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« UNTANGLING DESIRE; A QUEER READING OF  
SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* AND EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*».  
«ΜΑΡΙΕΤΤΑ ΚΟΣΜΑ»

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## ABSTRACT

A queer reading of Sophocles' *the Antigone* and Euripides' *the Bacchae*, tragedies of the fifth century BC. This thesis addresses the way that the female bodies go beyond the confines of their *oikos*, of the polis and of an essentialized identity and thus attain an alternative identification. Narratives of violence, commodification and objectification of the body are exposed through the dialectic of the gaze. The notion of performativity of the body comes to the forefront as it directly connected to the exposition of a queer identity. The definitional boundaries of the body are explored through queer studies, psychoanalysis and phenomenology. The possibility for same-sex desire emerges, exposing the complexity of female sexuality. The transformation of Antigone and Agave as radical subjects through subversive acts of agency is revealed.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μια εναλλακτική προσέγγιση της *Αντιγόνης* του Σοφοκλή και των *Βακχών* του Ευριπίδη, τραγωδιών του 5<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα π.Χ. Η διπλωματική αυτή πραγματεύεται τον τρόπο με τον οποίο τα γυναικεία σώματα ξεπερνούν τα όρια του οίκου, της πόλης και της βασικής ταυτότητας και έτσι αποκτούν μια διαφορετική ταυτότητα. Αφηγήσεις βίας, εμπορευματοποίησης και αντικειμενικοποίησης του σώματος παρουσιάζονται μέσω της διαλεκτικής του βλέμματος. Ο όρος της επιτελεστικότητας του σώματος έρχεται στο προσκήνιο και είναι άμεσα συνδεδεμένος με την έκθεση της εναλλακτικής ταυτότητας. Τα προσδιοριστικά όρια του σώματος εξερευνούνται μέσω εναλλακτικών μελετών, της ψυχανάλυσης και της φαινομενολογίας. Η πιθανότητα ομοφυλοφιλικής επιθυμίας ανακύπτει, εκθέτοντας την πολυπλοκότητα της γυναικείας σεξουαλικότητας. Είναι φανερό η μετάπλαση της Αντιγόνης και της Αγαύης σε αυθύπαρκτες προσωπικότητες μέσω της επιτέλεσης ανατρεπτικών πράξεων αυτενέργειας.

## INTRODUCTION

“To underestimate, ignore and diminish space amounts to the overestimation of texts, written matter, and writing systems, along with the readable [...] to the point of assigning these a monopoly on intelligibility.”<sup>1</sup>

Sophocles' *the Antigone* and Euripides' *the Bacchae* belong to the same tradition of works, as they are both tragedies that expose how queer identity is constructed through Antigone and Agave respectively. Through these plays different ways of constructing one's identity are exposed. Both tragedies focus on the transgression of boundaries on multiple levels. Sophocles' *the Antigone* and Euripides' *the Bacchae* belong to the same tradition of works that invoke the trauma of the protagonist in order to expose how the oikos has influenced the construction of female and male identity. The dire need of the female subjects, Antigone and the Maenads to voice their trauma emerges from the dynamic that is created by the interplay of the oppositions from which the narrative is created, the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment. Women of the fifth century and especially those with a queer identification need to be reinscribed in history and be brought in the forefront. Sophocles and Euripides open up the space for the exclamation of such narratives. Sophocles opens up the locus for addressing extensively the issue of contradictory emotions of the protagonist in the fabric of the narrative of the tragedy.

With my thesis, I try to show how queer theory offers the possibility to reconsider how the audience of the fifth century perceives gender by bringing to the forefront implications that did not exist in previous gender discourses. There is a division among the real experience of women and their representation. A constructed, fictional image of women appears “on the stage, in the myths, and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender of "woman" while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings, and fantasies of actual women.”<sup>2</sup> In the context of the theater, women roles were enacted by male actors in drag because actual women were prohibited from acting. In order for women to be portrayed in tragedies, male actors need to be dressed as women. Masks, costumes and other props are the way in which women are represented; however cannot speak for themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Lefebvre 1974, 62

<sup>2</sup> Case 1985, 318

The beginning of theatrical activity started with Dionysus' cult and the festivals that took place in his honor during the fifth and sixth century B.C. The notion of acting, of a façade and the notion of space emerged from these festivals. "Scholars do not record any evidence for specific laws or codes forbidding women to appear in the songs and dances, nor is there any evidence for the specific date or occasion of the beginning of their omission" from the practices of the theater.<sup>3</sup> Hence, their exclusion from the theatrical tradition is opaque. Margarete Bieber states that "it was part of the "Attic morality" to "banish women from public life.""<sup>4</sup> Therefore, their exclusion from such practices was laying in cultural practices. Ultimately women were excluded from stage.

The analysis of gender roles in Greek tragedies has been an interest of academics during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. "There is in fact, no literature, no art of any country, in which women are more prominent, more carefully studied and with more interest than in the tragedy [...] of fifth century Athens."<sup>5</sup> That is what originally drew my interest towards the tragedy. Tragedies provide the field for reflection of one's positioning.<sup>6</sup> "On a superficial level plays such as "[the *Antigone* and] the *Bacchae* might easily be seen as cautionary tales, designed to bring home the message that women who invade masculine areas of activity wreak terrible havoc in their families and communities."<sup>7</sup> However, this is a simplistic view. Even though there have been many scholars who have dealt with gender studies to expose the sexual inequality in Greece of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, there has not been enough scholarship around desire through the lens of queer studies. With this thesis, I attempt to explore the construction of an alternative identification, a queer one of Antigone and Agave, opening up the possibility for the existence of an alternative space of existence. One should bear in mind that "every work of art ... requires interpretation

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<sup>3</sup> Case 1985, 319

<sup>4</sup> Bieber 1989, 9

<sup>5</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 2 See: Mueller, M. 1980. *Children of Oedipus and Other Essays on the Initiation of Greek Tragedy 1550-1800*.

<sup>6</sup> See: Gomme, A.W. 1925. "The position of women in Athens in the fifth and fourth century BC", in *Classical Philology*. 20:1-25.

<sup>7</sup> Blundell 1995, 176

in the contemporary idiom and against the contemporary concerns of each generation.”<sup>8</sup>

This thesis consists an investigation of the ways in which queer theory can be employed in Sophocles’ *the Antigone* and Euripides’ *the Bacchae*. A queer reading exposes the discrepancy between gender identity in the context of hegemonic heterosexuality and desire. My thesis stands as a reference point for the existence of marginal identities and sexualities that do not fall into the normative discourse of sexuality. A queer reading deconstructs the fixity of one’s sexual identity as there is no such thing as a unitary identity politics. Thus, emphasis is placed on the fluidity and the constant reformation of a previously stable identity. It could be argued that employing queer theory in an ancient Greek play could be problematic as this field is connected to recent categorizations of desire, such as lesbianism and gayness; however these so called “dissident” desires consist universal phenomena that existed since the beginning of time. Queer theory encompasses the exploration of a wide range of topics such as gender ambiguity, cross-dressing and more generally any incoherence in the way that the categories of gender and desire are connected. The notion of performativity is central to queer studies. Thus, “gender-b(l)ending also blends reality and performance, effectively deconstructing both”.<sup>9</sup> The idea is termed “gender performativity,” coined by Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. The notion of an essential identity has been rejected by theorists as deconstruction is a strategy constantly employed in the concretized scheme of selfhood.

My aim is to re-examine tragedy in relation to one’s identity. I will try to unravel through my approach the attitudes of Athenian citizens while deconstructing gender norms and challenging their ideas of gender construction. This thesis traces the repression and at the same time the visibility of queer representation in the theatrical scene of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Tragedies are the perfect genre to examine gender roles as through performativity it is possible to examine gender roles as identity is a highly performative construct. “Gender, which is ordained by social convention, as opposed to ‘natural’ sexual identity, becomes an area, whose boundaries, if not transgressed, are stretched by stage-women so far that they invade the sphere of masculinity.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Segal 1986, 366

<sup>9</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 73

<sup>10</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 6

Women transgress the boundaries of their femininity as they act beyond the confines of this construct and blur the boundaries among sex and gender. Thus, there is a discrepancy among fictional women in tragedies and the Athenian women of the fifth century. These heroines exhibit characteristics “more appropriate to the masculine conception of the Athenian citizen.”<sup>11</sup>

The importance of gender in understanding one’s identity and political standing is obvious, as gender and politics are intricately connected. Earlier scholarship “has focused on the status of women and the realia of their lives”.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the real experience of these women cannot be fully recovered however it can be reconstructed up to a certain point. The intersection between the political, the social and one’s sexuality is pivotal in relation to the construction of identity. I shall impart my own interpretation of femininity as all the information we have about the women of the fifth century are from male sources which limit the real experience of these women. Drawing information from legal literature is extremely helpful in my analysis, as it will shed light to the social standing and status of women.

Athenian women were confined in the domain of the house and did not participate in public life with the exception of some particular occasions, such as marriages and laments in funerals, always in the presence of men, as they were considered being closer to nature. Attention should be drawn to the fact that they were “regarded in ordinary life as second-class citizens and secluded to the extreme of public invisibility, women nevertheless appear prominently on Athenian stage.”<sup>13</sup> This seems to be contradictory yet it perplexes the women’s social standing. Nancy Hartsock, in *Money, Sex and Power* states that “the Greeks defined the household as a private, apolitical space from the public, [yet a] political space of the polis”.<sup>14</sup> “The result was a theorization of politics and political power as activities that occurred in a masculine arena characterized by freedom from necessary labor, dominance of intellect or soul”, whereas the domestic place was the space where bodily needs were in the forefront.<sup>15</sup> Motherhood was the sole aspect of the women’s identities. The female

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<sup>11</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 6

<sup>12</sup> Segal 1986, 366

<sup>13</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 2

<sup>14</sup> Hartsock 1983, 187

<sup>15</sup> Case 1985, 320



body was rendered as a commodity. It was often colonized by the desires of the males. They needed to satisfy their husbands' desires and at the same time maintain the equilibrium of the oikos.

The oikos was the basic unit for citizenship. It was connected to the polis and the public life. The oikos was the "site for the creation and transmission of personal wealth".<sup>16</sup> Ownership was limited to males whereas women could only participate to such transactions rarely, with great limitations. It should be noted that "women could only enter into inheritance transactions in the absence of a male".<sup>17</sup> They were viewed as commodities that only served for certain exchanges. Within this system more particularly within this economical state of affairs, women became "a medium of exchange and marriage became an institution of ownership".<sup>18</sup> Women were not able to handle their economical affairs. They "were lifelong legal minors, could not be involved in financial transactions, and were always under the tutelage and protection of some κύριος, a legal guardian who was usually a male next-of-kin."<sup>19</sup> Marriage was denoted with the word 'ekdosis' that "meant loan – [they] were loaned to their husbands by their fathers, and in the case of a divorce, they were returned to their fathers".<sup>20</sup> Therefore, with this system of organization of wealth arose a change in the way that political units were organized. The social standing of women was contrary to the ideal of sexual equality. We should consider the fact that the lives of women were characterized by economic and social variations.

In the theatre women lacked representation as speaking subjects, as they were constructed in a way in which they constitute a being reduced to nature, as they were subjected to male desire. Thus, there is a crisis in terms of the representation of women. However, theater as a visual art opens up the locus for the exploration of the female body "without engendering "woman.""<sup>21</sup> That is of particular interest, as I attempt with this thesis to grapple with the problematic of the body, as the body represents the male economy. I want to address the issue of the gaze as it is

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<sup>16</sup> Case 1985, 319

<sup>17</sup> Case 1985, 319

<sup>18</sup> See: Rubin, Gayle. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter, for an analysis of women as a means of exchange through marriage.

