

Essay

# Neither Sensible, Nor Moderate: Revisiting the *Antigone*

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**Abstract:** In this essay, I try to conceptualise meaningful forms of resistance in the present by revisiting Sophocles' *Antigone*, one of the most important texts of western literary tradition. I focus on Antigone's compulsion to *act* against Creon's decree, which turns Sophocles' heroine into a metonymical expression of (civil) disobedience, sacrifice, and mourning—to my mind, the constitutive elements of effective resistant subjectivity. In my analysis, Antigone's resistance is transformed from a deeply private, filial duty, essentially seen as heroic, into a rich, public expression of collectivity and solidarity. To illustrate this, I capitalise on Judith Butler's designation of Antigone firmly in the *political*, and then proceed to make use of Bonnie Honig's recalibration of her disobedience as one which transcends solitary action to express the collective, democratic feeling of a whole *polis*. I then mobilise a three-pronged theoretical framework. Firstly, I analyse the clash of Antigone with Creon through the prism of Jacques Derrida's work on law and violence. Secondly, I explore the possibility of a biopolitical framing as developed by Giorgio Agamben since, at its core, the clash in the play is enacted within the parameters of a vitiated *habeas corpus*: from the moment Antigone confesses her misdeed she is treated by Creon, the sovereign, as a non-human—as an animal or, indeed, a miasma. In the last section of this essay, I mobilise the work of Howard Caygill with a view to analysing what I perceive as three discernible yet concatenated stages (or aspects) in the formation of Antigone's resistant subjectivity: her full awareness of what it means to *disobey* (hence to *resist*), her acceptance of sacrifice, and, finally, her commitment to the political potentialities of mourning.

**Keywords:** Antigone; neoliberalism; resistance; sacrifice; miasma; Butler; Honig; Derrida; Agamben; Caygill

## 1. Introduction

When Antigone defied Creon's decree in Sophocles' homonymous play she sealed her fate as an outcast—as a miasma.<sup>1</sup> In the eyes of the Theban state and its ruler she had committed a crime, for which she was condemned to die entombed in a cave outside Thebes. At first glance, Antigone broke the law and was duly punished. But how must it feel to be punished when you have not broken the law? How must it feel to be treated as a miasma when you have done nothing more than lawfully discharge your duties toward a state of which, you are told, you are a citizen? Simply put, how must it feel to be punished for the misdeeds of others or, indeed, for just participating in a socio-economic system which, you are also told, is not only inevitable but also necessary? In what follows, I set out to revisit the *Antigone* with a view to charting parallels between the conceptual parameters of her resistant subjectivity and the potential for effective resistance in the present.

Beyond the fact that Antigone remains a towering figure of female struggle in western culture, it is our historical conjuncture that ought to compel us to revisit such canonical texts. Looking back at the

<sup>1</sup> I will revisit this term in due course, but for the time being I use 'miasma' in its English meaning—an unpleasant vapour, a stink or reek. The play dramatises Antigone's defiance of Creon's decree, according to which the body of her brother Polynices was to remain unburied following his unsuccessful bid to conquer Thebes.

myths that constitute the so-called western literary imagination, one feels compelled to instrumentalise them; to, as Stathis Gourgouris argues, seek the ways in which the literary ‘pertains to whatever is social, historical, worldly—[in other words, to] whatever disputes, by its mere existence, the ahistorical pretensions of the sacred’ (Gourgouris 2003, p. xix). Cornelius Castoriadis, too, reads Sophocles’ play not as a transcendental clash between Creon (the sovereign) and Antigone (the dissident), but as a totality, as an ‘actual presence in the Athenian socio-historical space’—a presence ‘indissolubly interwoven with democracy,’ with ‘the polis,’ and, of course, with the political (Castoriadis 2001, pp. 139–140; emphasis in the original). In its capacity as a canonical text of western literature and culture, the *Antigone* may be useful when read against contemporary socio-political developments. To that end, I contend that we need to shift our focus from the burial of Polynices as an act of adherence to a filial, metaphysical law that is beyond the political, to precisely Antigone’s post-burial identity as a *political* resistant subjectivity—in short, echoing Judith Butler, to her identity as an organiser of resistance against the dictates of an oppressive (if not immoral) state.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The (Neo)Liberal State and the Neoliberal Law

My understanding of the state has been informed mainly by Nicos Poulantzas, who defines it as an autonomous construct whose first task is to regulate its citizens’ socio-political duties, rights and freedoms. ‘[A] complex unity’, Poulantzas continues, the state aims at establishing ‘its global equilibrium as a system,’ before asserting that, importantly, the constitutive interests of the state are closely aligned with the interests of its ruling class (Poulantzas 1978, pp. 44–45). More specifically, I conceptualise the liberal state in the way in which Chantal Mouffe’s re-examination of Carl Schmitt’s critique of liberal democracy—especially with respect to ‘the boundaries of citizenship’—elucidates the duties and trespasses of the state vis-à-vis its citizens (Mouffe 2009, p. 39). Mouffe scrutinises Schmitt’s conclusions on liberalism’s incompatibility with democracy,<sup>3</sup> and helps me draw a parallel between Antigone and the citizens of ‘the neoliberal state’ along the lines of what Imogen Tyler meticulously develops into a theory of social abjection (Tyler 2013, pp. 1–13). I should note, however, that here I am less interested in formulating a detailed account of the neoliberal state than I am in underscoring the centrality of what I call the *neoliberal law* and its intrinsic violence in the structural relationship between citizen and the contemporary advanced capitalist state. For the sake of accuracy, I understand the neoliberal state mainly in Foucauldian terms—a state, by and large, regulated by the law of the market. In particular, I conceptualise the neoliberal state as an abstract yet coherent, national and/or supra-national formation, whose commitment to doing the bidding of fictitious capital (especially post-2007/8) has accelerated the calamitous effects of financial deregulation and capital accumulation in the lives of ordinary people (Foucault 2010, p. 116; Brown 2015, p. 79).<sup>4</sup> I should also say that I do not deploy the term ‘neoliberalism’ uncritically. I share the concerns of scholars who warn against ‘identify[ing] “neoliberalism”—rather than capitalism *per se*—as the ultimate target of critique’ (Garland and Harper 2012, p. 415). I use the term neoliberalism here heuristically to designate a cultural, socio-economic and political rationality marked not so much by the roll-back of the state, but by the co-optation of the state apparatus to the dictates of private enterprise and the financial industry. In isolating neoliberalism as a concept worthy of critique, I do not hanker for the halcyon days of social democracy when the benign liberal state looked after its citizens (Callinicos 1991, p. 8; 1993, pp. 283–88). As Domenico Losurdo argues, the history of western liberal democracy is fraught with examples of social abjection (Losurdo 2014, pp. 1–34). That said, especially since the 2007/8 crisis

<sup>2</sup> Here, my approach modifies Butler’s analysis which centres largely on the political currency of kinship, in so far as despite my insistence on the political, I resist the urge to mobilise its valence as Butler does (Butler 2000, p. 6).

<sup>3</sup> Whereas democracy necessitates universal equality, citizenship essentially differentiates between citizens (who belong to the *demos*) and non-citizens (who do not) (Mouffe 2009, p. 39).

<sup>4</sup> The critique advanced by (Zamora and Behrent 2016) over the extent to which Foucault was seduced by neoliberalism, thereby instigating the beginning of the Left’s disintegration into neoliberal centrism, is outside of the scope of my interest here.

