning, defended individuality and kinship that were incompatible with the war discourse of the city-state, which defied the individual body in defense of the collective body of the state. Loraux’s reference to the *pathos* [passion] that female (usually maternal) lamentation entails stresses its threatening effects on the political ethics of the city-state, since the emotional excessiveness and individual grief for the irreplaceability of

the deceased stirs the democratic ideal of the *polis* and brings disorder among its citizens (*Mothers in Mourning* 9). Thus, already excluded in advance in the patriarchal societal structure of the city-state, women had to be further reduced to the boundaries of the *oikos*, by being deprived of the privilege of mourning, which acquired a civic function and a public form in the 5th-century democratic context.

Loraux's distinction between the two opposite constituent parts of life in the city-state (*oikos* and *polis*) (*The Divided City* 16-17) sheds light on the catachresis of politics (*polis*-men) when it intrudes private life (*oikos*-women), with the legitimate restriction of excessive female mourning and the reduction of lamentation to public praise (*epitaphios logos*). Hence, it becomes clear why the state excluded women from public burial rituals as the *ekphorā* and reduced their physical presence to the *prosthesis*⁶, "enclosed within the house, where women hold their natural place" (Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* 25).

The new image of the democratic *polis* was depicted through the introduction of a public funeral oration, the *epitaphios logos*, which replaced the private, female mourning with civic lamentation, stripping thus mourning of its privacy and projecting it as an issue of public/political interest. Addressing the parents of the deceased, Pericles highlights the importance of the citizens' defense of the *polis*, as worthy members of the whole, whose sacrifice for the common good should be publicly praised by the state as such and who should be replaced with other children, stressing the importance of the civic interest (*polis*) as opposed to the private *chora* of mourning (*oikos*):

All the same, those of you who are of the right age must bear up and take comfort in the thought of having more children. In your own homes these new children will prevent you from brooding over those who are no more, and they will be a help to the city, too, both in filling the empty places, and in assuring her security. For it is impossible for a man to put forward fair and honest views about our affairs if he has not, like everyone else, children whose lives may be at stake. (emphasis added; Thucydides 143-51)

Hence, the shift from the Homeric/heroic lamentation to public funeral orations signals the establishment of the democratic *polis* which was contextualized within the tragic form, in the discourse of state public orations that stressed the political and social significance of the body in its sacrificial manifestation to defend

the city-state. Additionally, the circumscription of mourning practices further limited the public role of women in the *polis*.

2.3 Antigone as a political actor in Creon's *polis*

This thesis proposes to interpret Antigone's burial act by drawing on her political action⁷ and her *logos* which comes out of her transgressive behavior of a woman who violates the conventional norms of her era and she trespasses the political realm to claim justice, which is relevant to the ethics of unconditional laws concerning burial rituals within the *polis*. My discussion of the role of Antigone's sex, which is of great significance in the play, addresses the moment when Antigone transgresses herself in order to articulate her powerful political *logos* in a prohibitive context which concerns the interference of political decision with life and death issues in the form of the written laws. Hence, Antigone displaces rather than affirms her gender role in the play by violating the prohibitive field of burial politics that constitutes exclusion policies towards the Other. Furthermore, in a fusion of cultural ethics with politics, the issue of pollution spreading throughout the play, engenders both Antigone's ontology as the dirty offspring of an incestuous marriage and Creon's self-contradictory politics: Creon remains blind to his own production of contamination by exposing a cadaver to rot in the *polis* and by prohibiting Antigone to purify herself from the death of her brother Polyneices through the proper burial rituals that comply with the cultural ethics of their era.

2.3.1 Contamination and Creon's self-contradictory politics

I draw on Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen's argument that "Creon's construction of the cave-space has far less to do with an attempted execution *than with a legal and political figuration of the conditions underpinning sovereignty's "blameless" (ἀγνός) rupturing of a person's juridico-political existence*" (emphasis added; 129), in order to elaborate on the issue of contamination as it is represented in the play in a polysemous manner, which bears different connotations of interpretation. Moreover, Creon's attempt to rest his sovereignty on the issue of blamelessness collides with his repetitive attempts to do so through a polluting death-doing mechanism that further

produces and spreads contagious contamination throughout the *polis*. When he decides to condemn Antigone to a living death inside a cave, he justifies his act saying: “I shall take her to where there is a path no man treads, and hide her, *still living*, in a rocky cavern, putting out enough food *to escape pollution, so that the whole city may avoid contagion*” (emphasis added; 77). Creon’s endeavors to avoid pollution: «ὅπως μῖασμα πᾶσ’ ὑπεκφύγῃ πόλις» (Sophocles 776); nevertheless, his actions contradict his initial purpose, since they further amplify the fearful contagion all over the city. Thus, the term “contamination” not only refers to the future cadaver of Antigone, nor to Creon’s attempt to avoid a bloody death,⁸ but also to the broader sense of the phrase “contagion” [miasma], as Antigone’s body is carrying both the dirt of her incestuous kin and the *miasma* of a person who has not performed the conventional burial rituals that enable her to purify herself from her brother’s death. According to the ritualistic conventions of the times, the relatives of the dead should go through a period of purification rituals, including the proper burial practices on the dead body, in order to be freed from the infectious *miasma* [dirt] that death bears within the family. As we already know, Antigone is not given the opportunity to be purified after the death of her brother Polyneices, because of Creon’s banning decree which is imposed on her.

Although Mark Griffith explains that Creon wants to avoid shedding blood by killing Antigone with a sword (253), the word “pollution” here carries deeper connotations, since it is linked with the figure of Antigone as a bearer of a double *miasma*: first because of her incestuous past and second because she is prohibited by Creon to go through purification rituals which will allow her to escape from the *miasma* of Polyneices’ death. The relatives of the dead were considered “ritually polluted” before the purification rituals had ended: “...those near the dead, both physically and by blood or marital ties, were thought to be ritually polluted” (Stears 143). Creon not only considers Antigone dirty due to her incestuous kin, but also forbids her to purify herself from the death of Polyneices, by giving him a proper burial: this is a twofold type of pollution imposed on Antigone. The most striking thing however is that Creon falls into political inaccuracies and strategic contradictions which blur his intentions as a democratic ruler of the *polis*, an *aporia* a governor declares publicly that he wants to protect his city from contagion when at the same time he himself produces pollution by intentionally exposing the unburied cadaver of Polyneices to rot within the borders of the *polis*--a political action which is

viewed by scholars as errant.⁹ Judith Fletcher, commenting on Creon's politics claims that "...the conclusion has to be that Creon's word is not stable, or to use Antigone's term, *asphalē*, if it can be subjected to modifications or amendments" (180). As Griffith comments, "Kreon's long opening *rhēsis* sounds confident and assertive" (135). However, he repeatedly falls into verbal contradictions in his speech, since he blurs the links between the democracy that he fervently advocates and his self-depiction as an absolute, monarchic ruler. Hence, while his speech is mimicking the Periclean political *logos*¹⁰ (Honig 99) and "...his language is typical of contemporary Athenian political debate" (Griffith 155), the use of terms such as "throne" or "power" (166, 173), sounds contradictory to his previous phrases which entail familiar and safe democratic connotations. Additionally, Creon is blind to the real cause of pollution. According to Tina Chanter, "Creon sees bribery and corruption where there is none, yet, like Oedipus, fails to see, until the final moment, that he himself is the cause of the pollution that infects Thebes" (21). Teiresias believes that the city is polluted and cursed, because of Creon's acts: "*καί ταῦτα τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενός νοσεῖ πόλις*" (Sophocles 1015), ["And it is your will that has put this plague upon the city"] (97). Creon's failure to see the tragic consequences of his acts, which are incompatible with both the written and unwritten laws, is parallel with Oedipus' blindness to see the curse of his incestuous acts. The exposed cadaver of Polyneices, which is prey to the wild animals, according to Teiresias, is a sign of pollution haunting the *polis*, since "...the cries screamed out by the birds no longer give me signs...for they have eaten fat compounded with a dead man's blood" (97). Creon refuses "...the possibility that, left to rot, Polynices' corpse will pollute the city, and in so doing, invoke the wrath of other cities, inciting precisely the kind of political instability Creon seeks to foreclose" (Chanter 40).