<sup>19</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 3

<sup>20</sup> Case 1985, 319

<sup>21</sup> Davy 1989, 157

intricately connected to voyeurism - a force leading to commodification/confinement to a course of action but at the same time it can operate as conducive to one's liberation. The mechanisms of voyeurism and scopophilia are central to the dialectic of construction of one's identity. The very existence of the entity of the performing body "in live, three- dimensional, theatrical space suggests a venue for undermining the mechanisms that contribute the fetishism in representational systems that have a visual dimension".<sup>22</sup> Theatre could be viewed as "an "arena of presence," over-constructing the performative dimensions of the [tragedy], to produce a kind of "radical presence.""<sup>23</sup> Therefore, through the dialectic of the body which is located at the center of the narrative, one can move beyond his liminal representation towards a more nuanced sense of self.

In the case of Pentheus, by over-constructing the body, the mechanisms of the metamorphosis are revealed and are being foregrounded, therefore undermining the mere construction of women as a body. The scene of Pentheus' cross-dressing "foregrounds gender as "man-made"", as wearing a female attire "inscribe[s] the body as female and, conversely, the female." <sup>24</sup> Pentheus moves along subjects positions, as he exists in a continuum and identifies as a queer subject. Therefore, his identity is multi-faceted. This needs to be further explored.

De Lauretis in "The Technology of Gender," argues what could be described as:

"the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation. [A] movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or "between the lines," or "against the grain") of hegemonic discourses. [... .] These two kinds of spaces are neither in opposition to one another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they coexist concurrently and in contradiction. The movement between them, therefore, is not that of a dialectic, of integration, of a

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<sup>22</sup> Davy 1989, 158

<sup>23</sup> Davy 1989, 158

<sup>24</sup> Davy 1989, 158

combinatory, or of difference, but is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy.”<sup>25</sup>

Queer theory shows that there is a multiplicity of potential identities for marginalized groups. Queer identity is defined exactly from its distance from the normative. Hence, the notion of orientation is extremely important. A central question is what it means to be oriented. To have a certain orientation signifies being turned towards specific objects that function as signs that expose our direction. In this regards, the notion of sexual orientation needs to be explored. “If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as "who" or "what" we inhabit spaces with”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, a phenomenological approach needs to be encompassed into my queer reading.

The notion of orientation exposes the sexualization of the territory and it foregrounds the spatiality of one’s sexual desires.

“Environment can be understood in two different ways. First, there is what one can do with and in a space; secondly, there is the acceptance of a given space. In the first case, one *creates* an environment by transforming a space; in the second case, one *negotiates* with an environment, engaging in a scenic dialogue with a space.”<sup>27</sup>

I wish to render a novel way of theorizing the concept of orientation in regards to the ways that bodies occupy space. What is within one’s limit and what is out of reach delimitate one’s orientation and more broadly one’s sexuality. Emphasis should be placed “on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the "living body””.<sup>28</sup>

Gender has a performative aspect as it is related to the issues of the body. What is problematic and needs to be considered is that “long-termed iterations of accepted norms of bodily presentation are in tense with the incredible variability in individual bodies and individual embodied experiences”.<sup>29</sup> It is essential to enable

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<sup>25</sup> De Lauretis 1987, 26

<sup>26</sup> Ahmed 2006, 2

<sup>27</sup> Collins and Nisbet 2012, 95

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed 2006, 2

<sup>29</sup> Ahmed 2006, 96

resistance by exposing the forces of naturalization of one's identity through performativity. What is interesting is that queer readings put into question the "rigidity of many binary structures".<sup>30</sup> To be more specific "the notion that "a body" per se does not exist: [but there is] access to bodies through their positioning in one or other discourse".<sup>31</sup> Thus, the issue of the body is volatile as it is not a rigid identification of one's sex but rather a construction; thus essentiality is placed under scrutiny. Therefore, the boundaries of one's body are not clear-cut as there is not fixity but rather a fluidity that renders their delimitation permeable.

A queer reading has a disruptive effect on normative sexuality as it puts into question the distinctive aspect of being queer if sexuality is out of the conversation. "The process of abjection delimits subjects through the stigmatization of others "as dangerous and unnatural".<sup>32</sup> Power is a central force in regards to the notion of queerness and more broadly to sexuality. According to Butler, performativity is defined as "that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names".<sup>33</sup> The power of the performative lies in the reiteration of a set of practices. Thus, an act's power does not simply lie in its invocation but also in its performance. Butler claims that gender is

"a very material, visible process. A gendered identity and a sexed body are produced by processes that occur on the surface of the body. The repeated stylizations of the body – everyday acts and gestures- are themselves performative, producing the gendered identity of which they are thought to be the expressions. Through that repetition of acts of gender congeal over time identities. The material aspect of these norms, repeated and taken up in cycles, lends authority to the naturalized identities"<sup>34</sup>.

A queer reading disrupts the casual explanation of the tragedy and gives rise to a plethora of questions that preexisted but have not been answered before. In a queer reading, the term "hubris" signifies "excess". A central question that needs to be

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<sup>30</sup> Ahmed 2006, 96

<sup>31</sup>Ahmed 2006, 96

<sup>32</sup> Bolger 2012, 95

<sup>33</sup> Bolger 2012, 95

<sup>34</sup> Butler 1990, 25

addressed is what is it that renders the queer as excessive. The protagonist of the tragedy suffers from a tragic fall that will lead to his downfall. Queerness “threatens to undo Aristotle’s prescription for the good of the social order”.<sup>35</sup> The tragic hero’s life is delimited and at the same time liberated by the notion of excess. The queer excess delineates one’s desires. The tragedy of excess “needs to be recuperated as a play abiding by the strict rules of aesthetic composition”.<sup>36</sup>

In my thesis, I explore the signification of the female bodies that are forced into silence and are rendered unseen. The body could be viewed as a medium for gaining agency and at the same time as a tool of oppression. It is central to the construction of subjectivity. I show how performativity comes into the discourse of the formation of one’s identity. I expose how Antigone and Agave are able to reconstruct their identity, assert themselves and their sexuality and emerge as radical subjects; hence they attain a more nuanced sense of self.

I explore the question of positionality within the structure of a power hierarchy in a specific geographical space through phenomenology. Scholarship suggests that the ancient Greeks had a more permeable and interactive understanding of space than we do. It should be noted that there is not adequate scholarship around the function of space in relation to the domain of theater. A set of spatial boundaries could be viewed through deconstruction as they give rise to the emergence of a different identification; a queer one. Polarities such as male and female, woman and other are predominant in the reading of Greek tragedies which depends on a “spectrographic division of a narrative into exotopic speech positions.”<sup>37</sup> However, there is another dimension to that. There is “a proliferation of competing “sets of spaces”, each designed to function conceptually with little concern for the physical or affective nature of the phenomenon.”<sup>38</sup> Competing spaces seem to come along into a uniform construction. A major concern though is:

“while temporality is presented as the subject’s structure of being, why isn’t spatiality equally well presented as a fundamental structure of being? ... Temporality cannot be a true temporality unless it is in

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<sup>35</sup> Eldeman , Menon 2016, 296

<sup>36</sup> Eldeman , Menon 2016, 296

<sup>37</sup> Wise 1998, 210 See: Segal 1993, 148-57 has investigated the polarity between the public and the private of the dramatic character.

<sup>38</sup> Rhem 2002, 1 See: McAuley 1999, 17-35

conjunction with spatiality. [...] This is only an abstracted aspect when we consider persons under the double structure of being both individual and social.”<sup>39</sup>

Theater could be viewed as the space that provides “ a (primarily) visual and acoustic context for relating [...] bodies [...] and their manifestation in dramatic action.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, space functions as an extension of one’s body. It exults:

“possibilities of relating inside to outside, unseen to seen, private inner experience to the external watching and guessing of others [...]. The inside and outside of the theater’s space offers the watching imagination a way of thinking about the inside and outside of other structures important to tragedy: city, house, self. The performance of tragedy [is] articulated through spatial dualities.”<sup>41</sup>

Phenomenology sheds light on the complexity of sexual relations in that system. Temporality and spatiality are intricately connected with phenomenology. By evaluating relevant scholarship and putting forward my own arguments, I contribute to the construction of female radical subjectivity as I reinvent the self by deconstructing its representation as an object. I achieve this by exposing the inequalities ingrained in the fabric of women’s identities and by exposing the performative nature of the body. The struggles that women go through are validated as experiences worthy of scholarly attention. What is innovative in my approach is that I address these questions of positionality of the female body in the structure of a power hierarchy within a specific geographical space through phenomenology. Voicing one’s trauma in specific temporal and spatial dimensions is indispensable for the deconstruction of essentialized notions of identity.

The maenads are liminal entities whose transition to agency is marked by the spatiality of the oikos and the temporality of the night. The mountain where they live is connected to their rebellion and the atrocious crime Agave has committed. She recognizes the significance of the mountain as a locus where desire and taking action are intricately connected. In this context, Judith Butler’s phenomenological criticism of the female subjects attaining agency through radical acts is relevant. In her book, *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler exposes “the limits of the historical scheme of

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<sup>39</sup> Yuasa 1987, 39

<sup>40</sup> Rhem 2002, 2

<sup>41</sup> Rhem 2002, 15

things, the epistemological and ontological horizon within which subjects come to be at all”.<sup>42</sup> To delineate the context within which the subject emerges as a radical entity it is crucial to expose its critical relation to existing norms.

My contribution to existing scholarship is the attribution of masculine traits to Antigone and Agave through imparting a queer criticism on them something that has not been attempted before. Through killing her son, Agave asserts herself in a way consistent to the subversion of traditional notions of femininity. The murder of her son consists a strategy of resistance to oppression which identifies Agave as taking up a position of masculinity, since by killing him she takes up his manhood. Her act mirrors a reversal of gender as she puts into question her gender identification. The female rage and violence are identified as traits of masculinity in this case. Thus, this new space is a discursive formation that functions as a locus where multiple subjectivities exist, a locus where the subject can exist par excellence. By employing the term third identitarian space, a fresh outlook is provided in relation to the special dimension of Ahmed’s phenomenology. My thesis opens up the locus for a different spatial dimension, one that is unique to the condition of the Greek female of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The existence of a third identitarian space signals the existence of a third space of thinking, a way of thinking that deviates from the dialectical thought of the male subject. It is the space where radical female subjects reside, but do not fall in the Hegelian dialectic but rather emerge as subjects that oppose representation. Antigone and Agave move beyond scripted gender roles as they turn into radical subjects. Antigone and Agave occupy a marginalized position and that they are in dire need to emerge as a radical subject and do so by challenging the margins within which they exist. They are able to transcend their gender by violating the moral codes of their era. That was the era of a womanhood, whose primary tenets were piety, purity and domesticity. Women were not deemed as subjects that could enact their will and agency but were rather confined to the performance of the norms of traditional womanhood; they were expected to be compliant, passive and submissive. In order to be deemed as respectable, they were encouraged to deny every aspect of their sexuality.