(and in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Ireland and the UK), the neoliberal state has ripped up post-WWII social contracts, wreaked havoc on European citizenries, and has destroyed the modest post-war advances of social democracy. My understanding of neoliberalism's vehemence has been especially shaped by the way in which the EU has handled the Greek crisis. In its tenth year of ferocious recession and austerity (and having lost an unprecedented 25 per cent of its GDP since the first so-called 'bailout agreement' in 2010), Greece has been brought to its knees. To my mind, Greece's catastrophic decade betrays both the failure—or *success*, depending on one's vantage point—of neoliberal rationality, and the comprehensive failure of post-war social democracy to protect ordinary people from the onslaught of financialisation (Kouvelakis 2011, pp. 17–32). Where does that leave the ordinary citizen of the neoliberal state? If the Syriza experiment has anything to teach us, that should surely be that the neoliberal state is not only deliberately irrational in its rationality, but also ruthless in imposing its objectives (Sheehan 2016; Varoufakis 2016, 2017). Equally, the recent electoral surge of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour has highlighted that, collectively, the Left does not only need to come to terms with the multiple paradoxes of 'left governmentality'—Syriza's example is also case in point here<sup>5</sup> but that it also needs to push back against the rise of the far-right among the European working class, and, in so doing, reverse its revolutionary appetite which, as Gopal Balakrishnan argues, is not a recent phenomenon (Balakrishnan 2017, pp. 19–43). To be sure, in this historical conjuncture the Left cannot afford to be either sensible or moderate.

What does it mean to be a citizen of the neoliberal state? At no point has this question been timelier (Morgan Wortham 2017, pp. 42–43). While I do not wish to paint everyone with the same brush or draw equivalences where they do not exist, it seems it is currently common-place to designate most of Europe's citizens—and those who would risk life and limb to become European citizens—as 'second-class.' To advance an iteration of Tyler's work on social abjection, the majority of citizens in the advanced capitalist West are, to my mind, treated as a collective *miasma* that brings to mind the fate of Antigone after she disobeyed Creon's rule. A telling difference, however, is that while the king of Thebes punished Antigone because she broke the law, the leaders of the neoliberal state have been punishing their citizens because of the 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA) principle, and because, in Theresa May's words, 'there isn't a magic money-tree that we can shake.' To expand on the argument put forward by Tina Chanter, whereas Antigone sets out to oppose a political system which 'exclude[s] women's voices from its purview' (Chanter 2010, p. 24), the citizen of the neoliberal state exists within a political system that designates, by *fiat*, all citizens as secondary to the imperatives of its financialized rationality. It is pertinent, therefore—especially since the financial crisis of 2007/8—to talk of a law, *the neoliberal law*, whose intrinsic violence, both as a prerequisite *qua* enabling condition and as guarantor of the force of the law (Derrida 1990, pp. 919–1046), always operates with a view to punishing ordinary people for the sins (and, of course, to safeguard the privileges) of a select few. There is, in other words, a chasm between what one would call the law of the liberal/social-democratic state and the neoliberal law. From the first chapter of the seminal *Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls analyses 'the law' as a theory of justice predicated on 'fairness', and on a re-evaluation of 'the social contract' for post-WWII liberal society and its social institutions (Rawls 1999, pp. 3–40). Setting out to revise the basic principle of utilitarianism on which, according to him, much of legal theory had been based, he attributes to 'justice' the same position as that of truth—'justice,' he argues, 'is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought' (ibid., p. 3). Interestingly for my argument here, he further asserts that '[e]ach person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override' (ibid.). Rawls develops a vantage point, a starting premise, which, to be sure, would sound really alien to the ears of countless people (especially the young) in contemporary Europe (and especially in countries such as Greece, Portugal and so on). While the latest Eurofound report reveals that in countries like Greece, Belgium and the Netherlands the statutory

<sup>5</sup> For two countervailing approaches to Syriza's rise and fall, see (Kouvelakis 2016; Douzinas 2016).

minimum wage has been massively reduced (Karel 2018, p. 7),<sup>6</sup> the latest *Oxfam Inequality Report* reveals that just eight billionaires own the same wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people (Oxfam 2017). Beyond the egregiousness of these examples, there is a widespread impression that neither the causes of the 2007/8 crisis have been addressed, nor those responsible for the crisis have been brought to justice. The neoliberal law, therefore, has helped establish a rather over-generalised yet very potent truism—usually attributed to the British social commentator Owen Jones—that especially in Britain socialism is firmly established but only for the very rich (Jones 2014).

I use the term ‘law’ rather than ‘rationality’ or ‘governmentality’ here in order to precisely underscore the juridico-political nature of neoliberalism’s post-2007/8 resurgence and its correlative impact on society. The Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the EU and Greece—the legal documents that underwrite the successive ‘bailout’ programmes since 2010—have all been ratified by the Hellenic Parliament. As such, the immiseration of the Greek people for decades to come has been actuated by formal acts enacted by their own legislative body. I will elaborate more on the concept of law below, but for now it would suffice to note that the neoliberal law, to my mind, is far more ‘calculated’ than Derrida had in mind (Derrida 1990, p. 947), and far more brutal than the law of which Antigone fell foul. Whether we are talking about Greek pensioners committing suicide for fear of becoming a burden on their children, *sans papiers* refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, British working-class families demonised by a vicious government and an even more vicious media, or the effects of urban gentrification that culminated in the Grenfell Tower catastrophe, the law of the neoliberal state condemns its citizens to a state of miasma as a matter of policy. My use of the term ‘miasma’, which I explore further in the next section, aims at describing this very condition. I contend, therefore, that by fully understanding this state of affairs as one governed by a law against which we must take a stand, we enable ourselves to take a step toward reconsolidating class consciousness while renewing our commitment to creating a collective, resistant subjectivity capable of effectuating meaningful opposition. It is precisely to the latter that Sophocles’ heroine may contribute.

### 3. Sovereignty, Violence, Miasma

In attempting to draw parallels between Antigone—here, as a citizen of an ostensible state—and the citizens of the neoliberal state, I do not want to initiate yet another project of what Gourgouris would call ‘resacralization’—the treatment of literary texts as ahistorical sacraments outside the social and the political (Gourgouris 2003, p. xix). Equally, I do not offer an analysis based on an ostensibly universal ethics that pits one law (Antigone’s private law) against another (the law of Creon’s state) (Hegel 1979, pp. 261–65); nor do I explore Sophocles’ play as the dramatization of a solitary agent whose resistance may be translated into a powerful, desirous discharge or *jouissance* (Lacan 1997, pp. 243–56).<sup>7</sup> Rather, based on Judith Butler’s recasting of Antigone as a political actor (2000, 1–35), and Bonnie Honig’s analysis of her stance as part of a political *collective* (Honig 2013, pp. 7–8), I use the play, first, as an interpretative framework capable of elucidating the shared plight of European peoples and, second, as an instrument capable of carving a pathway to meaningful forms of resistance. In that respect, my analysis is close to that of Tina Chanter, who reads Antigone as a resistant *political* actor poised to ‘articulate a law (*nomos*) to which Creon remains blind;’ in doing so, Chanter argues, Antigone ‘sketches a future of a politics to come’ (Chanter 2010, p. 21).<sup>8</sup> Although Antigone did

<sup>6</sup> In the case of Greece, workers’ wages have been reduced by a massive 24.3% since 2010; in Belgium by 4.3% and in the Netherlands by 0.7%. Whereas in countries of the former Eastern bloc wages have generally gone up to reflect a will to level income across the EU, countries of the so-called European nucleus have seen wages either stagnate or increase only marginally (Karel 2018, pp. 6–8).