Discussing the ritualistic, anthropological aspect of burial practices, Karen Stears analyzes three different rituals in people's lives which are linked with a common element, that of the *miasma*, the infection that people should overcome through specific purification procedures: giving birth, wedding and death. Childbirth was an incident which provoked *miasma* to the birth-giving woman who was considered for some time both polluted and polluting (an analogous belief in modern Greece too, where the mother should wait for forty days after the birth, in order to be purified again). Therefore, active participation in burial rituals was assigned to women who were already polluted with the act of giving birth (Stears 143). Stears further

explains that “Like death, childbirth incurred a period of pollution for the household concerned and was followed by a series of purificatory rites of the fifth, tenth, and fortieth days” (sic) (144). Most striking though is the parallel that is drawn between the traditional wedding and burial rituals of the time.¹¹ The dead person and the bride are equally treated as the passive recipients of communal rites offered by a group of people who prepare them for the ceremony. Thus,

The bride is dressed within the interior of the *oikos*, surrounded by women. She is washed, anointed, bejeweled, and decked in fine clothes, *a passive object just like the corpse*. Then *she makes the journey to her new home*, often on a cart or chariot, accompanied by men and women and the sound of flutes. (emphasis added; Stears 145)

Antigone’s famous dirge when she is led to her cave-tomb by the guards illuminates how her laments reflect the burial rituals repeating a catachrestic wedding imagery: “O tomb, O bridal chamber, O deep-dug home, to be guarded for ever...” (87). Antigone compares the tomb with her bridal chamber, her «*νυμφεῖον*», where she, as a deadly bride is led for the eternity. She is still alive, though. Antigone imaginatively projects her future, in order to be able to lament it. It seems that Sophocles was fully aware of the burial practices of his era and he draws on them in order to make a parallel between wedding and death rituals via the common element of *miasma*, in order to reach the climax of his tragedy, when Antigone is led to her wedding tomb. He tragically transforms the happiness that a wedding event should provoke to a girl, into the morbid and macabre message of death, provoking the necessary compassion and pity of the audience for Antigone’s dark fate.

Hence, Antigone’s dirt symbolizes her identity, inscribed by an incestuous past and her violation of the law, which results in her deportation out of Thebes as a transgressor by Creon, whose errant politics is reflected in his contradictory attitude towards pollution, since in his attempt to protect his *polis* from it, he further produces it and amplifies it, without being able to recognize that the main source of *miasma* is he himself. Thus, in the following chapter I discuss how Antigone’s figure is reappropriated via twenty-first-century postmodern aesthetics in literature to represent the excluded other who endeavors to bridge the gap between politics and *bios* and opposes the death policies imposed on minorities as a mechanism to sustain the immunity of the state. The crystallized act of burial becomes the simulacrum of

minorities' political resistance, since their political articulation within prohibitive contexts is censored, limited or banned; thus, their mental, ethical and political survival in oppressive regimes is contingent on their transgressive attitude towards sovereignty, namely their performance of banned burial rituals on bodies which are excluded from lamentation by the law of the state. Their transgressive behavior determines and develops their political dissidence in contexts of modern biopolitics which constitutes a dichotomy between grievable and non-grievable bodies and defines lamentation only when it is limited to the political ordering of life. Hence, I move to discuss twenty-first rewritings of *Antigone* as they revisit burial politics in modern political contexts which interfere with people's bare life through exclusion practices, as a medium of facilitating the sovereign's global superpower over weaker nations. In the following chapter I draw on Esposito's recent theories on biopolitics in order to read *Antigone*'s re-enactments as acts of resistance to the political ordering of life and death.

Notes

¹ See Loraux (2006).

² The defeat of the Athenian armies signals the defeat of Athenian imperialism in 405 B.C., when “ . . . the Long Walls of Athens are destroyed to the music of Spartan flutes” (Loraux, *The Divided City* 29). In the year 403 and then in 401 B.C. we finally have the restoration of democracy in Athens, after the oligarchic administration of the Thirty Tyrants, who took control of the city as a result of a civil war (Loraux, *The Divided City* 29).

³ See Holst Warhaft (1992): “Solon had passed a law in Athens that ‘regulated women’s appearances in public, as well as their festivals, and put an end to wild and disorderly behavior . . . he abolished the practice of lacerating the flesh at funerals, of reciting set dirges, and of lamenting a person at the funeral ceremonies of another’. Those who disobeyed Solon’s laws were to be punished by the board of censors for women for weak and unmanly behavior, and for carrying their mourning to extravagant lengths (qtd. in Warhaft 82).

⁴ See Gsoels-Lorensen who elaborates on this issue: “when Creon leaves her ‘food as religious law prescribes’ (775), the Greek word, as O’Brien points out, is φορβή instead of τροφή: ‘animal fodder’ or ‘forage’ instead of ‘nourishment’ or ‘food’ (1978.92). The difference is instructive: φορβή keeps you alive, but not much more; it is nourishment to be consumed, eaten so as not to die (cf. the verb φέρβω, from which it derives)” (127).

⁵ Perkell refers to the “heroic code” of epics, and specifically of the *Iliad*, which “locates life’s highest value in heroic achievement . . . on the battlefield” (99).

⁶ The *próthesis* referred to the laying down of the corpse: it was reduced to the *oikos* and it was mainly performed by women mourners. The dead body “was washed and then wrapped in a number of layers of fabric, including a shroud and a top cover. On the bier it was laid out with the feet toward the door and a pillow under the head. It was then decked with herbs and sometimes with garlands and occasionally jewelry . . . A jar of oil was placed by the bier, and a pot of water was set by the street door of the house, measures effecting the containment and purification of ritual pollution (miasma)” (Stears 139-42). The *ekphorá*, which was carried out on the third day after

death, was the ceremony relevant to the procession to the grave and the visit to the tomb (Stears 139-40). The *ekphorá* was a public, open-air ceremony, as opposed to the *próthesis* which was rather a private ritual, practiced by women in the house.

⁷ See Honig who argues that “Approaching the play in this context [of burial politics] we find not a mortalist humanist Antigone but rather a partisan political actor” (sic) (95).

⁸ Griffith mentions that “For unmarried women in particular, immurement has often seemed, esp. appropriate, since it sheds no blood and leaves their bodies still hidden (cf. 774 κρύψω), closed-off and unviolated” (sic) (253).

⁹ Honig argues that “Creon cannot enforce his decrees and in time comes to see them as in error. These acts, which Creon will seek too late to undo, will be his undoing” (87). Judith Fletcher also argues that “Once her [Antigone’s] transgression has been revealed, he [Creon] sets the punishment of entombment for Antigone to avoid polluting the city with her death (773-80), a rather curious concession from a man willing to leave a corpse to rot in the sun” (180).

¹⁰ Honig mentions that “Creon begins in statesmanlike voice (his first “ship of state” speech is Periclean)” (99). Griffith refers to specific words uttered by Creon, which manifest the Athenian political image of the *polis*, e.g. *ἀρχαί* (177), *νόμοι* (177, 191), *ἐνθύναι* (178) and the frequent use of the term *πόλις* all over his speech (155).

¹¹ Griffith further elaborates on the parallelism between wedding and funeral ceremonies in ancient Greece, arguing that, “Greek marriage and funeral ceremonies had many similarities, esp. from the bride’s perspective (torches, veils, the escorted journey to a new and unfamiliar ‘home’, fear and lamentation at loss of loved ones, delivery into the hands of a new ‘owner’, etc.)” (sic) (267).

3. POSTMODERN REWRITINGS OF *ANTIGONE*

3.1 Introduction

In the second part of my thesis I discuss how contemporary political contexts read *Antigone* in twenty-first-century postmodern rewritings, as a recurrent sign in states of exception and biopolitical regimes which repeatedly questions the rationale of these regimes that (re)activates immunization policies; the synecdoches of such policies are the political ordering of life, exclusion policies of minorities and death-decision practices. In this section I focus on dirt and contamination as the core of modern biopolitical thought which locates the stigma of the Other in his/her different ethnicity, race or gender identity and thus it conceives this otherness as the external contagious virus which threatens the communal state corpus. Hence, this part discusses how contemporary postmodern rewritings of *Antigone*, including Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (2012) and Mac Wellman's *Antigone* (2002) reimagine Antigone as the other body that implies a possibility of threatening contagion within the frames of totalitarian thought and manifests how the death of such a minority inscribes the life of the citizen proper in biopolitical practices. In order to discuss and interpret the issue of evaluating life through selective means relevant to political decision, I will draw on Esposito's latest theory on biopolitics that inscribes life as it is permanently exposed to power and its binding violence. Esposito assumes the binding still antinomical relationship between politics and *bios*, arguing that life has a "constitutively political dimension" (9) and that since politics has no other objective than maintain and expand life, two ultimate modes of reference to *bios* emerge out of the relationship of the two which forms the force that both attracts these two realms when at the same time it separates them.