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<sup>42</sup> Butler 2011, 17

By killing her son, Agave fully engages her position as a radical subject. The issue of dismemberment is related to queerness. Emphasis should be placed on fluidity as “contextual identifications rather than essential identities and a stress on practices”.<sup>43</sup> The way that Agave decides to kill Pentheus exposes her defiance of the structure of a system that perpetuates the violation of the female body. In the case of Pentheus, his “identity is context dependent and enacted or “embodied” in ways that capture the “lived experiences” of past peoples”.<sup>44</sup> The personal is turned into the political. Foucault argues that “to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value”.<sup>45</sup> It is necessary to render the individual vocal. It is difficult to voice something that is ineffable and non-transcendental such as the subaltern. Antigone and Agave disrupt the dialectic of silence through the performance of their ultimate act. Their act is “the source of a counter-politics, a counter-imagining, a counter-metaphysics, not originating from the master (and his world) but from the outside space she possesses as the ‘other’”.<sup>46</sup> They challenge the legacy of the gendered body as they move from silence and enter into discourse.

In conclusion, the *Antigone* and the *Bacchae* deal with a desire that reverses the social order. They are queer tragedies even though they do not consist tragedies that address queerness. It is impossible to point towards the tragic effects of one’s desires as there is not a clear cause, thus queerness does not involve a clear causal relationship. It should be noted that sexuality is constructed differently in the 5<sup>th</sup> century than in the contemporary world. It is important to showcase “the arbitrariness of the labels ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ or ‘perverse.’”<sup>47</sup> The way in which sexuality was constructed in the antiquity “around some version of the opposition penetrator/ penetrated shows that [...] there is still a tendency to essentialize the models of the ancient world”.<sup>48</sup> That is the reason why a contemporary queer reading

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<sup>43</sup> Ahmed 2006, 96

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed 2006, 96

<sup>45</sup> Spivak 2003, 81

<sup>46</sup> Anim-Addo 2013, 9

<sup>47</sup> Zajko 2010, 178

<sup>48</sup> Zajko 2010, 178



is indispensable and operates as a mode of deconstruction and exposition of one's covert desires.

VOICING THE UNUTTERABLE: ATTAINING AGENCY THROUGH THE  
WILLINGNESS TO DIE

“What was excluded ... reinfilters the place of its origin- It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present’s feeling of being “at home” into an illusion, it lurks- this “wild”, this “obscene,” this “filth,” this “resistance” of “superstition” -within the walls of the residence, and behind the back of the owner (the ego), or over its objections, it inscribes there the law of the other”.<sup>49</sup>

*The Antigone* is “a feminist text about revealing and breaking down false dichotomies, such as man and woman, public and private, morality and the law.”<sup>50</sup> Antigone’s act of defiance is highly political as she operates as a subject in ancient Greece during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, while her situation imposed on her radical limitations. The concept of situated freedom is pivotal in reading *the Antigone*. I will try to analyze this concept through a phenomenological reading. In addition, a feminist reading is necessary because Antigone reacts towards injustice and she does so, “specifically as a woman in a masculinist state [and] not as an “everyman” moral/political hero.”<sup>51</sup> Antigone exists in a conflict laden world. What needs to be further explored is the notion of foreignness in relation to the notion of desire through a queer reading. This notion is linked to “the peculiar, even unmappable, nature of her desire”<sup>52</sup>. Thus, through a queer reading, a new locus is going to open up that will provide the space for the possibility of the existence of an alternative identification.

According to phenomenology, identifying as a queer subject is intrinsically related to the recognition of the connection with the other and at the same time with the inversion of the other. Antigone’s queer identification is located “in the bind of requiring the other whom one fears to be and to be captured by”.<sup>53</sup> Thus her desire leads her to the recognition of the other and at the same time moving away from a liminal identification. Recognition entails gaining consciousness about what is

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<sup>49</sup> Michel de Certeau 1986, 3-4

<sup>50</sup> Story 2008, 170

<sup>51</sup> Story 2008, 170

<sup>52</sup> Meltzer 2011, 172

<sup>53</sup> Butler 2000, 13

invested in the other. It “is motivated by the desire to find oneself reflected there where the reflection is not a final expropriation”.<sup>54</sup> Thus, consciousness leads to the realization that “there is no return from alterity to a former self but only a transfiguration premised on the impossibility of return”.<sup>55</sup> This opens up the locus for a queer identification as recognition presupposes desire and stabilizes the dynamic between self-identification and negation of oneself.

I would like to denote a departure from Hegel’s Phenomenological approach of Antigone who views her desire as self-conscious. Hegel argues that Antigone’s self-consciousness “return[s] from otherness” as “it desires a unity with the self”.<sup>56</sup> I wish to argue that Antigone’s self-awareness reflects her perception and recognition of herself as an excess. Hegel’s phenomenology is linked to the master-slave dialectic whereas the phenomenological approach that I employ is connected to Ahmed’s notion of orientation and lining.<sup>57</sup> Antigone sees “her own self in the other” thus she “must supersede this otherness of itself” to become essential but not acquire an essential identity as a queer identification is related to the fluidity of orientation.<sup>58</sup> Antigone is a liminal subject that acquires agency through this specific characteristic of hers, being the other but not occupying an essential position. Her identification is what empowers her; deconstruction is essential for dismantling essential positioning. Through a phenomenological- queer reading, the locus for a different identification is created as it gives way for the formation of an independent female figure that eludes the strictures of her gender, the oikos and the polis. The allure of the play lies in the fact that it is representative of desire on many levels; on the political one and also on the level of gender, specifically of one’s representation.

What is innovative in this thesis is that I argue that through *the Antigone*, there is the possibility for the emergence of new temporalities, as a queer reading is founded on the relationship between temporality and spatiality. What needs to be further explored is how Antigone “stands in for the limits of kinship” and “offer[s] an alternative center for psychoanalysis, [which] represents radical futurity.”<sup>59</sup> I wish to

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<sup>54</sup> Butler 2000, 13

<sup>55</sup> Butler 2000, 13

<sup>56</sup> Meltzer 2011, 177

<sup>57</sup> See more: Ahmed, Sarah. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology*

<sup>58</sup> Meltzer 2011, 177

<sup>59</sup> McBean 2015, 5

offer a challenge to dominant modes of reading *the Antigone* and offer an alternative queer reading. I attempt to repudiate a uniformed explanation of the tragedy and open up the locus for a reading that theorizes a rigorous rethinking in terms of space and temporality. I will expose the subversive potential of the subject through a repositioning of gender in space. Undoing gender is critical in such case. One's fractured subjectivity can be experienced as a loss, however it is crucial to examine this disruption in order for a person who is an agent to emerge. An interesting take on Antigone as a queer heroine is Snediker's view who "argues against queer theorists' valorization of the shattering of subjectivity".<sup>60</sup> Antigone represents more than a mere disruption of gender norms and kinship ties. Snediker believes that "Antigone's burial of Polynices" exposes "the buoying valor of one who defends another person's fragility against an edict oppositely demanding that person's — that body's — desecration".<sup>61</sup> Thus, the body comes to the forefront as essential. The affirmation of her need to preserve the body is far more essential than the negation of desire. She exceeds the continuous rupture from her normative identity and attains a more nuanced sense of self and identifies as a queer subject.

Antigone could be identified as the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, according to the theory of abjection. Lacan in his work *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*<sup>62</sup> draws a connection between Antigone and the sun, as she "cannot be looked up directly".<sup>63</sup> This opens up the locus for an alternative phenomenological reading, something that has never been attempted before, as Antigone is presented as a figure that is associated with a deviant line instead of being linked to a straight line, thus to a normative identification. So, Antigone "blurs registers, because she blurs the distinction between life and death".<sup>64</sup> She transcends the boundaries of normative sexual identification as her actions cannot be situated in the existing locus of desire of the era she belongs in. Lacan argues that Antigone is situated "herself in a limit zone, between life and death", however she escaped this dyad by ultimately choosing death, thus transcending the limits.<sup>65</sup> She fails to be classified as her desire is transcendental and is elided into a queer locus.

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<sup>60</sup> Coffman 2010, 188

<sup>61</sup> Coffman 2010, 188

<sup>62</sup> See more: Lacan, Jacques, et al. 2016. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*.

<sup>63</sup> Meltzer 2011, 181

<sup>64</sup> Meltzer 2011, 181

<sup>65</sup> Meltzer 2011, 181

The notion of boundaries is intricately connected to the notion of subjectivity and gives the opportunity for the emergence of an alternative queer identification of the individual instead of just posing a limit.

Antigone's excess renders her a subject that eludes its marginal position. Antigone "falls outside all registers, realms, nomenclature".<sup>66</sup> She assumes a register of transgression. She is "in herself in excess, a figural catachresis, the emblem of which is her entombment which she is still living".<sup>67</sup> The intersection of Antigone's and Creon's desires should be further examined. Antigone is an excess that does not abide to the moral codes of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and cannot be contained. Freud, Nietzsche and Bataille view excess as "a one aspect of the feminine".<sup>68</sup> However, to consider the notion of excess solely in regards to the feminine is problematic, as in this thesis the notion of excess is identified with deviance from a normative sexual identification and entering a different sphere, the one of queerness. What is interesting about Antigone is that she rejects the hegemony of the social realm while transcending it. Antigone lies out of Lacan's Symbolic as she manages to escape the law. Julia Kristeva draws on Lacan's theory of the Symbolic and "situates the problem of the desire with the semiotic and the very materiality of language itself".<sup>69</sup> I side more with Luce Irigaray who rejects the notion of the excess as merely a feminine one. Lacan draws on Freud's theory of the death drive and argues that "desire is a case of always displacing, of never being content to gain a desired object, until the subject returns full circle to the place where there is no longer any tension, no longer any desire. That place, of course, is death."<sup>70</sup> The status of the law reflects "the status given to the phallus, the symbolic place of the father, the indisputable and incontestable".<sup>71</sup> This law is exclusionary as it eliminates the possibility for the subversive to emerge and stifles the possibility for change and agency.

Antigone could be perceived as an example of feminine defiance against the norms enforced by gender and kinship. She poses into question the limits of being represented as a subject and exposes the possibility to emerge as a subject moving

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<sup>66</sup> Meltzer 2011, 177

<sup>67</sup> Meltzer 2011, 177

<sup>68</sup> Meltzer 2011, 180

<sup>69</sup> Meltzer 2011, 181

<sup>70</sup> Meltzer 2011, 181

<sup>71</sup> Butler 2000, 21

away from liminality rather than merely connecting politics to representation.<sup>72</sup> She is a figure whose speech represents “kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering it”.<sup>73</sup>

Her actions place her in a sphere that is predominantly male. In her case “kinship might underwrite gender” as the language she uses approximates the language that Creon uses that “of sovereign authority and action”.<sup>74</sup> She abrogates the norms that secure her place into the feminine as she reverses the order of things. Creon as a figure is intrinsically connected to Antigone as there is “no simple opposition between the two”.<sup>75</sup> Segal employs a structuralist reading and further analyzes Antigone’s and Creon’s relationship.<sup>76</sup> These two figures are related in a chiasmatical way, as their limits overlap and there is no mere separation between the extent to which they are capable of wielding their power. Antigone’s power is related to “the social deformation of both idealized and kinship and political sovereignty that emerges as a consequence of her act”.<sup>77</sup> Antigone committed the crime of burying her brother going against the edict of her uncle prohibiting his burial. Creon denies the possibility of a proper burial to Polynices because he considers him infidel and thus desires to leave his body unburied and ravaged. Antigone buries her brother two times. The second time she was seen by a guard. The deed of the burial seems to be intrinsically linked to speech acts, as through language Antigone blurs the limits between the acceptance and the refusal of the deed. On the one hand, she does not admit committing the deed but on the other hand she does not deny it unambiguously.