<sup>7</sup> For a succinct account of approaches to the *Antigone* by Hegel, Lacan and others, see the ‘Introduction’ to *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Wilmer and Žukauskaitė 2010, pp. 1–16).

<sup>8</sup> ‘The future of the law that Antigone announces’, Chanter continues, is one that ‘lies between [her] defiance—which I shall as ultimately a political protest—and the defiance of all those protesters to have followed in her footsteps, some of whom are still to come’ (Chanter 2010, p. 21).

not live in a democratic state whose task was to serve and protect its citizens, Creon's approach to the concepts of sovereignty, state-power, and the law treads along the same lines as that of many contemporary, neoliberal leaders, who seem unwilling to acknowledge the calamitous effects of neoliberal rationality on their citizens. Therefore, my reading of the Sophocles' play proposes a return to a politics of resistance as *praxis*, which necessitates revisiting Antigone as a political actor and civil disobedient acting in unison with others to resist the trespasses of the (Theban) state (Honig 2011, p. 34). Highlighting Antigone's singularity as a female *agonistes* is not tantamount to hero worship. I do not suggest that Antigone is somehow valiant because she *acted out* her resistance whereas Ismene is cowardly because she did not.<sup>9</sup> If we see them both, as Honig does, as a collective of resistance then the former—firebrand, peevish, impulsive and angry—complements the latter who appears collected, organised and methodical.

Agamben argues that in the citizen-state dialectic (whether the state is liberal/democratic or totalitarian), the former, as and when the latter sees fit, may essentially be stripped of his/her life as a political being/citizen, and be return to a form of 'bare life'—that is to say, to a condition of a mere body that the state may punish with impunity (Agamben 1998, p. 123). Although in order to trace the ambiguous relationship between bare life (*zoe*) and qualified life (*bios*) Agamben goes back to Aristotle, the perceived return to bare life in the present is (paradoxically enough) instituted by the advent of modernity and the first instances of western liberal democracy; that is to say, by the advent of the very structures designed to protect not only a citizen's bare life, but also her right to a social, political and cultural existence (ibid., pp. 118–31). The paradoxical nature of the relationship between a citizen's bare life and the state hinges on the fact that although the latter is supposed to exist to protect the former and, also, to guarantee its aspiration to a *bios*, it routinely resorts to acts of violence that compromise both (Schmitt 2005, pp. 1–15). This, as the *Antigone* shows, may happen without terminating physical life. The sentence passed by Creon suggests that having defied the royal decree Antigone can no longer be treated as a human being (let alone a citizen): she is incarcerated in a cave with a few rations of food to last her a few days. Although Agamben himself highlights a state of being which is neither bare life nor death (Agamben 1998, p. 100), my reading here aims at designating Antigone's state post-sentence as a miasma—that is, as a gangrenous limb that must be amputated from the body politic.<sup>10</sup> With its root in the Greek verb *μιαίνω* (to pollute, to contaminate), miasma is a useful trope in so far as it signifies both that which is abnormal, wayward, or fetid (and which must be aborted, cast out or eradicated) and that which is contagious or infectious (and, therefore, in need of control). Mobilising miasma achieves two things. First, it uncovers the possible challenges involved in the act of committed resistance; to fully understand one's existence as miasmatic is to foster class awareness and, potentially, fuel one's will to resistance. Secondly, it elucidates ways in which the *Antigone* may prove useful in solidifying a contemporary political intervention on our relationship with those who rule us (with or without our consent). Derrida's positioning of violence at the heart of the conceptual and performative expression of the law, and Agamben's designation of *homo sacer* as a state of indistinction between bare life and animal, are capable of providing a powerful intervention not only on the ways we conceptualise the relationship between citizen and the state, but also on the ways in which we source potential ways of resisting the law of the neoliberal state—a law which, as I shall argue in what follows, is more irrational and immoral than the law that Antigone defied.

In his first speech, Creon of Thebes makes use of the terms *polis* (city), *kratos* (government), *thronos* (throne), and *patris* (fatherland) (*Antigone*, 161–183).<sup>11</sup> Taken together, these terms coalesce to structure

<sup>9</sup> For a meticulous analysis of Antigone's relationship with Ismene, see (Kirkpatrick 2011, pp. 401–24).

<sup>10</sup> Here, I would like to vigorously differentiate my position from that of Slavoj Žižek who reads Antigone as a 'monstrous thing' (Žižek 2005, p. 348), firmly within the realm of the 'uncanny' (Žižek 2006, p. 223). In capitalising on miasma, I wish to transcend that which is strictly symbolic, and acknowledge both the role of the state in designating one as 'miasma' and the property or agency of the miasmatic to resist.

<sup>11</sup> All citations from the *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* refer to the original Greek texts that may be found in the digital library of Tufts University (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>); the numbers indicate lines not page numbers.



a definition of the state which combines, on the one hand, the concept of authority as predicated on the will of the people (*polis*) and, on the other, authority as the single most important endowment of sovereignty (*kratos*, *thronos*). This kind of authority is based on a self-reflexive, transcendental, almost metaphysical source of legitimation. It seems to be able to exist beyond, above or even despite the will of the people. There is a parallel here with the neoliberal state. Although in what is ostensibly called modernity the liberal state cannot (or, at least should not) exist outside or beyond the will of its citizens (Mouffe 2005, pp. 1–15), increasingly, the citizens of the neoliberal state bear witness to a process of gradual and ever-widening rupture between their will and the objectives of the state. According to the neoliberal law, for the state to survive its citizens must suffer—to the extent that an increasing number of them have no alternative than to either risk or ultimately end their lives.<sup>12</sup> Before that stage is reached, however, comprehensive forms of resistance must be found. To return to Sophocles, Antigone sets out to resist a state whose latest law is not only disengaged from the will of the people (*Antigone*, 499–507), but devoid of a credible legitimating ethics (*ibid.*, pp. 730–40). Despite Creon's charged oratory, the decision to leave Polynices' body unburied is based on a principle of self-aggrandisement both of himself and of his rule. Be that as it may, that only Antigone appears willing to act even though everyone—Ismene, the chorus elders, the people of Thebes—finds the royal decree abhorrent (*Antigone*, 43–79),<sup>13</sup> inevitably highlights her position as that of a civil disobedient and conscientious objector. A powerful, audacious woman standing up for what she believes to be right, she verbally assaults the king (Goldhill 2006, p. 160). In defying the royal decree, Antigone does not simply make a stand. In fact, she opposes both Creon's rule and, more importantly, the state at large in all its articulations: *polis*, *kratos*, *patris* and *thronos*.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Antigone rejects the *whole* symbolic order which valorises Creon's decree. To further reinforce the potency of this stand-off, Antigone is a woman—that is to say, not even a citizen in the eyes of the Theban state.<sup>15</sup> That said, it is not as though Antigone does not have a civil role. Although not a *citoyenne* in the strict sense of the word, she is herself connected with the royal family of Thebes and is also betrothed to Haemon, Creon's son. Thus, both her bare life—her body, her womb—and her qualified life as the future queen are inextricably linked with the Theban state.<sup>16</sup> It is important, therefore, to consider Antigone not only as a woman but as a woman-citizen. The exchange between 'woman' and 'woman-citizen' does not depersonalise or desexualise Antigone as being a woman her physical life appears umbilically linked with her social position (Steiner 1984; Foley 1992, pp. 127–68). Her fate as a woman is organically linked with the Theban state, both by blood (Oedipus) and betrothal (Haemon). Even so, Creon appears merciless in his decision to uphold the law—firstly, because it is *his* law, the law of a king, and, secondly, because it is the law of his state. The law, precisely because it *needs* to be the law, can be neither flexible nor merciful.