The use of postmodern aesthetics in contemporary rewritings of Sophocles's text functions as a way of facilitating the modern authors' transition from the ancient Greek tragedy and its historical, political and cultural background to the re-signification of *Antigone* in the modern political environment which responds to the states of exception and the modern biopolitical thought and practices. The focus of modern approaches to the ancient text is on relocating the sign of Antigone in modernity: through the economy of Différance, which allows time and space

conditions to match a sign from the past to an interpretive mode of the present. Hence, Antigone remains the same familiar figure originating from Sophocles's text but the connotations and significations that she bears are transformed due to time and space variables. In both modern texts that I discuss (Carson's *Antigonick* and Wellman's *Antigone*), the introduction of external characters is of great significance for the interpretive dynamics of postmodern aesthetics, since they aim at introducing the concepts of time and temporization as they are actively engaged with deferring the meaning of Antigone and her act in modernity. Moreover, the poetic language, the fragmentary presentation of scenes and the loose plot in Wellman's text contribute to the absurdity of modern politics in states of exception as well as the conception of Antigone's burial act as a recurrent motif of political dissidence that goes back in time, manifest the current political reality and stands as a proleptic sign for similar situations in the future. Antigone thus is approached by Wellman as the medium that endeavors to bring some kind of order in the contemporary "broken world", as Wellman describes it, a disorganized reality depicted in a dystopian way; the world of today is presented by Wellman in a decadence of ethical, political and cultural values and it is governed by an odd deity of evil, \exists the Shriek Operator, who is satisfied with corruption, death, contamination and destruction.

Similarly, Carson in *Antigonick* introduces the external character of Nick of Time, who, despite his absence and his silence, he is depicted as the postmodern aesthetic tool that represents temporization as a condition that defers meaning and facilitates a postmodern reading of *Antigone* through the economy of the Derridean Différance. *Antigonick* by Carson is a mockery of the past approaches of Sophocles's Antigone and Creon is depicted as the modern caricature of the political leader in states of exception, an absolute and inflexible sovereign who collects the full powers of administration in his hands so that he can practice violence on the citizens through an ongoing process of death. In order to further analyze the two texts I draw on Donald Pease's theory on the states of exception and on Roberto Esposito's analysis on biopolitics in modern political contexts. The intervention of biopolitical practices sheds light on the interdependency of people's lives and politics: *bios* and politics are thus structurally interwoven in an interdependent but still antagonistic and antinomical manner, constituting a domain, " . . . only at the price of a certain violence that subjects one to the domination of the other, conditioning their superimposition to an obligatory positioning-under [*sotto-posizione*]" (Esposito 32).

Hence, I will elaborate on how postmodern rewritings of *Antigone* recontextualize the figure of the excluded singularity by rewriting the trope of *miasma* and how this is read under time and space conditions in the modern contexts of exceptional politics and biopolitical regimes. In this light, biopolitical intervention in life draws on its urgent need of practicing purification processes, even at the cost of adopting mass killing practices imposed on the contaminated parts of the body of the state. The urgency for the aforementioned purification processes reached a climax during the period of WWII, in Nazi's totalitarian thought and its ensuing violence, as it was practiced in extermination policies against the Jews in concentration camps, where the German body was treated as having to go through a healing process. My discussion of Nazi's biopolitics sheds light on the definition of the state as the sovereignty which needs to be pure and has to be protected from the threat of the contagious *miasma*, namely the external virus reflected on a different ethnic group; thus, the Jews were for the Nazis the contaminated minority that had to be deported, bestialized, dispossessed or killed.

Thus, I bring together two texts that represent twenty-first-century Western rewritings of *Antigone* and draw on the transgressive, miasmatic figure that practices burial rituals in prohibitive contexts, in order to articulate political *logos* that defends honor-based or moral ethics and opposes the written laws that constitute life and death as they are reduced to political decision-making. I will discuss *Antigone* as it is recotextualized in Carson's and Wellman's texts, where exclusion and war policies are practiced by the state of exception to sustain and consolidate the profile of a global superpower, which is instilled in citizens' consciousness as hidden behind a fantasized national ideal. I will thus elaborate on one of the key-points of this thesis, which is the self-contradictory aspect of politics when it aims at negative protective practices¹, to avoid contamination through processes that further produce it in a never-ending vicious cycle.

Wellman's rewriting of *Antigone* as a postmodern reappropriation of the ancient Greek tragedy, which depicts the state of exception and the absurdity of its corrupting practices in an elliptical, poetic language, by oscillating "between the play's past and the future" (Fleischer 513). The play does not have a storyline and the scenes are scattered throughout the text without being linked with a chronological order or following the skeleton of a main plot; in this way, Wellman uses postmodern aesthetics by presenting specific of the Sophoclean tragedy as fragments which do not

necessarily follow a chronological or a logical order. The effect of this writing contributes to Wellman's ultimate purpose to present a world of modern times that lacks order and logic. Moreover, having a loose plot, Wellman's rewriting of *Antigone* focuses mostly on concepts rather than acts or events. The play is set in a fragmentary manner, depicting a place full of holes and scenes that are interspersed with the playwright's instructions, to the extent that it is difficult for the reader or the audience to discern which character speaks each time. The play opens with the scene of a radio show from Uzbekistan, where a cosmic DJ is enthroned at a table surrounded by weird props. The main characters of the play are the Three Fates who "enacted the story that was to become that of ANTIGONE" (Wellman 63) and who finally become the Three Graces that whisper the story of *Antigone* in Sophocles-puppet's ear and ! ∅ the Shriek Operator. His introduction in the play is of great significance for the interpretation of the play, since he represents the incomprehensible and the uncanny deity who is satisfied with corruption and death. Thus, *Antigone* in Wellman's rewriting is further reconstructed as a question relevant to the prescribed political scenarios that move in a circular, atemporal and repetitive motion from the archaic to the classic era and the modern times: this motion describes a lacuna in political thought as it results in the annihilation of ethics that concern ontological issues of the human being, a vacuum in the process of the political ordering of life, which Wellman depicts as a hole among many in this world that constitutes the dialectic between politics and life as appearing " . . . to be opposed in a long-lasting struggle, the stakes of which are for each the appropriation and the domination of the other" (Esposito 32). Thus, *bios* and politics are tightly connected as two colliding constituents interrelated with a binding violence that cannot exclusively signify either their separation or their unison. Wellman displays the image of dirt and corruption in a modern political context of exceptional politics which is depicted as a dystopia, a *topos* of continuous contagion, governed by a deity who is satisfied with dirt, slaughter and the stench of death. In the analysis of Wellman's play in a separate section I will have the chance to further analyze how the writer discusses exceptionalism and biopolitics as they emerge through his postmodern rewriting of Sophocles's *Antigone*.

In Carson's text, which is a postmodern translation of Sophocles's *Antigone*, the plot follows chronologically the events as they were presented in the ancient Greek tragedy, but the author's postmodern invention includes the representation of

the receptions that *Antigone* has had by a plethora of scholars, thinkers, playwrights and philosophers throughout the years, integrated in the dialogues of the characters. Carson's postmodern touch on the play also includes the introduction of a new character in her rewriting, the Nick of Time who represents temporization or the fluidity of time as it emerges in various settings: a coincidental factor which determines the meaning of a sign; thus The Nick of Time is a postmodern symbol of Derrida's deconstruction theory, which focuses on the concept of Difference that allows deferring the meaning of the sign under the conditions of temporization and space. Furthermore, the postmodern invention of The Nick of Time is an external interruption which comes just in time, in a political moment that addresses the peak of globalization, to remind us the death of autoimmunity in states of exception. Carson rewrites the sign of Antigone as it foreshadows political *logos* of minorities in contemporary political contexts: she thus reads *Antigone* as the political articulation of the excluded singularity who implies a possible threat to contaminate the political structure of the state through her resistance to exceptional politics. *Antigonick* is a parody of the errant politics of Creon, who projects himself as a global political figure that misuses political power, confuses it with godlike hegemony and blurs the limits between fantasy and reality, death and life and laws and decrees. Creon in Carson's text also represents the almighty planetary governor who instills his national fantasy objectives of the ideal state to the citizens, implying the exceptional politics of Bush's administration after the 9/11 terrorist attack in the U.S.A.

Finally, I read Carson's and Wellman's texts, as well their connection with modern re-enactments of the Antigonean deed both in contemporary Western political contexts and their reflections on literature and art, as postmodern approaches of *Antigone*, which focus on the unintelligibility of a "political government of life" (Esposito 15) in modern exceptional and biopolitical regimes whose polemics against dirt and contamination reveals an unprecedented manifestation of dehumanizing and killing practices which further genders and sustains corruption and dirt. The texts I will be discussing share the manifestation of a prohibited burial act by the excluded singularity under conditions of impossibility, a deed that questions the authority and the orthodoxy of biopolitical practices, as they are bound with a violent interference with life via death-decisions. However, although biopolitics aims at the reduction of minorities to non-livability or death, the very act of the excluded singularity to grant

proper burial rituals to the non-grievable minorities constitutes the *agon* of resisting death and further sustaining life via a claim of proper burial acts.

The crystallized prohibited act of the singularity as a manifestation of political articulation which resists the interference of politics with people's life and ethics is the transgressive act that constitutes the reduction of that singularity to the unacceptable and his/her exclusion from the boundaries of citizenship. My thesis will further expand the reading of *Antigone* in contemporary Western rewritings of the twenty-first-century, as the interval or the space that the excluded singularity claims between *bios* and politics by interfering in the prohibitive area of burial politics to resist the rationale of biopolitical thought and exceptional politics that set "life against life, or, more severely, the life of one against the nonlife of others" (Esposito 98).