The agent was not seen as there were no visible footprints or evidence that would give away his presence. If she were to stop at the performance of the first burial, she would not have been accused for this crime because any passer-by could have sprinkled some dust over the corpse. However, after the second stasimon, Antigone returns to the place where she had committed the crime in order to perform a second burial. In the meantime, the body was uncovered by a guard, however it is

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<sup>72</sup> What is interesting about this tragedy is that it can be placed in a number of different cultural settings as it is universal.

<sup>73</sup> Butler 2000, 2

<sup>74</sup> Butler 2000, 6

<sup>75</sup> Butler 2000, 6

<sup>76</sup> Segal, Charles. 1986. *Interpreting Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text*. Ithaca; Cornell University Press.

<sup>77</sup> Butler 2000, 6

not clear how she discovered that. A pivotal question is posed by Syropoulos who wonders “whether Creon, as a political ruler, had the right to interfere in private religious rites (as funerary rites are) and whether Antigone made things right by defying his decree.”<sup>78</sup>

Ismene offers to admit that she has committed the deed if Antigone gives her permission to do so but Antigone does not allow her to. Role-reversal is obvious, as Ismene who stands at the opposite spectrum of Antigone, exemplifies the ‘proper’ image of woman. She exposes an obedience to Creon and his edict. In line 99 at the end of the prologue, “Ismene characterizes her [sister] as anous (foolish, mindless) [and this] is also a recurrent motif (line 562; 383 aphrosyne).”<sup>79</sup> It is interesting that her sister lays such a characterization to her that carries the notion of madness. Women were characterized as foolish and were regulated due to this characterization attributed to them. This rhetoric of madness is a burden that needs to be deconstructed. Ismene exposes an unwillingness to perform the act and participates in the political sphere however she is willing to own her sister’s action. The first time that the guard reports to Creon, he denotes that he has not committed the crime nor does he have any implication to the deed because his gaze, having seen the deed would have implicated him in the deed itself. The chorus exclaims “ἐάν δ’ ἄκλαυτον, ἄταφον, οἰωνοῖς γλυκὺν θησαυρὸν εισορῶσι πρὸς χάριν βορᾶς”<sup>80</sup> is “skeptical of its human authorship”.<sup>81</sup>

Antigone acts manly as she defies the law “but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law”.<sup>82</sup> She denies to have done the deed but at the same time she refuses to deny that she has committed the act gaining agency through language. Attaining agency though is problematic as it is accomplished by the assimilation of “the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses”.<sup>83</sup> Creon believes that he will counter her agency through his speech acts however, she manages to gain agency by Creon’s very sovereignty. The claiming “becomes an act that reiterates the act it affirms, extending the act of insubordination by performing its avowal in

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<sup>78</sup> 2008, 59

<sup>79</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 61

<sup>80</sup> Soph. Ant 29

<sup>81</sup> Butler 2000, 7

<sup>82</sup> Butler 2000, 11

<sup>83</sup> Butler 2000, 11

language”.<sup>84</sup> The performative aspect of her speech is analyzed by Gould.<sup>85</sup> Gaining agency entails a sacrifice as she needs to appropriate

“the voice of the other, the one to whom she is opposed; thus her autonomy is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice of one she resists, an appropriation that has within its traces of a simultaneous refusal and assimilation of that very authority”.<sup>86</sup>

Antigone and Creon use a different register, something that renders their interaction problematic. “Neither can bend [...] the other’s moral compass”<sup>87</sup>. Thus, one cannot permeate the orientation of the other. Sophocles’ play exposes “an Antigone that finally does not belong anywhere”<sup>88</sup>. However, the notion of her foreignness exists only if there are boundaries that render her alternative orientation as a taboo. Thus, there is violence “underlined by Antigone’s gender”.<sup>89</sup> She seems to be placed in a sphere where she does not belong thus this creates the possibility of queerness. Gender along “with the borders between realms provided by the gods” produces “a shock value when it is no longer in its place”<sup>90</sup>. Antigone is a female subject that has acquired agency as she realized that she excludes herself from the world of the living and at the same time she is not part of the world of the dead, opening up a third identitarian space. She tries to appropriate Creon’s sovereignty by using the language that allows her to enter the political sphere as it functions as an instrument of political power. However, language seems to fall short to pertain the possibility of existence of a queer space. Creon desires that the entire polis obeys to his edict. Antigone also wants to be heard. The language she uses is connected to her act as they expose an attempt to assume queer traits. It is important to keep in mind that “she cannot make her claim outside the language of the state, but neither can the claim she wants to make be fully assimilated by the state”; she inhabits the language

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<sup>84</sup> Butler 2000, 11

<sup>85</sup> Gould Timothy. 1995. “The Unhappy Performative”, in *Performativity and Performance*, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick. New York. Routledge. 19-44.

<sup>86</sup> Butler 2000, 11

<sup>87</sup> Meltzer 2011, 174

<sup>88</sup> Meltzer 2011, 174

<sup>89</sup> Meltzer 2011, 175

<sup>90</sup> Meltzer 2011, 175



of the state but at the same time is excluded by it.<sup>91</sup> She participates into the political sphere and thus turns into a universal figure.

Her act of defiance towards the state allows her to enter into a third space, a queer one, as her act functions as a repetition of her brother's defiance towards the state and therefore she is being territorialized. By idealizing manhood she vanquishes it thus "she assumes manhood through vanquishing" it.<sup>92</sup> She places herself into a third space, an alternative locus in order to establish her manly characteristics. The stability of the conceptual distinction among male and female is being brought into question as there is a third locus from which Antigone operates as an agent.

Language is the means through which Antigone assumes authorship of her deed. Her very act is what brings her to the forefront. She exposes "the illocutionary failure of Creon's utterance, and her contestation takes the verbal form of a reassertion of sovereignty, refusing to disassociate the deed from her person".<sup>93</sup> By admitting that she has performed the deed, she concedes Creon's authority. Her speech act is highly performative as it does not deny the possibility of the commitment of the action but does not solidify it either. She is characterized as having male characteristics by the chorus and the messengers due to her speech act. Gender seems to be destabilized by her speech act. Both her action and the language destabilize gender in a performative way. The completion of her act "implicates her in the masculine excess called hubris".<sup>94</sup> She assumes her own sovereignty through her speech acts as she assumes agency through language. However, Antigone seems to cross the limit of Ate as according to Lacan "she appears to have crossed over in some way to a death" and thus "her obstinacy [from life seems] to be a manifestation of this

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<sup>91</sup> Butler 2000, 28

For a more detailed analysis of how Antigone occupies space and her universality as a figure whose voice operates within and outside the political sphere see: Benhabib, Seyla. 1992. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, New York Routledge. 242- 259.

Dietz, Mary. 1985. "Citizenship with a Feminist Face". *Political Theory*.1. 13: 19-37.  
Hartouni, Valerie. 1986. "Antigone's Dilemmas: A Problem of Political Membership". *Hysteria I*. 1: 3-20.

<sup>92</sup> Butler 2000, 11

<sup>93</sup> Butler 2000, 8

<sup>94</sup> Butler 2000, 10

death drive”.<sup>95</sup> She appears to be dead even while being alive, blurring the boundaries between the two realms. She transgresses an aberrant limit by defying the public law as she is aware that she will die. We can view this action as the opening up of the possibility for an alternative existence as she consciously chooses to give up her life and identifies as a queer subject.

Antigone’s act of burial “does not simply stand for the ineffaceable character of what is”.<sup>96</sup> She exposes a persistence in protecting Polyneices’ body and not letting be exposed. She suffers a “fatal condemnation by virtue of abrogating the incest taboo that articulates kinship and the symbolic”.<sup>97</sup> She wants to retrieve her brother’s body and preserve it. “Antigone’s position represents the radical limit that affirms the unique value of his being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polynices may have done, or to whatever he may be subjected to!”<sup>98</sup> The transgressive destructiveness of her action wipes the slate clean and thereby creates the space for creation from zero, opening up space for a queer identification. Antigone is to love no one except her brother however what “in some sense she is also a man”.<sup>99</sup> Her loyalty to her dead brother makes her manly as it binds her desire to the death force of her queer identification. She is the trope of gender inversion and falls into a queer space. Antigone

“appears [...] as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely, the signifying cut that confers on him the indomitable power of being what he is in the face of everything that may oppose him”.<sup>100</sup>

In ancient Greece, women were prohibited to take action on behalf of the community because of the oikos. Mills denotes in "Hegel's *Antigone* that "woman is represented as someone that does not do anything and therefore can have no universal recognition of her action or humanity in the polis; she is not seen as someone who

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<sup>95</sup> Butler 2000, 47

<sup>96</sup> Butler 2000, 53

<sup>97</sup> Butler 2000, 53

<sup>98</sup> Butler 2000, 53

<sup>99</sup> Butler 2000, 61

<sup>100</sup>Keenan 2005,122

Keenan, Dennis King. 2005. *The Question of Sacrifice*.

acts but merely someone who is".<sup>101</sup> In ancient Greece, the situation in which women found themselves was extraordinarily limiting. Josine H. Blok states that "the principle rules concerning the relations between men and women, both in ancient and in rural modern Greece, may be summarized in a brief formula: women should not be seen, nor should they speak or be spoken of".<sup>102</sup> To the same end, Thucydides denotes that if anything should be declared "on the subject of female excellence" it is that the "greatest [glory] will be hers who is least talked of among the men whether for good or for bad".<sup>103</sup> However, men stand on the opposite spectrum as their good reputation will follow them even after their death.

Women in the ancient Greek society had only a few roles which were considered appropriate for them to carry out and their voice was heard only in a handful of contexts thus "this ban could be considered a significant form of social repression for Antigone and Ismene."<sup>104</sup> Ismene is a figure that mirrors how women in ancient Greece perceived themselves in relation to the male authority - power. She states «ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρή τοῦτο μὲν γυναῖχ' ὅτι ἔφουμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχομένα.»<sup>105</sup> Antigone is deeply conflicted between competing social values. Women were bound to the *oikos* as they occupied the private sphere. Surpassing the limits of the *oikos* could result in social sanction. Despite that, there were a few occasions such as the participation of wedding celebrations and the performance of death rituals in which women were allowed to be present, with the accompaniment though of men. These were the only times when they could be heard and were rendered visible.

Wailing over a dead corpse of a family member, uttering laments or participating in rituals of marriage were rites performed by women. The women are responsible for washing and preparing the corpse for burial.<sup>106</sup> Their connection to nature and their materiality were deemed as the agents that linked them to performativity. Sophocles tackles these two rites; marriage and death in his tragedy. As an ancient Greek woman, Antigone would be "fiercely protective of her role as

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<sup>101</sup> Mills 1996, 73

<sup>102</sup> Blok 2001, 97

<sup>103</sup> Story 2008, 179

<sup>104</sup> Story 2008, 179

<sup>105</sup> Soph. Ant 61 – 62

<sup>106</sup> Winnington- Ingram 1999, 123

mourner” and Creon with his edict tried to “rob [her] and Ismene, as the closest female kin, of their legitimate and meaningful social role in mourning”.<sup>107</sup> She needs to perform Polynices’ death rituals because it is her duty as his sister as this way she can project her voice as a respected member of the Athenian society but at the same time she needs to obey to the social norms of meekness and submissiveness to the male authority. Hence, her social standing is conflicting and contradictory. She exists in the opposite end of the spectrum from her sister. The performance of death rituals “is part of how the women share in the worth of the men who are able to gain respected reputations, fame, and social importance”.<sup>108</sup> She refuses to obey Creon’s edict and challenges patriarchal order. She abides by this duty of hers because it consists a means of “assertion of the value of women's role in carrying out the death rites and a declaration of the necessity of Antigone's freedom to do so.