In a complex section of 'The Force of Law' (1990), Derrida makes the case for the relationship of violence (or force) with the idea of a legal system and, therefore, with the concept of law. Evoking

<sup>12</sup> For the increase of suicide rates in Greece and Europe post-2010, see Eurostat: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00122>.

<sup>13</sup> See also, (Honig 2011). Honig's thesis, derived from a close reading of the second exchange between the two sisters, suggests that Ismene's part in burying Polynices may be more important than heretofore believed. Honig argues—and she does so in a compelling way (Honig 2011, pp. 34–51)—that the first burial, the dusting of Polynices, is (potentially) carried out by Ismene, and that the sisters' intense verbal exchange before Creon, which leads to Antigone's death and Ismene's acquittal, constitutes an extremely loaded (and coded) understanding they two arrive at. Honig reads this sisterly exchange as the culmination of a double-faceted, complementary process, which would benefit contemporary interpretations of resistance as *praxis*. I find Honig's reading useful, but my focus here necessitates approaching Antigone both as part of a sororal collective, but also as a figure who decides to act *against* state rule, having reached a point where the act of civil disobedience is not only pertinent but necessary.

<sup>14</sup> This, of course, infuriates him: *emou de zontos, ouk arxei gune*—no woman will rule while I am alive (*Antigone*, 525).

<sup>15</sup> As Ismene puts it, *gunai' ote efumen, os pros andras ou mahoumena*—being women, we are not supposed to oppose the laws of men (*Antigone*, 61–62).

<sup>16</sup> When Ismene asks Creon 'would you kill your son's bride,' he replies, 'there are other furrows for his plough/there are other [women] he could plough' (*Antigone*, 568–569); see, also, (Honig 2010, p. 13).

but transcending Hobbes who explicitly sees law and force as mutually enabling yet external to one another notions,<sup>17</sup> Derrida argues that force is inseparable from the concept of law, insofar as it is foregrounded as well as realised in the possibility of the law. Further, argues Derrida, whereas justice is ‘incalculable’ the ‘law is the element of calculation (Derrida 1990, p. 947). It is conditioned by a number of socio-cultural, historical and juridico-political determinants, all of which succumb to contradictions, self-negations—that is to say, *aporias* (Derrida 2009, pp. 27–30; 1992, pp. 181–220). Also, the performative aspect of the law presupposes a dichotomy between the sovereign (or someone authorised by the sovereign—for instance, a judge) and he or she who stands ‘before the law’ waiting to be judged. This brings into sharp focus the inevitability of hierarchisation. Implicit in any form of hierarchisation is the possibility of violence or force—a possibility that, more often than not, appears as certitude. That said, Antigone is afforded the full process of the law. Even though Creon took over after the near destruction of the Theban state—which necessitated the institution of a state of exception (Agamben 2005, pp. 104–5)—he does not prevaricate on the issue. He lays down the law and acts within it. Leaving aside the severity of the sentence, it is arguable that the way in which he, first, legislates—the law is public for everyone to know—and, second, invites Antigone to explain herself, constitutes an exemplary way of upholding both the letter and the spirit of state law.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault begins the section on punishment with the reformist proposals of 1789: ‘Let penalties be regulated and proportioned to the offences, let the death sentence be passed only on those convicted of murder, and let the tortures that revolt humanity be abolished’ (Foucault 1977, p. 73). Although it would not be credible to counter-factually analyse the extent to which Creon’s treatment of Antigone measures up to the positions of eighteenth-century French legal reformism, it would be safe to suggest that, despite his initial willingness to afford her due process, the concept of proportionality is rather lost on him—especially if we think that the democratic feeling of the community as articulated by his son and the chorus seems to be turning against his decree (*Antigone*, 726–780, 801–805). It is precisely in this that Creon’s tragic dimension consists; as a ruler, he knows that the law ought to be upheld even when it goes against the wishes of the community.<sup>18</sup> That said, I contend that, strictly speaking, the citizen of the neoliberal state fares worse; in fact, s/he is closer to Kafka’s country-man before the closed gate of the law than s/he is to Antigone before Creon, the ruler of a totalitarian state. The neoliberal law falls short both of Creon’s sense of justice and of the reformist jurisprudence of 1789 noted by Foucault. And it does so in two ways: first, in the way in which it militates against the rights of ordinary citizens, and, second, in the way it treats citizens who resist. As I mentioned above, violence according to Derrida acts as the enabling condition of the law as a concept, and as the central constitutive element of its practical articulation. I suggest, however, that to the extent that it has brought into fresh and sharp focus Engels’ conclusions on social murder, the law of the neoliberal state has (re-)introduced a socio-economic and political reality, in the parameters of which the survival of the neoliberal state seems to depend on the brutal as well as total abjection of its citizens (Engels 1999, p. 107). And while the last ten or so years have borne witness to a series of powerful resistance movements, they have also borne witness to the neoliberal state’s steely resolve to brutally quell resistance by making full use of the letter of the law.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the parameters of what is just or indeed moral, violence is not only inscribed in the conceptual blueprint of the neoliberal law—in so far as it enables punishment and subsequent correction—but is antecedent to the law as much as it becomes the guarantor of its authority: simply put, without violence (or its possibility) there

<sup>17</sup> See Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*: ‘And covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all’ (Hobbes 1985, p. 223).

<sup>18</sup> I wish to thank the anonymous reader for highlighting this point in his/her review.

<sup>19</sup> Who can forget the 2011 picture of a security officer pepper-spraying a group of students engaging in a seating protest at University of California at Davis? Or Alfie Meadows’ fractured skull during the 2010 student protests in Britain a year earlier? Or the brutality of the neoliberal law as it was encapsulated by Eric Garner’s desperate cry ‘I can’t breathe’? Here, it would be useful to also note that to achieve its objectives neoliberal rationality has no qualms in absorbing and instrumentalising the most violent elements of the far-right—especially post-2007/8 (Worth 2015).

can be no law. The last ten or so years have borne witness to the ways in which the neoliberal law, valorised by the juridico-political authority of the neoliberal state that enables and codifies it, has been used to quell all forms of opposition to the rationality of deregulation and financialisation.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Resistant Subjectivities and the Neoliberal Law

I suggest that Antigone fares far better in the law-court of Creon's totalitarian state. Her being condemned to an existence lower than bare life—she becomes nothing more than a source of defilement to be cast out of the city—comes as a result of her disobedience.<sup>21</sup> It is at this stage when the parallels and differences between her and the citizen of the neoliberal state become discernible. Antigone failed to obey a law, whose sole legitimating agent was the royal edict. As a miasma that can be neither accommodated—she is *akosmos* [dissident, outsider, upstart]—nor, however, straightforwardly eliminated, she is led to her incarceration, a metaphor for the conceptual space afforded to those who, really, have no choice; to citizens who are neither citizens nor, however, in the eyes of the state, living human beings. That said, whereas Antigone is punished for daring to *desire* a polity more just than that presided over by Creon, the citizen of the neoliberal state seems to be punished for nothing more than daring to *exist*. Long before articulating a desire for an equitable polity, let alone fighting for one, the citizen of the neoliberal state is treated as a miasma, and it is as such that s/he poses a threat to the rationality of the neoliberal law.