3.2 Mac Wellman's *Antigone*

3.2.1 Wellman's postmodern aesthetics in rewriting Antigone

Wellman postmodernist aesthetics facilitate his adaptation of the ancient Greek tragedy of *Antigone* in the twenty-first-century. He is influenced by the group of language poets² who are against the fixed form of language in literature that is relevant to a limited system of matching definitions and meanings and they offer the readers an interactive way of reception, facilitating thus their active involvement in the text. He advocates the flow of language that is free from the fixity of meaning.³ Wellman sees language not as the binding force which orients the reader or the audience towards a specific interpretation but as a liberating medium which allows them to interactively interfere with the literary text, through the dynamics of deconstructive verbal expression that uses language fragmentarily and facilitates the location of the sign within a context of time and space variables. Thus, his polemics against the fixation and stability of language is projected in his plays via his poetic language and his deconstructionist practice.⁴ By keeping the audience between the meaning and the absurd, Wellman, following the language poets, endeavors to

prolong the effect of stimuli on the audience's reception of words throughout the performance. Keith Appler explains that the border between meaning and nonsense introduced by Language poets is "...the border between meaning, formed as a restrictive economy and lost in an instant, and the general economy of language" (71). In Wellman's play the language frees itself from grammar and structure and reveals its potential to treat the reader and the audience not as passive recipients but as the contributors to a second, parallel writing of the text. Wellman's deconstructive writing manifests the use of elliptical language through uncompleted sentences, like "She did it. Creon, she. Did what? You know" (sic) (Wellman 64) or the use of words that although phonetically similar they bear antithetical meanings, such as when Eurydice refers to Antigone's eyes, saying " . . . with her violet eyes. Violent eye" (Wellman 67) or the connection of antonymous pairs of words to convey a meaning, such as when describing Oedipus' inability to identify his incestuous act, "Saw too much. Learned too little from what he saw. Incurious. Curious. Curious, how incurious" (Wellman 63). Wellman's manipulation of language as a non-static, living organism that changes, revolves around fragmentary images, rotates around itself and develops into an open system of reception and interpretation contingent on time and space parameters, constitutes his deconstructive attitude towards writing and meaning. Hence, fixed, immutable language seems in Wellman's plays, to be moving back and forth in a course of temporalizing meaning. Very close to the concept of *différance* by Derrida, words and signs seem to be guided via the economy of an adventurous, non-strategic and non-final but systematic play of differences, which, in the course of a blind-tactics, delays or postpones the meaning through an interval of temporization. (*Margins of Philosophy* 8).

Language poets, according to George Hartley, "engage 'dialectically' with the individual sign and sequence of signs to produce from these a 'negative' but ultimately affirmative complexity" (qtd. in Appler 74). The introduction of !∅ the Shriek Operator for example, might be interpreted as the sign of space between the logical and the incomprehensible, a reminder of the corruption and the dirt that dominates the modern political world, a negative option of reality which satisfies !∅ the Shriek Operator. When introducing himself, at the very beginning of the play he says: "I am the Shriek Operator !∅. I am the unique situation. I am the uncanny and have come to this place, place crowded with corpses and the stench of death. I am the Shriek Operator and I am very pleased with all this slaughter, this horror, this

misfortune” (Wellman 63). Similarly, Creon’s corrupting death-doing politics which further supports the profile of a global leader at the cost of humanist ethics, is depicted as evil in Wellman’s text: “The devil wipes his tail with Creon’s pride” (68) and Antigone admits that “I am the kind of girl tired of always being wise./I am the tin can tied to my own damn tail” (68). The external character of !Æ the Shriek Operator in Wellman’s text functions as a postmodern figure that voices the argument that the world is generating conditions of absurdity such as wars, death and destruction where states of exception, enforced by global superpowers such as the USA, endeavor to gain global power over the weak via violence and death practices and this is an unresolvable problem since, as I have already discussed, it is prescribed through the power of politics to interfere with people’s *bios* which Wellman reads as an evil deity personified by !Æ the Shriek Operator who governs a corrupted world: “Driven from place to place by !Æ the Shriek Operator” (Wellman 63). The pointlessness of fixing the world of disorder and the corruption of politics is manifested in a repetitive motion from the past to the present and the future: “The shorthand that stands in total contradistinction to the shorthand for ‘it will always be that’. Shorthand for ‘it always was that’” (sic) (Wellman 64). Influenced by the language poets and the theory of deconstruction that sees language as it is used fragmentarily and independently from the fixed signification of specific signs, Wellman depicts !Æ the Shriek Operator as an oddity who declares, “...I am what lies outside language and therefore cannot be understood. Cannot be understood, do you understand?” (Wellman 66). The world imagined as a *topos* full of holes, corpses, with a scent of death and a place governed by an uncanny ruler from whom no one can escape, is definitely a world of dystopia. The question is whether this dystopia is just fictional or responds to the real image of the modern world of politics.

3.2.2 The “Broken World” or “A World orderly disordered” in Mac Wellman’s *Antigone*

Wellman’s rewriting of *Antigone* is mainly a text which reads Antigone’s burial act within the absurd and corrupted realm of politics as it emerges recurrently from the archaic to the classical and the modern eras: thus, the three Fates, who are

the main characters of the play, enact the story of *Antigone* at a very far-distanced moment in the past, in a dystopian setting: “Once, at the beginning of time, the THREE FATES, unpleasant young girls, enacted the story that was to become that of ANTIGONE” (63). The same story will be whispered later by the three Fates, who become the three Graces, to the ear of a puppet-Sophocles, implying that the old story of corruption and contamination is repeated since the very genesis of politics.⁵ The effect of the “broken world” corrupted with politics of exception is depicted fragmentarily in Wellman’s text with scenes from the ancient Greek tragedy filtered through postmodern aesthetics, along with the introduction of external characters fused with rich symbolism, in order to further juxtapose the purity of moral acts and the claim for justice that Antigone’s honor-based law entails with the corruption and dirt of politics. Thus, Antigone tells Creon: “You watched me and despise me for my clean, unpleasant spirit” (Wellman 66). Antigone’s *agon* is recontextualized in Wellman’s play as her attempt to restore order in the world, to get deep inside a hole, hide herself and watch the guards instead of being watched by them: “I am going deep into a hole. I am going to watch them. The ones who think can watch over me. Deep in a hole and come out the other side” (67). The holes scattered all around the place symbolize the gaps that cannot be bridged, whether they are relevant to the lost meanings of words or the political inaccuracies and wrong doings that have corrupted the world. Wellman connects the holes in his play with a series of fallacies relevant to the comprehensibility of signs:

. . . or the / / fallacy of too many questions, the / / fallacy of affirming the consequent, or the / fallacy of denying the antecedent, or the / fallacy of hasty generalization, or the / fallacy of irrelevant conclusion, or the / fallacy of misplaced concreteness, or the / fallacy of many questions, or the / fallacy of accident; or the fallacy of bad faith. (66)

Wellman’s reference to holes in the world depicts the abysmal and chaotic aspect of temporality that represents the non-linearity of time in his narrative. Therefore, a particular sign can be absorbed within the vacuum of time and be reborn as a new simulacrum that has been transformed through the chaos of symptomatic and coincidental temporization into a different and deferred meaning. Wellman’s *Antigone* goes through the hole to watch the facts of this world and comes out again: “I am going deep into a hole. I am going to watch them. The ones who think they can watch over me. Deep in a hole and come out the other side” (Wellman 67). The

interpretation of the hole is related to the relativity of time and the coincidental occurrence of the event that temporality entails. As such, the holes in the world are accounted as symbols of incomprehensibility between language and meaning, since a particular verbal signifier can match a signified that is defined through time variables: “A little hole will sink a ship. A big old ship. A hole is nothing at all, but you can break your neck in it” (Wellman 65).

Wellman depicts the political leader in states of exception as the representative of American global superpower, the king of spiders who entraps weaker nations into his web and whose political *logos* does not respond to his actions but engenders a fantasized cause to justify the violence that his biopolitical practices entails. His words speak of nothing, since his political speech does not represent the reality but the concealed fact behind fiction: “//and an empty belly thinks the moon is green cheese; for//(the King of Spiders)// Up he was stuck/up he was stuck/up he was stuck/and in the very upness/he fell// (Straw, straw, straw, straw.)//...You can’t beat something with nothing” (Wellman 64). Furthermore, the biopolitical rationale that governs exceptional politics is reduced to the exclusion of specific ethnic groups from life and the biopolitical decision-making concerning the polarity between those who deserve to live and the others who are led to death: “The rule is: Eteocles, hero. Polyneices, the logical opposite: traitor. If one, then not the other. This is an unanalyzable truth” (Wellman 64) and “Okay. Eteocles hero. Polyneices,traitor. That’s simple enough. The news is what has been forgotten. The mystery. The absolute. The uncanny. The unanalyzable, Creon. The unanalyzable” (Wellman 64).