She is driven by her desire to proclaim this need of her not merely to a secluded audience but to everyone, even against the will of her own sister to silence her illicit act. Therefore, her declaration consists a public statement. If it were to be kept in silence, it would be void of meaning. She needs to assume a position of absolutism to defy Creon’s edict, she cannot oscillate between subject positions because her will would have been stammered. Antigone exposes “an irrevocable attachment to a goal that becomes the sole reason for her existence as she was willing to die instead of renouncing” her desire.<sup>109</sup> Griffith notes that "the choices for a female subject in this play are thus limited indeed: speak out, take action - and die in isolation; or keep your place indoors, in silence, in subjection, so that men may continue their misrule".<sup>110</sup> She poses a challenge to the absolutist way of Creon’s way of ruling.

The issue of the body is prominent in the tragedy and arises through the intersection among gender and action, as it constitutes the primary source of conflict in the tragedy. The body of dead Polynices is located in the center of the controversy in the place. The dialectic of the body sets the question “about who Polynices is-that is, under what description he ought to be recognized”.<sup>111</sup> Polynices is entitled to a

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<sup>107</sup> Story 2008,180

<sup>108</sup> Story 2008, 180

<sup>109</sup> Syropoulos 1999, 17

<sup>110</sup> 1999, 54

<sup>111</sup> Patchen Markell 2003, 9

burial as he is “a native of Thebes, a member of the ruling family, the brother (and more, since this is the house of Laius) of Antigone and Ismene, and the nephew.”<sup>112</sup> The ritual of mourning over a dead corpse allows the performer of the lamentation to resolve his feelings caused by the experiencing of the loss.

“The linguistic and physical artifacts produced as a part of funeral ritual-laments, eulogies, grave markers-can- not replace a lost person; but in the production of such artifacts, and through participation in the symbolic systems that govern funeral procedure, mourners work to reconstruct the agency that the traumatic event of death had interrupted”.<sup>113</sup>

What is interesting is that agency is intrinsically connected to the notion of identity and the occupation of specific spaces and roles in a particular social context. Therefore, obtaining agency could bring up conflict in the social locus. Antigone tries not only to get a grasp of Polyneceis multifaceted identity as a body but also tries to experience “the legitimacy of [her] own identity[y] [...]” and tries “to address the personal and civic losses Polyneices' body represents.”<sup>114</sup>

The continuous returning of the exiled body of Polyneices to the polis despite of Creon’s decree is a fact. As a king, Creon fails to keep the problematic body out of the polis. The way that the play depicts “a recognizably democratic figure failing to bury properly in a way that exceeds even the permissible impropriety called for by a dead man's treason, the play airs the charge that the democracy disrespects the dead, tout court”.<sup>115</sup> However, this was not atypical in Periclean Athens. The bodies “were treated improperly, their ashes thrown into communal coffins”.<sup>116</sup> What is problematic is that the city fails to enforce its agenda, as the proper rites for the dead are not being carried out.

Similarly, Antigone as a body transgresses the confined of the oikos and the city as well. Thus, as a body she cannot exist neither within nor outside. “The concession to private lament opens to view a rupture that threatens to exceed temporal and spatial boundaries to which the polis seeks to confine it.”<sup>117</sup> The very forces that

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<sup>112</sup> Patchen Markell 2003, 9

<sup>113</sup> Patchen 2003, 9

<sup>114</sup> Patchen Markell 2003,12

<sup>115</sup> Honig 2009, 25

<sup>116</sup> Honig 2009, 25

<sup>117</sup> Honig 2009, 30

the polis seems to desire to exclude, are elicited. Antigone through her act refuses containment to any institution and falls into a queer space. Antigone's final statement is "βροτοῖς οὔτε νεκροῖς κυροῦσα μέτοικος οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν"; hence she occupies a space somewhere among the living and the dead.<sup>118</sup>

Antigone exclaims that "οὐ γάρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε, οὐδ' ἡ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη τοιούσδ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὄρισεν νόμους. οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ῥόμην τὰ σὰ κηρύγμαθ', ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῃ θεῶν νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητὸν ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν"<sup>119</sup> there is controversy in regards to the unwritten laws of the half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The burial of a dead relative is not included in the unwritten laws of ancient Athens but could have been included in that category. "these laws are attributed to the gods and serve as a bridge between physis, nature, and nomos, custom."<sup>120</sup>

Segal argues that "Creon violates the two ritual act [of burial], which establish[es] the boundaries between man, beast and god: sacrifice, effecting an upward mediation between man and god; burial distinguishing between man and beast."<sup>121</sup> However, there is a limit that we should bear in mind. "An Athenian law decreed that a traitor could not be buried on Attic soil."<sup>122</sup> Ordinary practice allows for the body of traitors to be buried within the city limits; however, Creon's edict denies the relatives of Polynices to perform his funeral rites. This reflects a deep conflict in the fabric of the society. It is a fact that even though the Greeks "have a strong sense of burial, they also had a strong sense of the need to uphold the political authority."<sup>123</sup> Creon reflects the reaction that the male of the 5<sup>th</sup> century would have had, as he states "τί φής; τίς ἀνδρῶν ἦν ὁ τολμήσας τάδε."<sup>124</sup> He could only imagine a man defying his decree thus he recognizes only one possibility of orientation thus the exposition of Antigone's gender reversal was something unthinkable, as she exposes a dissident queer identification.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Soph. Ant 851

<sup>119</sup> Soph. Ant 450-455

<sup>120</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 59

<sup>121</sup> 1990, 169

<sup>122</sup> Xenophon, Hellenica. 1.7.22.

<sup>123</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 58

<sup>124</sup> Soph. Ant, 248

<sup>125</sup> "In the classical Greek world it was the polis, which articulated, legitimated and mediated all religious activity had the ultimate authority in, and control of, all cults. It

It could be argued that Antigone represents “a perversion of the law” however this is problematic as that entails “a static relation between the two in which each entails the other and, in that sense, is nothing without the other”.<sup>126</sup> This does not allow the possibility of other forms of life and identification to emerge. A queer identification is excluded by such negative dialectic. There are many possibilities and thus “an invariant social organization of sexuality follows of the necessity from the prohibitive law”.<sup>127</sup> An interesting question that Butler poses is “what happens when the perverse or the impossible emerges in the language of the law and makes its claim precisely there in the sphere of legitimate kinship that depends on its exclusion or pathologization?”.<sup>128</sup> It should be clarified that the perverse is not a clear cut category as it operates autonomously on one level and on another level it is assimilated into the norm. The site of enunciation of legitimacy lies outside of the realm of kinship, thus desire seems to be displaced to a new space, a queer one. Through her speech act she tries to fulfill a spectral position, a queer space that remained previously vacant.

What is interesting is that through her action she manifests a peculiar heterosexual fatality rendering herself a queer heroine. A critical intervention to the fatality of exposing a dissident sexuality exposes the need for deconstruction. Antigone opens the locus for the validity of a different way of organizing sexuality. Kinship “signifies any number of social arrangements that organize the reproduction of material life, that can include the ritualization of birth and death, that provide bonds of intimate alliance both enduring and breakable and that regulate sexuality through sanction and taboo.”<sup>129</sup> The boundaries “of the public and political sphere were secured through the production of a constitutive outside.”<sup>130</sup> Women could not hold property and were not allowed in the public sphere not even through the use of language thus they were denied their humanity. Even though Antigone is prohibited from taking action, she nevertheless acts radically and defies the existing norms. By doing so she challenges gender norms and raises the question of the preconditions of

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encompassed and sanctioned all religious discourse within it including that of its constituent units such as the oikos and the phatry.”

<sup>126</sup> Butler 2000, 67

<sup>127</sup> Butler 2000, 68

<sup>128</sup> Butler 2000, 68

<sup>129</sup> Butler 2000, 72

<sup>130</sup> Butler 2000, 82

existence. She has entered into catachresis as she acts through excess. Through this figure, gender is displaced. As she speaks “her speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future.”<sup>131</sup>

As a figure, Antigone does not prefigure a reconstitution of the law of the polis. It should be noted that even though she is “entangled in the terms of kinship, she is at the same time outside of those norms.”<sup>132</sup> Her act

“is confounded by the fact that the kinship line from which she descends, and which she transmits, is derived from a paternal position that is already confounded by the manifestly incestuous act that is the condition of her own existence, which makes her brother her father, which begins a narrative she occupies linguistically, every kin position except “mother” and occupies, them at the expense of the coherence of [...] gender”.<sup>133</sup>

Antigone is the product of an incestuous relationship and experiences herself almost an incestuous attachment- love for her brother. She is obsessively fixated even to an incestuous point to the performance of Polynices’ burial.

She is the last person in that generation that will not reiterate incest through the creation of another generation. For Anti-gone translates to mean “anti-generation”.<sup>134</sup> Her name is suggestive of the sexual difference it bears. This could function “as evidence of Antigone's refusal of gender, an attempt to “neuter herself” in her refusal to marry and give birth to a new generation of young Thebans”.<sup>135</sup> She did not want to reiterate her fate because she challenged the bounds of her oikos and the polis. The course she follows and the actions she carries out “break the endlessly repetitive cycle of Theban crimes and in doing so transform her from *genos* to *xenos*, a known stranger (if not, quite, a foreigner) on familiar territory”.<sup>136</sup> Thus the notion of space is also predominant in this dialectic. We should note the fact that technically,

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<sup>131</sup> Butler 2000, 82

<sup>132</sup> Butler 2000, 72

<sup>133</sup> Butler 2000, 72

<sup>134</sup> Holland 1998, 1128

<sup>135</sup> Saxonhouse 1992, 69

<sup>136</sup> Holland 1998, 1128



Antigone is not the last person of the family that could procreate and continue the lineage as Ismene, her sister did not seize to exist.

Emphasis should be placed on the constituent part of anti in Antigone's name. What this heroine truly desires is to bury her brother with a ceremony. Her desire is unwavering as she insists on the execution of her act. She denotes her desire clearly and Creon do so too; he exclaims "he will not be carrion for dogs and vultures [because] she will have the rituals of mourning".<sup>137</sup> Antigone attempts to expose to Creon the absurdity of his own laws as he acts self-blindly. She functions as Creon's foil. The absolute nature of the law seems to function as a replacement of the agency of the subject. She experiences the law as "pathological and sadistic" because there cannot be any exceptions to it.<sup>138</sup> "Her intransigence mimics that of Creon."<sup>139</sup> Both figures share some characteristics as neither wishes to compromise. They are "both afflicted by excessive certainty- so that the two of them will always be on a collision course."<sup>140</sup>

Antigone's name could also denote "a distance is established from what she represents."<sup>141</sup> This consolidates the space for a different identification as her name shows that neither does the maternal can be configured nor does the stability of the paternal can be established. She originates from an incestuous lineage so the question of what kind of a generation does Oedipus engenders prevails. Antigone contests the limits of a normative identification and exposes new ways of intelligibility of the space one occupies. This is further reinforced by the foreignness of her name, an aspect "tied to Antigone's love for her father"<sup>142</sup>.