The notion of miasma and its relationship with the body—sexual desire, genetic material and blood as legitimating agents of kinship—is central to Sophocles' Theban Cycle.<sup>22</sup> Oedipus assumed power because he rid Thebes of the plague; his children were then begotten with his mother, an act that, as Antigone underlines, is an indelible miasma instrumental to her own doom (*Antigone*, 839–871). Tiresias' first speech also underscores the miasmatic signifiatory value of Polynices' decomposing body and castigates Creon for it (*Antigone*, 1015–1018). Thus, the concept of miasma invokes Antigone's doomed race and serves as a warning to those who take up arms against their own. Polynices lies unburied not because he simply laid siege to the city of Thebes, but because he did so while maintaining blood-ties with the city. In fact, miasma cannot be conceptualised outside of the city—both as a physical space and as a signifier of kinship and shared blood-line (*Antigone*, 200–201). Indeed, it cannot be theorised outside or beyond the juridico-political injunction(s) of the city (or the state), and as such it is indivisibly linked with the concept of resistance itself.

Echoing Derrida, Howard Caygill argues that to reach a definition of resistance is to have expended all analytical resources and reached a *telos*, an undeconstructible point where analysis renders itself redundant (Caygill 2013, p. 7). This is not applicable to Antigone. The *in medias res* way that her decision is communicated suggests a curious absence of any conceptual investment on her part. Indeed, her resistance does not appear as a logical consequence of politically engaging with state oppression, but as natural and forthcoming as her pronouncements on love.<sup>23</sup> No matter how tempting it is to read the *Antigone* mainly as the story of a woman who in a fit of filial rage defied the rule of a king, it runs the risk of re-committing Sophocles' heroine to masculine, nineteenth-century

<sup>20</sup> The neoliberal law has created a socio-political reality, in which human beings are deprived of basic human rights—the bodies of *sans papier* refugees strewn lifeless across the Mediterranean is an indelible blot on Europe's record—and produced a so-called citizenry whose claim to a *bios*—access to decent education, healthcare and so on—is countenanced only to the extent that it makes financial sense. Examples of this are simply too many to note here; I would, however, mention the barbaric 'rape law' as part of the British government's wide-ranging welfare changes in 2017; see, 'Government Under Fire Over New Child Tax Credits', *The Guardian*, 6 April 2017.

<sup>21</sup> In loving the dead, Creon says, Antigone becomes like the dogs of Thebes poised to consume Polynices' corpse: *athapton, kai pros oionon demas kai pros kunon edeston* (*Antigone*, 204–205).

<sup>22</sup> 'Marriages that gave birth to me and from the same sperm [*tautou sperma*] you proved fathers, brothers and sons to share the same blood [*aim' emfulion*], and brides, wives and mothers' (*Oedipus Rex*, 1404–1407). The *Antigone*, too, is consummated in blood as the dying Haemon is locked in a bloody embrace with Antigone's lifeless body (*Antigone*, 1237–1242).

<sup>23</sup> *Outoi sunhthein, alla sumfilein efun*—I was not born to hate, but to love (*Antigone*, 523).



conceptualisations of femininity: hysteric, maniacal, but certainly submissive.<sup>24</sup> Instead, *maenadic* in her overall articulation,<sup>25</sup> and invested in parody, mimicry and more than a little penchant for violence, Antigone ought to be read as a deliberative resistant subjectivity which ties together the personal (filial loyalty) with the political in ways in which neither can exist without the other. Antigone does not have a death drive. Her defiance is endowed with political urgency and agency and, certainly, cannot be read simply as a mystical will to resistance. In defying Creon even on pain of death, Antigone defies his *vitaie necisque potestas* (right over life and death), the ‘unconditional’ authority of the sovereign (Agamben 1998, p. 87). It is precisely this, her political agency, that Creon considers dangerous and in need of control. Antigone’s politics is further nourished by a robust ethical positioning, which places one’s duty as a dissident above the state and its laws. The lack of diplomacy on her part, which comes in contrast with Ismene’s over-cautious initial speech, does not suggest lack of political savvy but a full-scale politics of resistance which acknowledges both its own momentum and the overall potential for wider proliferation within Thebes. Her exchanges with Creon are not only charged with rage but betray an acute awareness of the seriousness of her infraction and the severity of the impending punishment (*Antigone*, 497–537). Even at the prospect of extreme violence, Antigone launches a courageous, *public* attack against Creon and the whole concept of state authority (499–507). Antigone, a child by all accounts, is neither sensible nor moderate.

To recall Derrida on the force of law, violence forms the central thread which ties this text together—both as expression and consequence of state authority. From the beginning, the link between resistance, violence and pain is made explicit. The adjectives *kakon* (bad, grievous), and *algeinon* (painful) define Antigone’s prologue (1–10). Violence is made explicit at the very moment it is understood that Creon is not a mere statesman, but the Theban state personified. Ismene appears much quicker to realise that than Antigone who insists, initially, on focusing the thrust of her hatred on him (44–67). Ismene understands that Creon embodies the abstraction that is the Theban state in all its main branches of authority: legislative, judicial and executive. Creon, however, lays his cards on the table quite early. He states that not even filial loyalty may be placed above one’s duty to the state (182–183); in fact, kinship and/or friendship are contingent on the actual safety of the state itself and cannot be realised outside of its protective reach (188–190). Finally, he concludes that whoever defends the state, whether dead or alive, should be honoured (209–210). It seems that, *mutatis mutandis*, Creon’s speech could have been written for (and, in fact, be used by) any contemporary politician running for public office. The state becomes the protector of its citizens and guarantor of their well-being. The only thing it asks for, according to Creon, is that it be placed above all else so that it may, in turn, foster everything else. Implicit in this proposition is the notion of the state as ‘ideal.’ There is, in other words, a type of social contract, for which the citizen is required to relinquish, or suspend, his or her sovereignty in favour of a ruler/governor and the sovereign-state which he heads (Hobbes). In return, the citizen stands to receive all the advantages that Creon’s speech describes. Although the notion of the state as ‘ideal’ cannot be fully addressed here, it should suffice to argue, as Creon does, that a state which ‘protects and guarantees the safety of its citizens’ and ‘upholds the rule of law’ should be nothing but ideal (*Antigone*, 162–210, 280–314, 639–680). Creon’s speech certainly paints a picture of a totalitarian state, but it does aspire to a certain ideal relationship with its citizens.

<sup>24</sup> See Matthew Arnold, *On the Classical Tradition* (Arnold 1986, p. 12). Arnold does not actually write these words; contextually, however, my comment is justified; see, also, Yopie Prins ‘Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters’ (Prins 1999).