What is the unanalyzable? When it comes to the sphere of biopolitics, it refers to the terms of inclusion of life in the political realm through its exclusion. Biopolitics as a term includes two constituent parts that give birth to its interpretation: *bios* and politics. However, the difficulty of defining the term biopolitics lies in the antinomical interrelation between these two spheres (bios and politics) that spontaneously repel and attract each other; politics is dependent on life and vice versa but at the same time it cannot support its existence without putting life in question. As Esposito explains, “It is as if the two terms from which biopolitics is formed (life and biopolitics) cannot be articulated except through a modality that simultaneously juxtaposes them” (sic) (32). In his analysis of biopolitics as to what extent politics dominates over life Esposito is confronted with the enigma of biopolitics when “Life insurance is

connected with a death command” (39). Under this perspective, life is secured on the grounds of other people’s death and violent actions such as wars or genocides are not accounted to the manifestation of power but “in the name of the survival itself of populations that are involved” (Esposito 39). In the light of immunization policies that are triggered by biopolitical thought and practices, the justification of USA’s war attacks against Islamic nations through the Patriot Act and in the name of homeland security results in the excessive practice of immunization and the dangers that it entails concerning the relations between individuals and communities. The immunization crisis that nations are confronted with can thus be controlled through a renegotiation between “we”, as in Bush’s slogan “We the people” and the individual, namely a singularization of “we” in the light of accepting the other. Furthermore, as Esposito believes, biopolitics attributes its modern genesis to the negative protection of life embedded in immunization policies.

In his interview to Carrie Hughes, Wellman argues that his play *Antigone* depicts a “broken world”, a cosmos in disorder, full of holes that cannot be filled up and he focuses on the crisis the modern human being experiences in the absence of humanist politics:

The way I thought of *Antigone* was a play of a broken world, and we Americans, of course, try not to think like that. We’d like to think that we live in a fixed world, a world that’s ultimately repairable and that all difficulties are problems—and by a problem I mean something that has a solution. I was trying to write a play that challenged the way of looking at things. (60)

An issue that is common in both, Sophocles’s *Antigone* and the modern rewritings that I am discussing is Creon’s misusing his power and confusing the world of the dead with the world of the living. His hubristic, godlike behavior is questioned by Teiresias in Sophocles’s text: «ἀλλ’ εἴκε τῷ θανόντι, μηδ’ ὀλωλότα κέντει. τίς ἀλκή τόν θανόντ’ ἐπικταίνειν;» (Sophocles 1079-80) [Give way to the dead man, and do not continue to stab him as he lies dead! What is the bravery of killing a dead man over again?] (97). Similarly, Wellman’s text revolves around Creon’s errant politics, concerning his decisions and his decrees which invoke a reversal of locations. Antigone tells Creon: “Each thing has its right place if you know how to place it. My brother’s body, for instance” (Wellman 66). This point is described by Tiresias in

Carson's *Antigonick* as "a structural mistake" (n.p.), since Antigone is entombed while still alive and Polyneices' cadaver is exposed to rot on the ground.

Antigone is further described by Wellman as a "living dead" and he questions her wrong entombment: "Verdict. Interment in the house of death, while yet alive. Agon. Antigone. In her geode" (sic) (Wellman 65). The image at the beginning of the play of "Heaps full of dead clothing" (sic) (Wellman 63) refers to dead warriors on a battlefield. Wellman depicts the dead bodies after a war through the imagery of "Heaps of empty clothing" (sic) (66) and he introduces the Shriek Operator in the form of a "bodiless shadow" and "a swirl of fabric" (63), a terrifying deity who is pleased with horror, death and corruption. The war imagery interpolates Wellman's play as the horrific topography of biopolitical violence and death: "A battlefield. Heaps of empty clothing. Dead clothing strewn all over. Two girls watch from a distance" (66). The absence of bodies and the heap of clothes are similar images of the unjustifiable sacrificial loss of life at war in states of exception where the "empty clothes" of soldiers who die on the battlefield become the signs of the futility that speaks for the illogical loss of life or the mass deaths of populations within the framework of biopolitics. Clothes become the lifeless, empty remains of bodies whose life value is destroyed under biopolitical violence and stripped of their dignity, absolutely dehumanized, naked and anonymous bodies are put to death in a victimizing, sacrificial manner. The devaluation and dehumanization of bodies which represent the other in states of exception and biopolitical practices, is reflected in the course of political ordering of the human body, in cases when it is further bestialized and devaluated in oppressive regimes. Nudity is implied in the play as the bestialization or animality of the human in politics which devalue humanist ethics and it becomes a repetitive concept throughout Wellman's text. Going back to Sophocles's text, there is a constant narrative of bestiality through images of animals in the play: Antigone herself is depicted as a *δαιμόνιον τέρας* [godsent portent] because she transgresses Creon's politics and presents an alternative politics instead and she is thus confined in a cave like a wild animal, the birds that bear the curse of the *polis* because they are fed on Polyneices's flesh and thus they become mad and whose omens cannot be read by the prophet Teiresias and the image of Antigone who resembles a bird mourning and shrieking loudly over her brother's cadaver. What the animal symbolism entails in *Antigone* is the politics of animal towards the sovereign in a relation of, as Jacques Derrida describes, "the questions of the animal and the

political. of the politics of the animal, of man and beast in the context of the state, the polis, the city, the republic, the social body, the law in general, war and peace, terror and terrorism, national or International terrorism, etc” (*The Beast and the Sovereign* 9). Thus, Wellman uses animal imagery in his play as a symbolism that inscribes the bestial role of the sovereign in relation to the subject in states of exception, where there is no space for humanist ethics. Furthermore, Wellman reads corrupted and corrupting politics as an endless, primordial process which is depicted again through animal symbolism: “Let us invoke/ the spider that taught the spider, the/ very first one./ How to be a spider./ How to creep./ (And be creepy). They all do the spider. They all howl. They all creep” (64). Antigone refers to the “terrible, terrible cat’s cradle” (64) and the Chorus talks about the “King of Spiders”: “Up he was stuck/up he was stuck/up he was stuck up/ and in the very upness/ of his stuckitude/ he fell” (64).⁶ Similarly, Creon refers to time as a dog: “Time backs up and shakes itself like a wet dog” (64), while time is depicted as a “weasel or a vicious hedgehog” which “backs up, puffed up in raging horripilation” (67). Animals are all around the play, as omens of something unpleasant in a dystopian place full of death and stench: “A small unpleasant animal crosses the vast emptiness of infinite spaces. They watch this. Not a very nice animal, in fact” (Wellman 67). Similarly, the self-contradictory aspect of biopolitics, which genders life through death practices is a central issue in Wellman’s text that is depicted through the images of animals and bestiality: “Let us invoke the pause before the silence before all of this;/ for earth, hollow earth,/(hollow, hollow, hollow)/ is the house of the dead, and the place/ of engendering. The branching of facts,/ facts which are opposed, contradictory. *Dog and cats facts*” (emphasis added; 64).

In Wellman’s *Antigone* the world as a place of dirt and corruption is projected through !E The Shriek Operator’s words: “City half buried in a tide of shit, Creon. Hey, Creon, look at me. Look at me, Creon, if it looks like shit, smells like shit, tastes like shit...Hey, Creon, baby. Look at me. Hey, I got no teeth. I’m on drugs” (69). As I have already discussed in the first part of my thesis, contamination is a focal point of Creon’s politics in fifth-century Thebes, since it is represented repeatedly through his errant practices to protect the city-state from contagion, without being able to realize that the main source of contamination, which is spread as a curse in the *polis*, is he himself. Teiresias is the authoritative voice who speaks about contamination as a result of Creon’s immoral action to leave the dead body of Polyneices exposed within

the polis, to be eaten by animals. The curse that comes from Creon's errant politics hunts the whole city, since Teiresias's birds which eat Polyneices' rotten flesh have become bad omens of a forthcoming disaster, since they cannot be read by Teiresias anymore. I go instantly back to the ancient text, in order to explain how Wellman defers the sign of contamination in modern political reality in his rewriting of *Antigone*. Hence, Wellman's Teiresias says:

Omens are over. The signlessness of the omens is the most uncanny. Terrible, terrible, terrible. I am unable to stop thinking. Thinking of how to make a curse capable of ripping through human flesh like a goldarn bullwhip. We are surrounded by death and crumpled paper. Newsprint we cannot read. All the print that fits the new, us, the walking dead, dead shadows. *Symparanekromenoi*.

In a striking modern re-signification of omens in contemporary political reality, Wellman treats deconstructively words and signs to defer the meaning of the sign of omens through temporization. Hence, he uses time and space conditions of modernity to recontextualize the imagery of omens as the contemporary sign of newspapers that cannot bear the truth, since they are used by specific political governments as their representatives in communicating a distorted reality to the public, sustaining a politics of corruption and contamination.