For Antigone, home is her unification with her father as well as her brother through death which represents the foreign. In Antigone foreignness "takes ontological proportions since it partakes what Kierkegaard calls "Alive in the place of corpses".<sup>143</sup> Antigone is bound to her brother as she experiences a strange loyalty to him. Death is two- fold for her. On the one hand, she is "serving death" for the

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<sup>137</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, viii

<sup>138</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, viii

<sup>139</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, ix

<sup>140</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, x

<sup>141</sup> Butler 2000, 22

<sup>142</sup> Meltzer 2011, 172

<sup>143</sup> Meltzer 2011, 176

length of her life” as she has not found love neither has she borne children because she was doomed to death due to her incestuous lineage.<sup>144</sup> Perhaps, it is her desire that has no place in the assigned space for her and therefore she needs to move beyond the realm of the incestuous desire into a queer space. She exclaims “ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος, οἷ πορεύομαι πρὸς τοὺς ἐμαυτῆς, ὦν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς.”<sup>145</sup> Thus her death signifies some kind of marriage among her family members “affirming the death quality of those loves for which there is no viable and livable place in culture”.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, there is a dire need to detangle the notion of desire from having a child and reverting the idea that the incest taboo needs to be resolved in order to find love because there is the possibility for belonging to an alternative space, a queer one.

She states “πόσις μὲν ἂν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν,/καὶ παῖς ἀπ’ ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ’ ἤμπλακον,/ μητρὸς δ’ ἐν Ἄιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοιιν/οὐκ ἔστ’ ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ.”<sup>147</sup> Thus, she believes that it is possible to marry again and have other children but it is not possible to replace a brother. This statement “is rejected by Goethe as "ganz schlecht" and it is characterized by Kitto as a "frigid sophism.””<sup>148</sup> This statement is not consistent to her traits. I do not side with Sam Weber who states that “when Antigone calculates the incalculable she does not cease to make sense but rather comes to personify the problem she represents”.<sup>149</sup> Antigone explains that she is so attached to the idea of saving her brother because he cannot be replaced and challenges the idea that “his death (but maybe also any death) can be responded to by way of an economy of substitution such as that called for by Pericles in the Oration.”<sup>150</sup>

Antigone’s predicament exposes the crisis of kinship as there is a derangement of the social aspect of what is considered as legitimate love and how loss is

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<sup>144</sup> Butler 2000, 23

<sup>145</sup> Soph. Ant 891-893

<sup>146</sup> Butler 2000, 24

<sup>147</sup> Soph. Ant 909-912

<sup>148</sup> Honig 2009, 16.

See: Steiner, George. 1984. *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought*. pp. 44-51

Kitto, H. D. F. 1969. *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*. p. 130.

<sup>149</sup> Honig 2009, 38

Weber, Samuel. 2004. *Theatricality as Medium*. pp. 138-40.

<sup>150</sup> Honig 2009, 17

experienced. Her deed represents “a trespass on the norms of [...] gender that exposes the precarious character of those norms, their sudden and disturbing transferability and their capacity to be reiterated in contexts and in ways that are not fully to be anticipated”.<sup>151</sup> Antigone represents the displacement from gender norms and at the same time being placed in the very center of a queer representation, cofounding the possibility for the existence of desire.

Hegel argues that Antigone worships “*the dei infermi* of Hades” thus he believes that her insistence in burying her brother is due to an ethical obligation that is deeply ingrained in her being.<sup>152</sup> However, I would like to move beyond Hegel’s contestation that “Antigone’s being lies ultimately in the ethical law, which becomes her substance” phenomenology of spirit.<sup>153</sup> Antigone fulfills her desire to bury her dead brother. In Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* “the doubling of consciousness becomes self-consciousness” as “self-consciousness is desire in general”; however I wish to argue that this desire is hidden, it is not overt.<sup>154</sup> The unwritten laws to which Antigone abides are not the conventional laws that are prescribed by the ancient greek religion but are laws that reflect her desire and personal set of chosen values that establish a specific order. She is “a 'maker of her own law' (autonomous , 821); her defiance is 'self-invented passion' (autognotos orga , 875)”.<sup>155</sup> However, what is unclear is the reason why she is so obstinate in performing this action.

She “acts out of place – that is, out of the proper place for women.”<sup>156</sup> First of all she transgresses geographically the limits of the oikos and of the polis by burying Polynices but there is more to her transgression. She threatens the order of things of the state but at the same time she opens up the space for the existence of a new order of things.<sup>157</sup> Thus, Polynices acted as a traitor towards Thebes, his native city of origin. It is interesting to ponder the motive of Sophocles who decided not to expose this side

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<sup>151</sup> Butler 2000, 24

<sup>152</sup> Meltzer 2011, 177

<sup>153</sup> Hegel 1977, 280

<sup>154</sup> Hegel 1977, 105

Hegel. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. trans. A.V.Miller. Oxford.

<sup>155</sup> Story 2008, 170

<sup>156</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 60

<sup>157</sup> It should be noted that the audience of the 5<sup>th</sup> century would have already been aware of the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices after the death of their father, Oedipus. The conflict occurred when Eteocles who ruled first did not want to give up his reign.

of the story. In addition, “she transgresses the boundaries of her gender by going against the will of her legal guardian.”<sup>158</sup> Women were linked to funeral rites because they were deemed as closer to nature and destruction. A connection could be drawn between death and disorder, so women were closer to death because they were viewed as figures whose existence prefigured disorder. However, it is “the head of the *oikos*’ job to arrange the funeral details.”<sup>159</sup>

Creon says “ἐν τοῖς γὰρ οἰκείοισιν ὅστις ἔστ’ ἀνὴρ χρηστός, φανεῖται κὰν πόλει δίκαιος ὢν”.<sup>160</sup> Her action poses a challenge to the stability of the city. Segal notes that “abandoning her loyalties and love for the living in favor of those below, Antigone upsets the balance between upper and lower worlds. Hence her relation to the very centre of civilized values, which she champions, the house, becomes ambiguous.”<sup>161</sup> What is problematic is that Creon blurs the boundaries of the two realms “ἀνθ’ ὧν ἔχεις μὲν τῶν ἄνω βαλὼν κάτω ψυχὴν τ’ ἀτίμως ἐν τάφῳ κατόκισας, ἔχεις δὲ τῶν κάτωθεν ἐνθάδ’ αὖ θεῶν ἄμοιρον, ἀκτέριστον, ἀνόσιον νέκυν”.<sup>162</sup> Due to her transgression of the limits of the feminine self she disturbs the balance in society. Would she have acted within the parameters of her gender, she would have not disrupted the civic order. “The second choral ode (lines 332-383), the one that praises man and his achievements, reinforces the negative coloring of Anitgone”.<sup>163</sup> Basically, what the chorus does is to set a reminder of the most basic laws of the polis to the citizens in order for its cohesion to be pertained. He particularly exclaims that the person who does not conform to the city’s mandates is rendered cityless.

Antigone wants to grant her desire and places her interests above the maintenance of the cohesion of the polis. She exclaims “ὄσια πανουργήσασ’. ἐπεὶ πλείων χρόνος ὃν δεῖ μ’ ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε”.<sup>164</sup> She feels that she is more deeply bound to the dead than to the living. τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ’ ἀτιμάσασ’ ἔχε; she transgresses the limits of the city.<sup>165</sup> The second ode exclaims the importance of insistence on the rituals of death. Here, Antigone “places on one hand the ‘unwritten

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<sup>158</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 60

<sup>159</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 60

<sup>160</sup> Soph. Ant 661- 662

<sup>161</sup> Segal 1999, 177

<sup>162</sup> Soph. Ant 1068-71

<sup>163</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 61

<sup>164</sup> Soph. Ant 74-75

<sup>165</sup> Soph. Ant 77

and immovable customs of the gods' and on the other hand, not only Creon's kerygmata, but implicitly all the laws of the polis, which, in comparison to the theonomima are time-bound, relative and man-made."<sup>166</sup> The law that was enforced was exclusionary to certain citizens thus this brings to the forefront the issue of one's humanity. The Athenian audience of the fifth century would have found this unproblematic however in modern audiences this is a prominent issue. Antigone contravenes the law and contradicted what was considered as a proper way of behaving, disregarding the polis.

It should be noted that the only way that Antigone was able to act somehow was to rebel; this was her means to react. The way that she dies is suicide and it is her choice. She is an agent who chooses the way and the temporal conditions under which she wishes to die; hence she is being proactive instead of being passive. Her actions could be viewed as acts of rebellion contesting political injustice and "not as apolitical or anti-political" as they are "acts of revolt against Creon's valuation of the state over the individuals who comprise it" and therefore she "ceases to be a model of political quietism."<sup>167</sup> Her act of burial symbolizes "an assertion of her right to freedom, right to perform one of the few publicly praised functions that women are allowed, her right to publicly protest injustice."<sup>168</sup> So, her act should not be delegated to a mere adherence to a ritual as it signifies more than that. She acts against the edict that denies her very own humanity. A queer trajectory respects and protects one's humanity. Antigone is "a charter member of the small human community that is "la Résistance," wherever it pops up in the history of human civilization".<sup>169</sup> The death of Antigone does not constitute a surrender, but it is a rebellion against the limits that render her life unlivable. Her death could be viewed as her final transgressive act in order to break free from the strictures imposed on her. Antigone does not desire death per se but the possibilities that this act opens up for her.

Antigone argues that she will die without a friendly face thus she laments for herself. Her lamentation is a highly performative act which exposes her displacement from the Symbolic. Segal argues that "in ancient Greece, wailing and lamenting

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<sup>166</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 61

<sup>167</sup> Story 2008, 181

<sup>168</sup> Story 2008, 181

<sup>169</sup> Story 2008, 182

(threnos) is the role of women”.<sup>170</sup> However, in funerals men were assigned to give the speeches. Antigone belongs to both the feminine as well in the male domain and thus identifies as a queer subject as she laments for herself and at the same time provides her funeral speech. Her performative action is highly political as it is performed in front of an audience; thus her personal trauma is turned into something political. Antigone consists the other as she cannot be placed within the norm. What is problematic is that desire seems to lead to death. However, death can be liberating as this way escapes her liminality imposed by the boundaries of the oikos and the polis more broadly and emerges as an active agent. What is problematic with Antigone’s desire is

“not the suicidal purity of her death drive but - quite the opposite – that the monstrosity of her act is covered up by its aestheticization: the moment she is excluded from the community of humans, she turns into a sublime apparition evoking our sympathy by complaining about her plight.”<sup>171</sup>

She “is implicitly castigated as the ‘cityless outcast’ [as she] disturb[s] the eunomia of the state”.<sup>172</sup> From this standpoint, Antigone is uncanny. Her defying act expresses a stance of de-measured excessive insistence which disturbs the ‘beautiful order’ of the city; her unconditional ethics violates the harmony of the polis and is as such ‘beyond human boundary’”.<sup>173</sup> Thus, her excess castigates her as the uncanny. What is ironic is that “while Anigone presents herself as the guardian of the immemorial laws which sustain human order, she acts as a freakish and ruthless abomination”.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, a contrast can be drawn between her ruthlessness and her sister’s human side. In addition, her name exposes her existence’s uncanny dimension. Her name “Antigone” signals the uncanny dimension due to its ambiguity. Such name could be read as “‘unbending’ coming from ‘anti-‘ and ‘gon/-gony’ (corner, bend, angle), but also as ‘opposed to motherhood’ or ‘in place of a mother’ from the root ‘gone’, ‘that which

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<sup>170</sup> Meltzer 2011, 181

See: Segal, Charles. 1995. *Sophocles’ Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*.