<sup>25</sup> It would be useful here to explain that the role of maenads in classical and pre-classical Greek imagination was to be Dionysus’ female entourage—hence their other name, *Bacchantes*. The word itself, *maenad*, means ‘mad woman’. The decidedly ambiguous and, potentially, ferocious articulation of ‘the feminine’ commands a special place in classical Greek literature—one need only think of Euripides’ *Bacchae* or *Medea*; that said, whereas other ciphers of the feminine—for instance, Erinyes, Nymphs and so on—inhabit an almost abstract, interstitial place between the spiritual and the material (Agamben 2013), maenads were decidedly flesh and blood, and possessed of a divine mania that men feared and admired in equal measure (Harrison 1991, p. 388). In describing, Antigone as ‘maenadic’, I wish to highlight the potentially explosive nature of her stance before the king of Thebes, and to suggest that a modicum of divine madness may be useful when one sets out to resist that which is overwhelmingly powerful.

Still, Creon is unable to grasp his folly even when it is illustratively put to him by Haemon, his son, during their heated exchange (726–780). Beyond its importance in paving the way for the famous choral song on love (781–800), Creon's exchange with his son also marks Antigone's gradual transformation from a rebel, an anarchist—or, as he puts it, *akosmos*—to a deeply engaged, almost democratic citizen poised to fuel the participatory feeling of her community. Although it is important to lay emphasis on the singularity of Antigone's stance before Creon, in their second stand-off she transcends the conceptual borders of this singularity and assumes the position of a resistant subjectivity that speaks for herself, for her sister, and for her community (806–943). In her dirge, she undoubtedly appears keen to draw attention to her own turmoil as a woman, as the daughter of a doomed family, and as a citizen; *she* alone is the one walking the path to destruction (806); only *her* fate is comparable to that of tragic Niobe (824–825); *she* is the one who is led toward her tomb and bridal-bed (891). However, these multiple references to her personal woes do not take place behind closed doors but in front of the whole community. Her exchanges with the chorus elders, her continuous invocations of Thebes as a *polis*—a dual signifier of nourishment and destruction—all point toward the necessity of placing Antigone's act (and its very public consequences) within a collective aspiration to resistance. When she talks back at Creon she does not do so only for herself but for, and on behalf of, her city (505). Even the sheepish old men of the chorus appear galvanised by her torment: 'Now', the chorus leader says, 'even I would rebel against the king', thereby exalting, even if it is for one moment, Antigone's act as something more than an incidental act of civil disobedience (801–805). Be that as it may, Creon is unshakeable. Even though Haemon reminds him that the people of Thebes are on Antigone's side, Creon perfunctorily dismisses their will—in effect, the very power on which he bases his rule—and asks 'am I supposed to rule for others or for myself,' to which Haemon replies '*polis . . . ouk esth' etis andros esth' enos*'—the city is not a single man (736–737). Fed up with his son's democratic insolence, Creon declares that '*ou tou kratoundos e polis nomizetai*'—the city cannot be conceptualised beyond its ruler (738). This paradox goes beyond the democratic paradox of liberal democracy as conceptualised by Mouffe—the clash between individual liberty and collective will (Mouffe 2009, pp. 1–13). Essentially, what Creon is asking here goes to the heart of democracy—who is better placed to judge what is best for the city, the sovereign or the people?

Not only does Creon's overall attitude recall Poulantzas' state as a construct aligned with the interests of its ruling class, but it succinctly evokes the paradoxical nature of sovereignty. As Agamben puts it, 'I, the sovereign, who am outside of the law, declare that there is nothing outside the law' (Agamben 1998, p. 15). Although it would be facile to argue that Creon is a democratic leader, the issue here is the concept of authority at large and the legitimating agents that sustain it. For instance, the chorus in Sophocles' play serves not only as a repository of some obscure, metaphysical wisdom, but as an important legitimating agent of state authority.<sup>26</sup> Without citizen consent, tentative or otherwise, there can be no conceptualisation of a sovereign state—totalitarian or neoliberal—much less of a single sovereign. Equally, however, without defiance and resistance there can be no state authority and the concept of law. State authority does not only depend on the self-reflexivity of the state and on the ways in which its legitimating agents—the law, the judiciary, the media—guarantee its power, but is also contingent on the will of the people to either acquiesce or resist. In the same way that Antigone's defiance makes no sense outside the conceptual parameters of Creon's authority—in

<sup>26</sup> It would be useful here to draw a parallel between the chorus in the play and the role of mainstream media in contemporary politics; in particular, the manifold ways in which so-called liberal institutions—for instance, the BBC—sustain and perpetuate the influence of the ruling elites, the banking industry and financial capital (Mills 2016, pp. 140–66). In that sense, the gradual dismantling of the state by neoliberalism is not really a dismantling of the *idea* of state authority but of the structures designed to protect its citizens. As such, the state maintains its role as arbiter of sovereignty, power and, of course, violence, but renounces all implied responsibility toward its citizens (Harvey 2005, p. 2). The paradox of the neoliberal state hinges, on the one hand, on its reliance on the will of the people—in reality, on the rubber-stamping of the will of the markets by the so-called 'democratic process'—and, on the other, on its tendency to act beyond, above and, to be sure, against the will and basic rights of the people.

fact, neither Antigone nor Creon makes sense without each other—the authority of the neoliberal state does not make sense outside or beyond its citizens' willingness to resist it.

## 5. Protest and Resistance, Sacrifice and Mourning

In so far as the global financial turnover has been relatively unaffected since the 2007/8 crisis while austerity for the many (as result and enabling condition of neoliberalism) has intensified thereby normalising the state of exception or crisis (Claessens and van Horen 2014), it is not an exaggeration to suggest that the neoliberal law is every bit as irrational, unethical and brutal as the law against which Antigone took a stand. Here, in the last section of the essay, I argue that the formation of Antigone's resistant subjectivity comprises three important aspects (or stages), the analysis of which here may help illustrate the conceptual proximity of Creon's decree to the neoliberal law, while problematising the conceptual challenges of resistance as *praxis*. The first stage in the formation of Antigone's resistant subjectivity is her complete awareness of what she sets out to resist. Antigone is thoroughly cognisant of Creon's brutality. Not only does his decree violate the limits of ethical behaviour but, as we have seen, it also goes against the collective feeling of the people of Thebes. Its legitimation springs from the state of exception in which Thebes finds itself, and, more importantly, from the authority of the sovereign which is as absolute as it is irrevocable. Antigone is acutely aware of this, and it is this that compels her to take a stand. The second stage is marked by her investment in mourning. From her very first address to Ismene (1–10), Antigone invokes her doomed lot: long before committing herself to the resistant act that would catalyse her future, Antigone was already mindful of her legacy—she is the daughter of loss, the spawn of an unutterable act. Indeed, we cannot theorise Antigone's resistance outside of the potent significances of mourning, especially in so far as mourning is both conceptually and practically aligned with sacrifice. And, to be sure, sacrifice reveals another stage or facet in the formation of her resistant subjectivity. Mourning and sacrifice, therefore, coalesce to impose a categorical imperative on Antigone's decision.