Hence, avoiding a *miasma* which was articulated by Creon's politics, "...φορβῆς τοσοῦτον ὅσον ἄγος προθείς, ὅπως μίasma πᾶς' ὑπεκρύβη πόλις» (Sophocles 775-6), [putting out enough food to escape pollution, so that the whole city may avoid contagion] (77), seems to be haunting politics up to the present in biopolitical practices and states of exception, where the sovereign's political profile is a manifestation of self-contradictory policies: although it condemns contagious contamination it further reproduces it in an endless deadly route.

On the political stage of exception the absurd voice of sovereignty which instills a fantasy cause in the minds of people is articulated by the chorus in Wellman's play: "He who speaks of nothing does not know/what he is doing.//In speaking of nothing he makes it into/a something.//In speaking he speaks against/what he intended./He contradicts himself" (66). The "speaking of nothing" policy is what defines politics of exception and specifically the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, on the face of President Bush, who justified his hegemonic role in the globe and his war-waging attitude towards Islamic nations after the terrorist attack of 9/11 to defend

the world against Islamic terror—in fact, President Bush needed to defend and support his global capitalist order which he presented as a fantasized higher “noble cause” (Pease 182). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 President Bush invested in in American’s people collective grief and rage and got involved in a Global War of Terror using people’s emotional state to justify his violent attacks towards The Islamic populations as an expression of the state’s policies of revenge. Pease uses the term “state fantasy” based on Jacqueline Rose’s theorization which refers to “the dominant structure of desire out of which US citizens imagined their national identity” (1). The state of fantasy constructs a politics towards the citizens that is based upon an imaginary national cause and as Pease explains “Rose turned to psychoanalytic theory to explain that, despite the efforts of political theorists to suppress them, the state depended upon the subjects’ affective investments in fantasy for its legitimization” (2).

In his play Wellman depicts the profile of the political leader as the global sovereign, a planetary leader who is presented as a creepy spider who entraps his victims into his lethal web and he is a recurrent motif for political leaders in states of exception: “Let us invoke/ the spider that taught the spider, the/very first one.//How to be a spider./How to creep./(And be creepy). They all do the spider. They all howl. They all creep” (Wellman 64). The first image of the play is a heap of “dead, empty clothes” that refers to the warlike behavior of the political leader in the state of exception who gets involved in unjustifiable wars against weak nations. In his interview to Hughes, Wellman epitomizes in a few words the notion of American exceptionalism and how the United States have built up the profile of the planetary leader, by declaring wars to the weak, in the name of democracy and justice: “Right now things are out of control, and we’re not going to be able to fix this thing with Osama bin Laden, assuming that he is behind it, and those people who were directly responsible. It’s not necessarily fixable or resolvable, and our response is to declare war to the poor and dispossessed” (60). America’s legalized use of global violence based on a higher law, what Bush named “his higher father”, is what placed the US “outside the world of Nations as the Exception” (Pease 182-83), constituting a Homeland Fantasy to justify the hegemonic role of the USA in the world. Especially after the 9/11 the American nation was presented by Bush as vulnerable, being exposed to biopolitical threat, so he “represented ‘We the People’ in the image of vulnerable biological bodies in need of the protection of the Homeland” (sic) (Pease

183). Hence, my focus on the issue of burial politics as a process of political negotiation between politics of exception and life suggests that such exceptional political schemata are closely related to life as it is prescribed within the operations of power. The mechanisms of biopolitical power through which life is produced, valued, terminated and grieved underlie a critical moment in the history of humanism and moral ethics. Certain lives which do not qualify as lives are “themselves operations of power” (Butler *Frames of War* 1), since their death signals the welfare and sustainability of sovereignty’s power over people. In politics of exceptionalism, the sovereign incorporates fantasy work which instills a higher cause in the subjects, constituting an “official national mythology” (Pease 5), some kind of feedback for the citizens’ self-realization as a nation aiming at a common, national “noble” cause. Political mottos in war campaigns that praise peace in the world, for example, or the justification of undemocratic practices that violate human rights in the name of democracy per se are some of the exemplary manifestations of the absurdity in the practice of modern exceptional politics in the world. In American exceptionalism, the gap between fact and fiction hidden behind the rationale of exception has become even wider, since the US needed to preserve the mighty profile of the planetary leader. This gap is depicted in Wellman’s dystopian setting as a hollow earth and a gap, in the form of a hole, between people’s *bios* and its political governance which genders a fantasy reality or a fantasized threat to justify exclusion policies bound with violence. The violation of human rights in states of exception is extended further when images of violence and dehumanization are projected publicly without provoking the slightest amount of sympathy by the spectators: Scenes of dehumanizing political practices on human beings or images of violence which are exposed publicly cannot invoke the spectator’s sympathy anymore in states of exception. Wellman depicts the lack in spectators’ humanism in his play when he describes the scene of Haemon’s death that cannot move anyone: “We watch him from a distance (this is a command). We feel nothing for him. We feel nothing human. We feel cold and alone. Antigone looks at us. We look at Antigone. Nothing moves us...We feel nothing because we are no longer what’s called ‘human’” (Wellman 67). This scene comes as a repetition of a similar scene with Antigone who is caught in absolute stillness, there is no motion, no reaction by the spectator that cannot show the slightest sympathy for the pitiful and painful figure of Antigone: “Looks around, shivering and afraid. Look at her (this is a command). Alone and cold.

No one to love her. No one to protect her. Nothing but stillness. Stillness laying waste. The laying waste of stillness. Now she is the focal point of stillness” (Wellman 67). Similar scenes of the spectators’ indifference emerge in the modern political reality, in Bush’s politics of exception that performed one of the most dehumanizing acts of American exceptionalism in the history of humanity. I refer to the Abu Ghraib prison photographs, taken by American police guards, which exposed a group of ethnic bodies in public as the humiliated victims of the USA cultural and human assault, a type of “violence to their Muslim identities” (Pease 185). The photographs of Abu Ghraib prison, which depicted Iraqi prisoners who “ . . . were forced to masturbate publicly or simulate oral sex with one another” (Pease 188), were not only a cruel manifestation of violating human rights, but also a religious and cultural attack to the Muslim bodies, since they were relevant to their ethnic phobias or taboos about “bodily nudity, homosexual touching of male genitals, [and] appearing naked before a woman” (Pease 188). The global commentary that one image known as “The Man on the Box”⁷ triggered, as a figure of Christian martyrdom, innumerable traumatic memories to the consciousness of people, relevant to slavery, the civil rights movement and “a scene of venerated self-sacrifice” (Pease 186). The image of “The Man on the Box” is the modern exposure of the human being as he/she is reduced to a symbolic sacrificial role as a member of a specific ethnic or racial group that might also have Christian martyrdom connotations. In Wellman’s play *Antigone* is depicted as the sacrificial symbol of martyrdom, who patiently awaits her death, being exposed as a vulnerable human being. Her obligatory public exposure under the command of the political leader “Look at her (this is a command)” (sic) (Wellman 67) is comparable to similar inhumane exposures of the human being on the internet, in photographs and on the mass media by the state. In western modernity, the easy access to public exposure by the use of technology has facilitated the biopolitical interference with people’s privacies and lives and the borders between politics and people’s lives are put in crisis in more immediate and effective ways. Being framed as a threatening singularity within the law of biopolitics can be accomplished very easily nowadays via worldwide public exposure in an instant. Violence and violation of ethics and human rights are what constitute biopolitical practices, since their applicability to mass ethnic or racial populations is contingent upon the paradoxical principle of protecting life at the cost of terminating it.⁸

3.3 *Antigonick* by Anne Carson: A parody of the state of exception

Anne Carson's comic book *Antigonick* is a postmodern rewriting of *Antigone* that revises the significance of the burial politics under the post 9/11 state of exception. It parodies the role of the sovereign, represented as a caricature of politics who has all the full power in his hands to manipulate his people and hypnotize them with a fantasy cause. Kreon in Carson's text represents the global leader, who has the power to interfere with people's lives and works in favor of the sustainability of his power and his political aspirations. Carson's *Antigonick* mocks Kreon's power, as a monarch "doing deaths", an act which results in a de-democratization of democracy, where legitimate violence corresponds with politics of exclusion in order to sustain the sovereign's authority in the *polis* as a national fantasy: "KREON: I HAVE DEATHS TO DO" (Carson n.p.). Gsoels-Lorensen argues that Kreon appears to have a strange relation with the issue of death, since he reverses the *topos* of the living with that of the dead and he thinks that death never suffices for a severe punishment (116). Teiresias tells Kreon about Polyneikes: "THIS BOY IS DEAD STOP KILLING HIM" (Carson n.p.). Hence, Gsoels-Lorensen argues that "... [Anne Carson] characterizes Creon as "doing deaths" (2012 n.p.), a circumlocution undercutting the solemn nature of death with a certain easy, managerial negligence, almost an agenda item to be taken care of, not much more" (sic) (115). Kreon plays a strange game with death and life in order to manipulate his subjects more effectively, and his figure becomes almost blasphemous and hubristic, since he projects himself as a godlike figure who keeps people's lives in his hands, a man who thinks that is in charge of decision-making, relevant to life and death issues. This image of an absolute, godlike political figure who fantasizes himself as the ruler of the globe, invokes Wellman's notion of politics' interference with people's lives as a disturbance of the cosmic order, a reversal of ethics that sees life exclusively as defined, controlled and deleted via political manipulation. Therefore, Wellman saw this disorderly ordered cosmos which is reduced only to political handling in all its absurdity when he introduced the character of !Æ The Shriek Operator, a hybrid deity of the uncanny, the evil and the incomprehensible, as well as with the Dance of Error and Disclosure, where Teiresias says: "Polyneices lived his death above the ground. Antigone below" (Wellman 66).