<sup>171</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xv

<sup>172</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xx

<sup>173</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xx

<sup>174</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xx

generates' ('gonos', '-gony', as in 'theogony').<sup>175</sup> In ancient Greece, women were supposedly predisposed to giving birth thus, Antigone's desire potentially functions as a rejection of motherhood due to her views.

On the one hand, she disturbs the preexisting harmony but creates a new order of things, a queer one. She could be viewed as "a proto-emancipatory heroine who speaks for all those excluded from the public domain, all those whose voices are not heard."<sup>176</sup> She possesses the voice of an individual whose voice has been excluded "by the hegemonic configuration of the public discourse."<sup>177</sup> Even though she signifies the opening up of possibilities, she signifies "a limit for which no standing, no translatable representation is possible [as it is] the trace of an alternative legality that haunts the conscious, public sphere as its scandalous future."<sup>178</sup> She could be identified as an individual whose social status is indefinite. Thus, the position she occupies is unique and ambiguous as her desire to bury her brother is liminal. Such desire supersedes the confines of patriarchal categorization. Her position is not merely feminine as she forcefully enters the male public domain of affairs. She talks like Creon "appropriating his authority in a perverse displaced way [...] her claim thus displaces the fundamental contours of the Law, what the Law excludes and includes."<sup>179</sup> She stands on the outside of order and tried to reconstruct it radically. Mark Griffith states that "the operative division for Antigone that makes sense of this speech is not between family and non-family, but between natal family and marital family, where Antigone sides decisively with her cursed natal family, making her claims "amount to a resounding rejection of the institution of marriage itself"<sup>180</sup> However, this is problematic because she is willing to abandon Ismene, her natal sister. In addition, the fact that this speech is situated in the midst of laments for her unmarried death is problematic.

Antigone consists a 'living dead' as she occupies an uninhabitable position because there is no space for her in the public sphere. It should be noted that she is

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<sup>175</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xxi

<sup>176</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xxi

<sup>177</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xxi

<sup>178</sup> Butler 2000, 40

<sup>179</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xxii

<sup>180</sup> Story 2008, 174

excluded from this space “not a priori, but only with regard to the way this space is structured now, in the historically contingent and specific conditions.”<sup>181</sup> Até-

“the Ancient Greek goddess of misfortune, madness and ruin; it can also be used to designate the action that a hero performs because of his/her hubris and that ends in his/her downfall, as well as the prohibited domain that the hero enters when s/he performs such an act.”<sup>182</sup>

Antigone’s lamentation is exposed from line 807ff. The guards lead her to the thalamos. She is going to get very little food until she dies alone from natural causes. “Creon thus is trying to avoid miasma by not having Antigone executed.”<sup>183</sup> In the lines 891-928, Antigone exposes a completely different demeanor from the one that she has exposed so far in the play. Her lamentation changes in its character. Folley states that “the self-lamentation is of course an anomaly in itself”.<sup>184</sup> Instead of being presented as a self-secure, confident individual, she seems fragile as “she undergoes a dramatic change of character.”<sup>185</sup> At first, when she was arrested she remained calm throughout the scene (line 459-466) even though she is aware of the fact that she might die. She believes that she was to be praised by the chorus as well but they were too scared to do so because of they were aware of what Creon’s reaction would be like.

This image is highly contrasted to her image now of lamenting how she is going to die unmarried. An explanation of this scene, could be that “Sophocles intended to remind his audience that the highest point in a woman’s life is marriage and that procreation is the most honorable goal”.<sup>186</sup> She highly rejects the ideology of her time as she acknowledges the fact that she would not have acted in this manner even for her own husband.<sup>187</sup> Antigone believes that Polynices has brought her mischief upon her.

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<sup>181</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xxiii

<sup>182</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xxiii

<sup>183</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 61

<sup>184</sup> 1990, 111

<sup>185</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 61

<sup>186</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 62

<sup>187</sup> See: Just, R. 1989. *Women in Athenian Law and Life*.



The stance of the chorus towards Antigone's self-lament is not clear cut. It seems that its reaction is more towards the sarcastic side. Antigone perceives their reaction as mockery. The chorus exclaims "προσέπεσες, ὦ τέκνον, πολὺ πατρῶον δ' ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον"; her desire leads her to hubris that will lead to her punishment<sup>188</sup>. She is suspended somewhere between death and life, as the limits within which she exists are not clear cut. In the lines 925-928, it is obvious that she starts having some doubts and undergoes some changes. After line 891, Antigone feels empowered as she believes that she has made a wise choice and has performed the death rites for her family that she should have for her family. Folley argues that "Antigone, is hardly undergoing a moral collapse or a change of heart in the face of impending death."<sup>189</sup> "She uses her lamentation to carry her point assertively in a public context that might otherwise have silenced her speech."<sup>190</sup> Her transgression seems to have its roots in some of the values she personifies; "the devotion to family traditions and defiance of death."<sup>191</sup> Sophocles attempted to exhibit how Antigone's role was reversed.

Creon is so strict about having Antigone punished because he experiences fear in regards to his manliness as he believes that if he does not enforce a punishment to her "ῥέθος αἰσχύνει".<sup>192</sup> Antigone thus "appears to assume the form of a certain masculine sovereignty, a manhood that cannot be shared, which requires that its other be both feminine and inferior."<sup>193</sup> Therefore, this opens up the locus for a dissident identification, a queer one as the category in which she falls in is not clearly discernible. Once Creon orders that Antigone is removed from the public space because she has challenged his authority, he exclaims that "from now on these two must be women, and must not be on the loose".<sup>194</sup> Antigone is confined in the space of the oikos. Creon tells to Haemon that "there is no worse evil than insubordination! This it is that ruins cities, this it is that destroys houses ... In this way we have to

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Massey, M. 1988. *Women in Ancient Greece and Rome*.

Patterson, C. 1991. "Marriage and the married woman in Athenian law" in S.B. Porreroy, *Women's History and Ancient History*. 49-72.

<sup>188</sup> Soph. Ant 855-856

<sup>189</sup> 1990, 113

<sup>190</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 62

<sup>191</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 62

<sup>192</sup> Soph. Ant 528

<sup>193</sup> Butler 2000, 9

<sup>194</sup> Holland 1998, 1124

protect discipline, and we must never allow a woman to vanquish us."<sup>195</sup> Creon does not tolerate any disagreements neither in terms of the city nor in the locus of the *oikos*. Antigone exclaims “πόσις μὲν ἄν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν, καὶ παῖς ἀπ’ ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ’ ἤμπλακον, μητρὸς δ’ ἐν Ἴαιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοι οὐκ ἔστ’ ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἄν βλάστοι ποτέ”.<sup>196</sup>

In *Antigone* “Sophocles dramatizes the final [...] phase of the destruction of the *genos*, in which a member of the *genos* sets herself up against the *polis* - and is destroyed”.<sup>197</sup> A pivotal question is whether Antigone endangers the *polis* and the *oikos* or whether she functions as their savior. “She pays for her liberation with an abdication”.<sup>198</sup> Antigone consists a peculiarly modern and at the same time universal heroine. Creon’s “authority (*krate*) has been challenged by a woman”<sup>199</sup>; this culminates once Creon exclaims “ἐμοῦ δὲ ζῶντος οὐκ ἄρξει γυνή.”<sup>200</sup> He is absolute in what he requests. By that time, he “has already spoken of Antigone as his 'slave' [...]; who saw his subjects as animals beneath the yoke”.<sup>201</sup>

Thebes is the city that "respects no laws or institutions"<sup>202</sup> and Oedipus, the man who "collapses space and time into perverse singularity"<sup>203</sup> “come together in a shared principle of reproduction that privileges the selfsame as both origin and destination”.<sup>204</sup> “Autochthony and incest have in common the ideal of a self-originary, self-referential, self-generating, self-identical, self-continuous, and finally, self-enclosed narrative of beginnings that has nowhere to go except back to its original starting point”.<sup>205</sup>

Antigone departs from the spiral of a normative construction of identity in which she was caught; hence she breaks the cycle of oppression. Antigone interferes

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<sup>195</sup> Holland 1998, 1124

<sup>196</sup> Soph. Ant. 909-912

<sup>197</sup> Winnington - Ingram 1999, 120

<sup>198</sup> Beauvoir 2005, 376

<sup>199</sup> Winnington- Ingram 1999, 125

<sup>200</sup> Soph. Ant 525

<sup>201</sup> Winnington- Ingram 1999,125

<sup>202</sup> Zeitlin 1990, 147

<sup>203</sup> Euben 1990, 103

<sup>204</sup> Holland 1998, 1122

<sup>205</sup> Holland 1998, 1122

with a space where she has no formal standing as a woman. As Creon puts it, Antigone "act[s] apart"<sup>206</sup>, she "think[s] differently" from other Thebans; for her part, Antigone likens her- self to Niobe, "the Phrygian stranger" once married to a Theban king.<sup>207</sup> She is positioned "not [as] an absolute but a familiar stranger to her own people, and her actions, though undertaken alone, work to open up and restore public space".<sup>208</sup> "According to Greek mythology, Niobe was the daughter of Tantalus, King of Sipylus".<sup>209</sup> She was punished by having her children killed because she had been boasting about her progenitive abilities. Apollo and Artemis were the ones who punished her. Folklore tradition "her sorrow turned her to rock on Mount Sipylus, which continues to weep when snow melts".<sup>210</sup> Antigone's actions bring to an end Thebes's otherwise endless cycle of beginnings.<sup>211</sup> "Antigone's marriage to her cousin Haemon would have introduced her family and her city into yet another cycle of Theban time, and a new generation into Thebes' endless cycle of beginnings."<sup>212</sup> Thus, a queer reading is indispensable because it is linked to specific temporal and spatial conditions.

As a play, *the Antigone* exposes the contradictions in the very fabric of a normative gender identification. "It illustrates a necessary conflict, showing that useful rather than deadly conflicts make democracy possible".<sup>213</sup> She "insists up to her death on performing a precise symbolic gesture: the proper burial of her brother."<sup>214</sup> Antigone "is a drama of a failed symbolic ritual."<sup>215</sup> What sets Antigone as "a pure agent of death drive is her unconditional insistence on the demand for the symbolic

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<sup>206</sup> Sophocles 1982, 128

<sup>207</sup> Sophocles 1994, 81

<sup>208</sup> Holland 1998, 1126

<sup>209</sup> Holland 1998, 1126

<sup>210</sup> Holland 1998, 1126

<sup>211</sup> The success of the play lies in Antigone's 'loss' over the dispute she had with Creon. Had she won over the argument, the success of the play would not have been guaranteed. If there was an alternative end in the play and Antigone buried her brother, she would not have been punished neither would she have had to die.