Given the play's tragic denouement, it is only proper that I start this section with sacrifice. That said, and even though Antigone made the ultimate sacrifice, I do not generally consider sacrificing *everything* as the be-all and end-all of effective resistance; however, in committing oneself to resistance one ought to be prepared to sacrifice *something*. To echo Caygill, resistance does not consist only in the existential dilemma 'to resist or not to resist,' but also, I would add, in one's ability to reconcile oneself with the possibility of sacrifice, even if by 'sacrifice' we denote the loss of one's status as a law-abiding citizen.<sup>27</sup> Effective resistance cannot be actuated within the parameters of a law designed to protect the interests of the state and its ruling class in the Poulantzian sense. As we have seen, Bonnie Honig reads Antigone and Ismene as a double-faceted resistant collective, as two mutually enabling resistant agents underwritten by significant personal investment in a collective socio-political objective. However, for the purposes of my analysis here the difference between the two is predicated on Antigone's willingness to sacrifice *something* and Ismene's reluctance to do the same—at least to begin with. What is more, Antigone's engagement with resistance and sacrifice appears to be—to appropriate a Derridean term—one of 'infinite responsibility' (Derrida 2005, p. 88). To the extent that resistance is a term as empty and irreducible as, perhaps, deconstruction—who resists *what* or *whom*, in *whose* name, and for *what* purpose—it remains constantly in need of a referent, a correlative qualifier capable of regulating its signifiatory valence and practical articulation (Couzens Hoy 2005, p. 5). In that way, the expectation or indeed promise of sacrifice makes sense when resistance—and, *in tandem*, the sacrifice expected of the resistant agent—is aligned with an emancipatory objective which is,

<sup>27</sup> I approach 'sacrifice' heuristically to establish that a certain amount of loss is a prerequisite condition of resistance. I do not conceptualise sacrifice in a sacramental—primeval or Judaeo-Christian—fashion and, as such, I share Terry Eagleton's conclusions in *Radical Sacrifice* (Eagleton 2018). In it, Eagleton develops a theory of sacrifice which treats the concept not as self-negation and/or as absolute self-effacement, but as a process that leads to the eventual acquisition of power—that is, sacrifice as a deeply political act (Eagleton 2018, p. 9).

first and foremost, underwritten by justice or, indeed, the promise of justice. Sacrifice and resistance as ‘infinite responsibility’ should, first, problematise the legitimacy of the decision to resist. As Caygill argues, ‘resistance understood in terms of the preservation or enhancement of the capacity to resist cannot be reduced to a binary opposition of “run or rest”, but must be situated within a complex spatio-temporal field that manifests itself in postures of domination and defiance’ (Caygill 2013, p. 4). While for Antigone the binary opposition ‘run or rest’ was never an issue, Ismene’s initial reluctance and subsequent submission to resistance as she sees her sister being led to her doom legitimises her own identity as a resistant subjectivity. Second, the sacrifice-resistance dialectic may protect the latter from displacement, misappropriation and eventual neutralisation. In so far as legitimate resistance is underwritten by infinite responsibility to an emancipatory objective, it cannot extent legitimation to an act (or acts) of indiscriminate violence as indispensable correlative of opposition. Sacrifice and resistance, cannot, and should not, exist outside of this injunction. At its core, therefore, the will to resistance presupposes a will to protest, while protest as an act—despite the conceptual complexities associated with the term and on which I will shortly elaborate—presupposes conciliation with sacrifice, and, consequently with the work of mourning. In initiating an act of resistance, one must be willing to succumb to, at the very least, learning to say ‘no,’ thereby being prepared to set oneself beyond, or outside of, the normal, the acceptable and/or the lawful. In other words, one ought to be prepared to be thought of, like Antigone, as *akosmos* [a dissident]—or, to borrow a *Daily Mail* term, a saboteur.<sup>28</sup> As such, the decision to protest signifies one’s conciliation with the possibility of being treated as a miasma—both as that which is unwanted and as contagion—and this, at the very least, is a sacrifice that the resistant subjectivity ought to be prepared to make.

Both in its Greek (*diamartyromai*) and Latin (*protestare*) etymologies, protest first and foremost denotes avowal, agreement and/or affirmation.<sup>29</sup> Especially in Greek, the term contains the element of *martyria* which can mean both, and at the same time, bearing witness to *and* suffering (or sacrificing oneself) for a cause—hence ‘martyr’ and ‘martyrdom.’<sup>30</sup> Even though in some contexts protest suggests wholehearted commitment to a certain cause, in others it may denote dissent, disenchantment or disagreement. Regardless of whether it is interpreted as agreement or disagreement, protest appears trapped between two antithetical semantic poles, thereby giving rise to a considerable amount of ambiguity. This conceptual self-entrapment should not be seen as undermining the validity of protest as resistance. Seen in that way, protest becomes a portmanteau concept, one in which avowal, acceptance and affirmation coexist with dissent, disagreement and, of course, resistance. However, whereas in order to conceptualise resistance an opposing force has to exist (Caygill 2013, pp. 23–29; Couzens Hoy 2005, pp. 3–12), protest may take place (and indeed be fulfilled) even in the absence of opposition. If, as Caygill argues, resistance constitutes an irreducible position predicated on a (potentially) equally irreducible opposition (Caygill 2013, p. 19), the avowal of sacrifice—in other words, the avowal of loss—ought to be an indispensable prerequisite of both. To be sure, Antigone’s protest consists both in her avowal of Creon’s authority, and in her own right—as a woman, a citizen, and a sister—to bury her dead brother. This act of avowal precedes *and* leads to her act of resistance. At no point during her encounter with Creon does Antigone negate his authority. Indeed, there is no point in resisting that which can easily be subdued. Therefore, her political choice is to mock him, to deride his folly, and castigate his barbaric rule. Thus, by virtue of its originary nature as ‘acceptance’ protest becomes an *arche*, and may signify ‘beginning’, ‘authority’ and, of course, ‘power’. In that sense, protest may also appear as undeconstructible and unanalysable a notion as resistance.

Protest, then, may appear both as a self-fulfilling prophesy and as a concept at war with itself. Granted, as ‘avowal’ it may precede ‘resistance,’ but as a concept it is enmeshed in a complex network

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Mail*, 19 April 2017, front-page.

<sup>29</sup> I do not suggest that these terms are semantically straightforward; for the purposes of my analysis here they should be seen to denote an initial stage of reflection or deliberation—leading to affirmation of ‘sacrifice’ and engagement with resistance.

<sup>30</sup> See (Douzinas 2013); Douzinas discusses protest as *martyria* throughout.

of juridical, political and theological determinants, all of which calibrate its conceptual proximity to (and practical efficacy) as ‘resistance,’ while doing nothing to disambiguate its semantic scope from (and in relation to) *praxis*—that is to say, from and in relation to what it seeks to achieve. Nowhere is this more obvious (or indeed useful) than in texts such as the *Antigone*. Of course, it would be facile to even insinuate that it is only by, and through, reading such texts that we come, or learn how, to resist. There are, however, a number of ways in which the reception of such texts may foster an ethics of resistance. The very ambiguity inherent in ‘protest’ as a concept carves out *both* an ethics of engagement with what is to be resisted and the multiple torments involved in the process of resistance. In *Antigone’s* case, protest necessitates a dual act of acceptance and dissent, which precedes the final, uncompromising act of resistance—the articulation of an absolute ‘no’. Her protest—replete with multiple gestures of avowal, rejection, remonstrance and unbelievable tenderness—suggests that a certain ambiguity is always present for as long as it takes protest to become an undeconstructible, unanalysable form of resistance. *Antigone’s* avowal of her dead brother’s right to a proper funeral would constitute no offence had she not acted on it. Ismene was spared not because of Creon’s magnanimity, but because her own protest (563–581), albeit as vocal and virulent as that of *Antigone*, was never (and for whatever reason) transformed into an act of resistance—that is, into a disruptive act that would unsettle the Theban state and its ruler. The moment *Antigone* herself transcends ‘protest’ and embraces ‘resistance’ she becomes an enemy of the state and is, therefore, sentenced to a ‘life’ in a cave, to a life neither bare nor qualified, to a life undeserving of family, citizenship or law; in short, to a life not worth living.