Kreon is presented by Carson as a leader who is extraneous from his people's will, but inside the law, since he uses his full-power potential to suspend the law and imposes decrees that have the juridical force of the law. Thus, Kreon's democracy slips into dictatorship:

KREON: SHALL THEBES PRESCRIBE TO ME HOW I SHOULD RULE
 HAIMON: LISTEN TO YOURSELF YOU SOUND LIKE A BOY
 DICTATOR (Carson n.p.)

The profile of a ruler who fantasizes an authority no longer embodying the community but serving a separate constitutional and legal state (Pease 3), reads the modern paradigm of American exceptionalism in the West. Through a constant disorienting policy of the state towards the people's realization of their common good, which neglects humanitarian principles or justifies war policies against other nations as an internalized desire of citizens who are led to struggle for a "noble cause", today's democratic states in the West build up their whole notion of democracy by fully de-democratizing it. This shares allusive ties with Wellman's depiction of the profile of a political leader fits, as a person who is talking about nothing and still he makes it into something. Haimon tells his father: "HAIMON: YOU TALK AND TALK AND NEVER LISTEN" (Carson n.p.). Kreon in Carson's *Antigonick* constructs with his politics a state of fantasy which, according to Pease, "...does not refer to a mystification but to the dominant structure of desire out of which U.S. citizens imagined their national identity" (1). Eurydice in her monologue says:

A STATE OF EXCEPTION MARKS THE LIMIT OF THE LAW THIS
 VIOLENT THING THIS FRAGILE THING TRY TO UNCLENCH WE
 SAID TO HER SHE NEVER DID. ... FINALLY WE EXPELLED HER
 WE HAD TO....BUT HOW SHE CAN DENY THE RULE TO WHICH
 SHE IS AN EXCEPTION. (Carson n.p.)

Carson's postmodern approach of *Antigone* is structured through the addition of the external character of Nick of Time. This ubiquitous but still speechless character is the articulation of time which along with space, constitute the *différance* conditions which defer the meaning of the sign by postponing it to another *chronotopos*. The chorus in *Antigonick* define time as a condition of relativity, which

along with space, constitutes the context that will define the signification of *Antigone* in the specific text:

ANOTHER

AN HOUR

AN HOUR AND A HALF

A YEAR

A SPLIT SECOND

A DECADE

THIS INSTANT

A SECOND

A SPLIT SECOND

A NOW

A NICK

A NECK

KREON RUSHES OUT

ALL THE GUARDS RUSH OUT

HANG BY THE NECK UNTIL. (Carson n.p.)

Who is the Nick of Time? A courteous, silent, fluid and permanently watching figure, Nick of Time is always there to define, appropriate, defer and postpone the meaning of signs in an endless course of time which never stays still. The Nick of Time is cleverly introduced by Carson as a character who draws on the fluidity of signs as they visit and revisit literary works and their adaptations, in an endless route back and forth through historical moments, ancient grammatology, modern times and

even through minutes or seconds. The meaning is always transferrable, dependent on the time and space conditions of the context in which it is about to be articulated. The Nick of Time in *Antigonick* embodies temporality as an accidental factor, the errant that reads the sign as a delay of meaning contingent on time in its definitions as past, present or future.

Thus, Carson's *Antigonick* mocks the caricature of the political leader of exception who projects himself as the global ruler and makes political decisions via policies of exclusion, such as racist discriminations, gender reductions and social marginalization to follow the repetitive motif of biopolitical immunization. The profile of such a politician in *Antigonick* foreshadows the very recent political reality in the USA, in the American elections of 2016, when Donald Trump was elected as the new President of the USA. Trump's figure was initially depicted as a cartoon character, a fact which translates American politics into a cartoon politics, which is embedded in Trump's imaginary of the absurd exceptional state that negates any external presence in the country, ignoring the constitutions and human rights. Trump's errant politics has been manifested from the very first week of his administration, via his extreme exclusion policies towards minorities, namely his executive order which temporarily bans all refugees from entering the US, including the ban of entry into the US to all 218 million citizens from seven Muslim-majority nations. The Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour sued Trump to overturn his ban which was called a "Muslim Exclusion Order", explaining that the ban is unconstitutional and shows preference of one religion over another. Trump's totalitarian thought which aims at protecting the country from external danger, is an assault to the Muslim ethnicity that is directly connected with terrorism and further engenders terrorism around the world, with its absolute negation of not only Muslim refugees, but also people who work in the US and pay taxes and cannot travel abroad, since they will not be allowed to enter the country again. As another Creon, Trump suspends the law by executing orders that although illegitimate, bear the force of the law. Trump's administration and exclusion politics imply the image of a bleeding democracy or a democracy suffocating from the law of the state of exception. Refugees and people who belong to another ethnicity, another religion or another color, people who are distanced from the American white nationalist man's profile are reduced by President Trump's biopolitical practices to the worst *miasma* that

threatens his exceptional state. This is exactly where *Antigone* fits, a recurrent sign of *miasma* coming from ancient Greek tragedy, which foreshadows the modern political reality of exclusion relevant to racist and nationalistic practices.

Similarly, the depiction of the planetary leader in Carson's text reflects on Bush's political administration which projected the profile of the USA as the savior of the world who would restore global peace and order through the so called "higher law" that justified the American violent intervention in the affairs of weak nations. As Pease explains, "Bush endowed the doctrine of American exceptionalism with a metaphysical supplement that enjoined the belief that the preemptive violence through which the US would defend the globe against the threat of other nation-states" (185). Additionally, Bush invested to the vulnerability of the people after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and he projected a possible biological threat in the nation in order to justify his violent attacks against the Islamic world as a humanistic intervention of the US to restore global peace and order.

Notes

¹ Esposito calls it “a negative protection of life” (10).

² Language poetry took its name from the magazine edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews (L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E). It is an avant garde poetry movement that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a response to mainstream American poetry. Rather than emphasizing traditional poetic techniques, language poetry tends to draw the readers’ attention to the uses of language in a poem that contribute to the creation of meaning. It is often associated with deconstruction, poststructuralism and the Objectivist tradition. See Hartley (1989).

³ As Wellman wrote in 1984, “[a]rtists and thinkers of our time are engaged in a war against . . . the tyrannical domination of meanings so fixed, so absolute, as to render the means of meaning, which is to say the heart and soul of meaning, a mere phantom” (qtd. in Appler 71).

⁴ Influenced by James Gleick’s book *Chaos: Making a New Science* (1987), Wellman was characterized by Helen Shaw as a Language poet who “...has been the deconstructionists’ mountaintop” (qtd. in Appler 69). Appler further argues that “Wellman’s embrace, in the early 1990s, of chaos theory is compatible with the deconstructive language practices so far described, if we are to understand the singular enunciation as a convergence of different systems (forms of expression, contents of expression, and forms of content) in relations of nonrelation” (71).

⁵ Fleischer’s review saw the play living “...in two far-flung moments: an archaic era before the dawn of the House of Laius and a time that feels like it’s dangerously just around the corner” (513).

⁶ This part of the text shows how Wellman treats the language by inventing new words and by using repetition as a way of an internal rhythm of the dynamics of language in the literary text which bears semantic connotations.

⁷ The six pictures depicted “a hooded man who was made to stand precariously on the edge of a box, sprouting wires from his hands and from under the poncho that covered his torso” (Pease 186).

⁸ See Esposito, (2008). Esposito further refers to a paradigmatic event of biopolitical practices as “The most acute oxymoron of humanitarian bombardment” (sic) (4).

4. CONCLUSION

The political genealogy of *Antigone* in modern reenactments sustains the validity of the myth as an inheritance from the classics and it recurrently emerges in the West as an organic part of narrative in arts and literature, which reads burial politics as a crucial turning point to ethics or humanism. The antinomical relationship between politics of exception and humanist ethics is the space between politics and the human being, namely the space that defines what constitutes and what negates polity and inclusion of the singularity within the ideological, ethical and social frames of political administration: this becomes the decisive point where life is enclosed within the borders of politics or politics per se is included within life and death decisions. Since sovereignty has always been the representative force of the law and its suspension in urgent national situations, the dialogic intercourse between the sovereign and the subject is reduced to the unquestionable dominion of the sovereign's power over the citizens' lives. Thus, individual *bios* is recurrently exposed to political manipulation and control and consequently the borders between life and death, as accounted to political interest and decision-making, are constantly put into crisis.