It is at this point where the relationship between resistance and mourning becomes manifest. To the extent that effective resistance takes place precisely within the parameters of an effort to eradicate a given status-quo and replace it with another, it cannot be realised devoid, or outside, of a double-faceted engagement with the work of mourning. On the one hand, to seek to replace a certain state of affairs (or socio-political reality) with another presupposes full cognition of what has been (or is in danger of being) lost to (or because of) this state of affairs (or socio-political reality). For instance, Wendy Brown invites us to mourn the loss of liberal democracy as the first prerequisite of resisting the ravages of neoliberalism (Brown 2005, pp. 37–57). Although I do not entirely share Brown’s assertions on the historico-political affordances of liberal democracy, her central premise pertaining to the need to mourn in order to resist strikes me as rational and useful. On the other hand, the combinatory potential of mourning and resistance, which presupposes an epistemological break with one’s current reality and its substitution with another, ultimately reveals one’s readiness to affirm, to avow (and, certainly, to reconcile oneself with) the loss of said reality. The French title of Derrida’s *The Work of Mourning* (2003) is telling: *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* [every time unique, (every time) the end of the world] does not have an eschatological aspiration but rather underscores that the work of mourning—and, here, our engagement with resistance—is first and foremost dependent on our willingness to accept the conceptual and practical significances of loss. This, of course, is easier said than done. The loss of a loved one—or indeed the loss of an ideal, a way of life or a socio-political reality—presupposes conciliation with the work of mourning as the means through which a new (hopefully better) socio-political reality may be created. Derrida’s ‘democracy to come’ (Derrida 2004, p. 325), or, indeed, the ‘messianic without messianism’ (Derrida 2006, pp. 74, 211) are useful concepts here, but in articulating our resistance to a certain socio-political reality we essentially seek to achieve its ‘death’ and to effectuate the coming of a new one.<sup>31</sup> The driving question here should be who is willing to mourn, or who is ready to withstand the (potentially ferocious) violence of mourning? In asking these questions I, of course, underscore the centrality of violence—or its possibility—as an instrumental element of resistance. In fact, being subjected to violence—verbal,

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted here that this is precisely how Tina Chanter also reads *Antigone*, as a resistant subjectivity which announces a ‘future political order’ (Chanter 2010, p. 26). Chanter does not, however, underscore the conceptual and practical importance of ‘mourning’.



physical, or psychological—and/or perpetrating violent acts is a sacrifice, with which the resistant subjectivity ought to be reconciled. That said, to the extent that this is countenanced by the resistant agent, the emancipatory aspiration of rightful resistance ought to be animated, according to Caygill, by the virtues of justice, courage/fortitude, and prudence—‘all three contributing’, according to him, ‘to the deliberate preservation and enhancement of the capacity to resist’ (Caygill 2013, p. 12). There is an ineluctable paradox at play here. Whereas courage/fortitude may expose one to extreme violence or death, thereby negating his/her ability to further resist, prudence presupposes understanding that resistance consists in more than the binary ‘resistance/non-resistance’. It is the collective combinatory potential of resistance that interests Caygill, a potential that the *Antigone* so marvelously illustrates. Caygill explores the efficacies of this combination by analysing the case of the women of Greenham Common in juxtaposition with the Mexican Zapatistas. Whereas the former were invested in a collective understanding of resistance as rejection of (military) violence, the Zapatista resistants had not only reconciled with violence but ‘consider[ed] themselves as already among the ranks of the dead’ (ibid., p. 125). This precisely underscores the awesome combinatory potential of resistance in the *Antigone*. Ismene’s deliberative, methodical approach is supplemented and fortified by Antigone’s instinctive alliance with mourning and death.

Lastly, the resistant subjectivity that commits itself to resisting injustice for the sake of an egalitarian, emancipatory politics ought to be fully aware of the folly, callousness and injustice of the politics s/he seeks to change. As a number of political theorists and philosophers have shown—from Harvey and Brown, to Butler and Derrida—the law of the neoliberal state, especially post-9/11, ushered in an era characterised, in the main, by the noxious combination of neo-imperial expansion, financial deregulation, and relentless privatisation of state assets. In some parts of the world—see Greece—deregulation and privatisation were further intensified post-2007/8 with a view to shifting blame from the toxicity of financial capital that caused the crisis to the supposed trespasses of the welfare state. The first aspect of Antigone’s resistance I mentioned above—that is, her steadfast belief that the law she sets out to defy was unethical, irrational and brutal—is also the hardest to realise. As Caygill shows, resistance is not only articulated by the resistant subjectivity committed to an egalitarian, emancipatory objective, but also by those whose interests are better served by opposing such egalitarian, emancipatory objectives. In her analysis of neoliberalism’s *stealth* revolution (2015), Wendy Brown argues that its rationality does not limit itself to the realm of the economy but stretches across every facet of public and private life. Since neoliberalism has succeeded in establishing itself as a socio-economic, cultural and political hegemony, to even begin to question the legitimacy of its rationality—that is to say, its law—is an awesome task. Preventing this from happening constitutes neoliberalism’s first line of defence (and resistance to all potential challenges). Therefore, understanding what the opposition is all about is an important (if not *the* most important) step in setting out to solidify an effective resistant subjectivity.

Even though, for the sake of clarity, I have listed these stages in order, I do not suggest that successive linearity is the only way through which resistant subjectivity may be formed. The July 2015 Referendum in Greece and the 2017 General Election in the UK, prove that even direct or parliamentary democracy may constitute arenas of effective political resistance, arenas in which citizens, who are neither entirely ready nor entirely willing to resist neoliberalism, may align themselves with a political proposition animated by a vocabulary of hope, solidarity and collective endeavour. The possibility of a revolutionary politics of and for the future, according to Razmig (Keucheyan 2014, pp. 252–55), is predicated on our ability to resist the ravages of (neo)liberalism by conceptualising and enacting ‘new strategic paradigm(s)’ capable of defending material conditions while addressing, I would add, the urgencies of supra-nationalism, automation, and political ecology (ibid., p. 254). After decades of establishing itself as the only socio-economic and political hegemony, neoliberalism has run out of options and has, in effect, placed diverse electorates in the advanced capitalist West in a metaphorical ante-chamber to resistance. Predicated on a palindromic movement from opposition to acquiescence and from emancipation to morbid despair, people’s resistant subjectivity is collectively formed as I am

writing these lines. I noted above that although Antigone's resistance appears almost as natural as her pronouncements on love, it is, in fact, made possible by a series of individual steps, all of which are marked by both avowal or acceptance and rejection or negation. Her head-on clash with Creon and the complete rejection of the symbolic order which valorises his rule is preceded by the acceptance of sacrifice and mourning as constitutive parts of an ethics of resistance that is robust and urgent. As Honig argues, mourning constitutes an important aspect of the process of resistance, in so far as it is, on the one hand, capable of monumentalising the enormity of what has been lost and, on the other, in a position to stage conflict as a state of affairs between two commensurate, albeit rival, (political) economies (Honig 2009, pp. 5–43; Detloff 2007, p. 50). The most potent will to resistance presupposes, at the very least, a tacit reconciliation with sacrifice and, therefore, with the possibility of mourning. To my mind, this is the main reason for which Antigone is still relevant today. To know how to mourn, and Antigone certainly does, is to know precisely what has been lost and, more to the point, what *could* be lost further.

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