In the realm of biopolitical thought, life and death have become interchangeable, or at least it cannot be clearly defined whether death is meant to emerge out of life or vice versa, especially in cases where the underlying biopolitical rationale triggers the desire for life through death.¹ The human body is naked and stripped of its individuality and dignity, since it is materialistically and collectively intelligible as a medium for civic manipulation: de-democratizing policies take place in the name of democracy and the apparition of the state's noble causes paradoxically endeavors to justify the irrationality of death politics in favor of the normativity of the majority of populations. Hence, Roberto Esposito argues that, "...the humanity of man remains necessarily exposed to what both saves and annihilates it" (4).

The crucial moment of breaking the law, the moment that Antigone buries her beloved brother, is the moment that she, as the marginalized singularity, claims the right for lamentation, the moment that she looks the political *archē* in the eyes and says no to policies of exclusion by including the dead body of her brother to

the group of the grievable deceased: her act is accounted to the political *logos* of the stigmatized minorities who build a wall between politics and their *bios* to defy the annihilation of their right to live and grieve for their beloved. Paradoxically, Antigone's claim for life is accomplished through her own death, a fact which recurrently stresses the emergence of life out of death. Rewriting *Antigone* from a twenty-first-century perspective involves reading *Antigone* as a paradigm of political dissidence, which foreshadows the modern repetitive present and future resistance to the absolutism of political administration as it is integrated in politics of exception, where the minorities are violently excluded from the communal corpus, as evil, polluted and contagious parts. Hence, Antigone's reappropriation in oppressive regimes focuses on the marginalization that constitutes the image of minorities as miasmatic figures, who claim life via a burial act in absolutely prohibitive contexts.

Hence, this thesis discussed how burial politics in Sophocle's *Antigone* is recontextualized in the literary narrative of Western modernity and becomes an issue of great political significance, where life is constituted through selective means, permanently exposed to power and violence. The conclusions that I reach through this thesis are relevant to the reimagining of the sign of Sophocles's *Antigone* as a paradigm of political resistance in modern western political reality and a proleptic image of recurrent Antigonean re-enactments that critique the absolutism of the global leaders and the political ordering of people's lives.

Notes

¹See Roberto Esposito (2008). Esposito refers to several paradigms of biopolitical practices, among which the mass ethnic rapes of Tutsi women in Rwanda by Hutu men in April 2004 (6). What is striking though is that when those raped women were asked about their experiences, they declared their love towards their children, even though they were born out of death and violent practices. Esposito stresses here that "...the force of life prevails once again over that of death" (7).

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα θέση θα συζητήσει πώς οι σύγχρονες διασκευές της Αντιγόνης του Σοφοκλή, όπως το θεατρικό έργο *Antigone* του Μακ Γουέλμαν και η διασκευή *Antigonick* της Αν Κάρσον ερμηνεύουν την πολιτική του θρήνου και εκπροσωπούν την μετάβαση από τις ταφικές τελετουργίες στην άσκηση της πολιτικής στα καταπιεστικά καθεστώτα που εξαιρούν κάποια μέλη μειονοτήτων της πόλης. Προσεγγίζοντας τον πολιτικό ορισμό της ανθρώπινης ζωής και τον διαχωρισμό της σε θρηνήσιμα και μη-θρηνήσιμα σώματα, θα εξετάσω την τρέχουσα θεωρητική διαμάχη επάνω στην βιοπολιτική, έχοντας ως βάση μου το πιο πρόσφατο έργο του Ρομπέρτο Εσποζίτο.

Συζητώντας παράλληλα δύο σύγχρονες διασκευές του έργου του Σοφοκλή, δηλαδή το έργο του Γουέλμαν, *Antigone* και το κείμενο της Κάρσον, *Antigonick*, θα αναπτύξω μια συγκριτική ανάλυση της πολιτικής του θρήνου, όπως αναγράφεται στην ιστορική περίοδο του 2^{ου} Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου, όπου η σύγχρονη βιοπολιτική εδραιώθηκε ως το συστατικό μέρος των ολοκληρωτικών καθεστώτων και των συστημάτων της πολιτικής σκέψης της εποχής. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, συζητώ τις πρακτικές του θρήνου και την πολιτική της ταφής, όπως εξυπηρετούν τα σύγχρονα πολιτικά περιβάλλοντα, ειδικότερα την πολιτική εξαίρεσης της Αμερικής που αποτυπώθηκε στην πολιτική διοίκηση του Προέδρου των ΗΠΑ George Bush μετά τις τρομοκρατικές ενέργειες της 9/11, όπου η πολιτική της ταφής συνέστησε το προφίλ των ΗΠΑ ως παγκόσμια υπερδύναμη πάνω σε αδύναμα έθνη. Έτσι, οι πολιτικές πολέμου εναντίον Ισλαμικών εθνών προβλήθηκαν ως ανθρωπιστικές παρεμβάσεις υπέρ της παγκόσμιας ειρήνης και κατά της τρομοκρατίας. Συνεπώς, βασίζομαι πάνω στην θεωρητική ανάλυση του Donald Pease επάνω στα κράτη της εξαίρεσης και στην θεωρία της Jacqueline Rose πάνω στα κράτη της φαντασίας, για να εξηγήσω πώς οι πολιτικές της ταφής ενσωματώθηκαν στην πολιτική εξαίρεσης της Αμερικής ως μηχανισμός που ενστάλαξε το εθνικό φαντασιακό ιδεώδες στην συνείδηση των πολιτών εν ζωή, επαινώντας και τιμώντας τον θάνατο των αγαπημένων τους προσώπων με την μορφή δημόσιων επικήδειων λόγων. Έτσι, οι πρακτικές ταφής αποτέλεσαν αναπόσπαστο μέρος των κρατών εξαίρεσης που υποστήριζαν τους φαντασιακούς σκοπούς της κράτους τόσο σε εσωτερικό επίπεδο (μέσα στο κράτος) όσο και στο εξωτερικό (παγκόσμιο) επίπεδο, για να αιτιολογήσει πράξεις που

παραβιάζουν τους κανονισμούς του Διεθνούς Δικαίου και μετονομάζουν τις πολιτικές πολέμου ως ανθρωπιστικές ενέργειες που προάγουν την παγκόσμια ειρήνη.

Η έρευνά μου προτίθεται να ρίξει φως σε ερωτήματα της σύγχρονης εποχής που σχετίζονται με τις πολιτικές ανησυχίες που αφορούν στην επίδειξη δύναμης εκ μέρους των αποκλεισμένων ατόμων, οι οποίες υπερβαίνουν την υποτίμηση και την εξαθλίωση του ανθρώπου και πυροδοτούν την επιθυμία για ζωή κάτω από συνθήκες καταπιεστικών καθεστώτων, τα έθνη της εξαίρεσης, αποικιοκρατικές και ρατσιστικές πολιτικές, περιβάλλοντα πολέμου και θέματα μετανάστευσης. Θα συζητήσω επίσης την έννοια του μιάσματος που συνθέτει την περιθωριοποίηση του άλλου, πυροδοτεί πολιτικές αποκλεισμού και θέτει την ζωή και την ανθρώπινη ηθική υποδεέστερη της πολιτικής. Η σύνδεση μεταξύ του βίου και της πολιτικής συνθέτει την κοινωνική φύση του σώματος που μπορεί να οριστεί μόνο μέσα από κοινωνική συναναστροφή, ως μέλος του συνόλου.

Έτσι, θα συζητήσω την πράξη τη ταφής των μη-θρηνησίμων νεκρών σωμάτων και την πολιτική του θρήνου μέσα από την ανάγνωση της Αντιγόνης του Σοφοκλή που αποτελεί τον πρόδρομο παρόμοιων πράξεων στην σύγχρονη πραγματικότητα της Δύσης κάτω από συνθήκες βιοπολιτικής και στοχεύει να δώσει τον λόγο στις αποκλεισμένες μειονότητες, των οποίων οι επαναστατικές συμπεριφορές παράγουν μια αγωνιστική πολιτική για τον επαναπροσδιορισμό της έννοιας του κοινωνικού παράγοντα, εξελίσσοντας με αυτόν τον τρόπο την ζωή μέσα από τον θάνατο. Για αυτόν τον λόγο, θα συζητήσω τις προαναφερθείσες πράξεις σαν έναν διαχωρισμό μεταξύ του βίου και του λόγου που προβάλλει ένα ισχυρό πολιτικό μήνυμα της κοινωνικής, πολιτικής αλλά και οντολογικής δυνατότητας των περιθωριοποιημένων μονάδων μέσα στην ατομικότητα και στην συλλογικότητά τους.

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