<sup>212</sup> Holland 1998, 1128

<sup>213</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, x

<sup>214</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, x

<sup>215</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, x

ritual, an insistence which allows for no displacement or other form of compromise.”<sup>216</sup>

In conclusion, “Antigone is certainly a feminist, a girl defying patriarchy, a lone woman standing up to a cruel man. But she ain’t no sister, there’s no solidarity or community in her actions. She is a rebel but not a revolutionary. She doesn’t want to remove Creon and replace his dictatorship with a more democratic system.”<sup>217</sup> Sophocles exposes “how the law and dissent create and generate one another, illustrating the necessary tension between the state and the people, the family and the individual, man and woman.”<sup>218</sup> Examining Antigone’s actions, desire and limitations provide a more nuanced reading, a queer one. Her desire consists a focal element that brings attention to the notion of gender and dissident identifications, as they entail for a freedom that cannot be bound by any limitations. One would guess that anyone who entered challenged Creon’s edict would automatically enter the political sphere, however Antigone doing so as a woman exposes a gendered dynamics, extremely charged.

From the up until now, “Antigone has served as the theoretical stage for reflection on a whole variety of conflicts and ambivalence seen as endemic to the modern condition: between the old and the new, family and state, conviction and obedience, sentiment and reason, women and men”.<sup>219</sup> She consists a figure that occupied a marginal position as a liminal subject, but accomplishes to gain radical agency according to the western tradition. Elshtain claims that Antigone is “the woman who [threw] sand into the machinery of arrogant public power” hence her action is disruptive in terms of positioning.<sup>220</sup> What is charming about the play is its capacity for “acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come”.<sup>221</sup> The same drama of flesh and spirit, and of finitude and transcendence, plays itself out in both sexes; both are eaten away by time,

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<sup>216</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, xv

<sup>217</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, viii

<sup>218</sup> Žižek and Kureishi 2017, ix

<sup>219</sup> Holland 1998, 1109

<sup>220</sup> 1982, 55

Elshtain, Jean Bethke. 1982. “Antigone's Daughters.” *Democracy* 2:46-59.

<sup>221</sup> Nietzsche 1983, 60

stalked by death, they have the same essential need of the other; and they can take the same glory from their freedom; if they knew how to savor it.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Beauvoir 2005, xiii

## YEARNING BODIES; IMMEDIATE BREAKDOWN OF CORPOREALITY

“Our body is not a space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument. [...] Even our most secret affective movements, those most deeply tied to the humoral infrastructure, help to shape our perception of things.”<sup>223</sup>

“Our body is not a space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument. [...] Even our most secret affective movements, those most deeply tied to the humoral infrastructure, help to shape our perception of things.”<sup>224</sup>

*The Bacchae* is an interesting play because it is set in Thebes, a setting that disrupts the division among men and women, mortals and immortals, the personal and civic order. It is important to delineate the spatial dimension of the play through a phenomenological approach to expose role reversal. It would be useful to examine the context which provides the underpinning for the existence of an alternative, queer identification. In the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “queer” was defined as something ““odd,” “strange,” something which is “out of the ordinary””.<sup>225</sup> I will try to analyze *the Bacchae* through deconstructing gender roles. The *Bacchae* is a play about deconstruction and inversion as

“what is presented on stage is the resistance to the introduction of the cult of Dionysus to the city of Thebes and its final, violent establishment through the same forces that were unleashed during the Dionysiac festivals; the “normal,” useful queerness of the festivals is (mis)placed outside the Athenian ritual context and becomes the very mechanism which brings about the tragic fall.”<sup>226</sup>

When Dionysus’ cult was introduced in Thebes, it had exactly this effect; it imparted the sensation of something strange, out of the ordinary and encompassed an aspect of danger to it as a threat. It was something dangerous, as it provoked a trepidation to the social order of the polis and to its status quo. Dionysus’ festival offered the space for the occurrence of inversion.

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<sup>223</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964, 5

<sup>224</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964, 5

<sup>225</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 78

<sup>226</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 76

Dionysus was a god whose identity was “oscillating between extremes: he was both Theban and Asian, both Greek and barbarian, raised as a girl, dismembered by the Titans and transformed into a bull”; hence his identity is related to the “exaggeration of reality.”<sup>227</sup> He is “foreign and local: a member of Thebes’ ruling family, Dionysus is nevertheless presented as an outsider, and he and his followers (the Bacchantes of the chorus) are explicitly treated as non-Greeks”.<sup>228</sup> He is both human and divine and encompasses both male and female characteristics, capable to reach women en masse. The symbols of Dionysus are “the phallic, ivy-covered thyrsus coupled with around wine cup symbolize the fusion of male and female, intoxication and sexuality, in a single divine personage”.<sup>229</sup> Dionysus is the figure that encompasses all kinds of dialectics as he is a subject laden with features of both sides of the spectrum.

In the prologue, the situation in Thebes is set out. It is denoted that Dionysus has come to Thebes to inflict a punishment to Pentheus’ mother, Semele’s sister and also to the other sisters. He tries to achieve that by getting dressed as a human “ὧν οὔνεκ’ εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω μορφήν τ’ ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν”.<sup>230</sup> The punishment of these women is madness “τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὤιστρησ’ ἐγὼ μανίαις, ὄρος δ’ οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν, σκευὴν τ’ ἔχειν ἠνάγκασ’ ὀργίων ἐμῶν”.<sup>231</sup> “The daughters of Cadmus are ‘driven’ to the mountain by the god, but also the whole womenfolk of Thebes.”<sup>232</sup> Pentheus is a political ruler who does not believe in Dionysus’ words, “a stranger who comes from abroad and declares himself a god.”<sup>233</sup> He believes that he consists the agent responsible for the social upheaval caused by these women. The fact that “all the women had abandoned their homes and

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<sup>227</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 76

<sup>228</sup> Schotten 2008, 8

<sup>229</sup> Schotten 2008, 8

<sup>230</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 53-54

<sup>231</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 32-34

<sup>232</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 45. It should be noted that the Macedonian audience that watched the play was more perceptive of women’s rights.

<sup>233</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 47

It should be noted that an analogy could be drawn between Pentheus and Creon of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Pentheus experiences a deeper inclination towards the rules of the polis of obscure, dissident commands of God. He acknowledged the power of that they had but he doubted Dionysus’ existence and did not place him in the pantheon of Gods he personally revered. However, it is obvious that he respected the Gods and performed all the necessary religious rites.

transgressed the boundaries of the *polis* is a phenomenon contrary to all notions of order and stability.”<sup>234</sup>

Pentheus believes that women are themselves responsible for leaving their homes. They broke the social confinements which mandated them to remain at home. Cithaeron “stands for the opposite of the city; the opposite of organized political society, with the established laws that preserve and define it.”<sup>235</sup> The degree of abnormality of these women’s movement is evident. Dionysus was the figure that set the conditions that allowed to the women to transgress certain boundaries and cross the line in some situations even though the scheme in which they operated was known, rendering them as queer subjects. The abnormality of the situation is further enforced by the speech of the messenger (lines 677-777)<sup>236</sup>. Pentheus imagines that these women have sexual orgies in the mountains. In his speech lines 215- 241<sup>237</sup>, Pentheus denotes that the women of Thebes “imposed a kind of ‘strike’ on sexual relations with their men; a strike that is aggravated by the fact that, up here on the mountain, a seductive- looking Lydian is with the woman day or night.”<sup>238</sup> The Theban males felt upset because their wives would not satisfy their sexual needs.<sup>239</sup> They were even more astonished by the fact that a Lydian was with these women in the mountain, as he could have seduced them.<sup>240</sup> It is interesting though that the power of the Lydian over the women is his effeminate look. Therefore, the power Dionysus has over the feminine is queer.

The issue of role reversal is central to the play. It is interesting how women acquire characteristics of warriors and embrace more masculine traits while Pentheus acquires feminine characteristics. The fact that the women abandoned their houses due to the Dionysiac cult was in contrast to the social norms of that era as they were confined in their *oikos*. Gould denotes that “there is an apparent masculinisation of women in Greek tragedies” in contrast to their role in the Greek society.<sup>241</sup> The conflict extends to the level of the *polis*, as these women challenge not only Pentheus’

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<sup>234</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 45

<sup>235</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 47

<sup>236</sup> Eur. *Bacch*

<sup>237</sup> Eur. *Bacch*

<sup>238</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 46

<sup>239</sup> Eur. *Bacch*. 215-241

<sup>240</sup> Eur. *Bacch*. 233-238

<sup>241</sup> Syropoulos 2000, 94



masculinity but also his authority on a political level. The audience becomes aware that the women have abandoned their oikos by the employment of a repetition in the play. The Chorus “asks the polis to accompany the women to the mountain”<sup>242</sup> in lines 105-119.<sup>243</sup> Syropoulos suggests that “the repetition is employed by drawing attention to the fact that every single one of the women has abandoned the polis”.<sup>244</sup> There was none exception to this movement beyond the bounds of the polis and more broadly a normative sexuality. Their personal movement towards the mountain is therefore rendered a highly political issue, as it implicates a queer dialectic.

The Bacchae could be viewed as a marginal group and thus in the minds of the fifth century audience they could never be considered as a viable role model because they did not consist the norm. These women “were no more than ‘women’, in the eyes of the audience”.<sup>245</sup> Even though they were turned into bacchantes by an exterior agent and run almost naked in the mountains, they were still considered as falling into the category of the female, however they expose a queer identification. The clothing of these women illuminates the possibility of an alternative identification. Women’s clothing is illustrated as a means of the disruption of the social order. It is not used purposely in order to ignite sexual desire but at the same time it is overly sexualized due to the gaze. It is interesting to consider that male actors “put on women’s clothing and threaten” men.<sup>246</sup> The choice of Euripides of the composition of women of the play and the chorus is interesting. He chose to portray married and unmarried women together as an ensemble. They consist a closely knit group and Agave has taken up their leadership “μήτηρ Ἀγαυὴ σύγγονοί θ’ ὁμόσποροι πᾶσαι τε βάκχαι”<sup>247</sup>.

What is interesting is that the Bacchae perform actions that are highly performative that could only being achieved with the intervention of gods. In lines 734-748, the women seem to attack the cattle. This scene is very raw and exposes obscene cruelty imposing queer characteristics to these heroines. Another scene that exposes their queer characteristics, is the scene of “the attack of Bacchae against the village close to Hysai and Erytrai, built under the slopes of Cithairon<sup>248</sup>”; “ὥστε

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<sup>242</sup> Syropoulos, 2000, 94

<sup>243</sup> Eur. *Bacch.*

<sup>244</sup> 2000, 94

<sup>245</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 46

<sup>246</sup> Bassi 1988, 108

<sup>247</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 1092-1093

<sup>248</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 47

πολέμιοι ἐπεσπεσοῦσαι πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω διέφερον· ἦρπαζον μὲν ἐκ δόμων τέκνα”<sup>249</sup>. In this scene, the women destroy everything as they resemble an army of enemies. The inversion of gender of these women is obvious, as they adopt male characteristics that are usually attributed to warrior-like figures. Through their actions, they become “superabundantly fertile and uncannily strong, capable of repelling Thebes’s armies with their bare hands”.<sup>250</sup> Pentheus reacts against their transgression and routing of male patriarchy. He wants to kill them because he feels vulnerable in relation to their power. He questions his on standing in this dialectic.

Another aspect of the Bacchae’s identity that needs to be further explored, is their relationship to motherhood. I gesture towards the recognition of the maenads as a sum of women that live outside the norms of reproduction labor as they place emphasis to sensual pleasure. They are self-sufficient subjects who “are able to draw sustenance from the earth [...] and are procreatively independent from men in their species-violating maternity”.<sup>251</sup> The experience of not functioning “as mothers, subordinates, or sexual objects” to men was something unheard of, for a woman of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>252</sup> It is oxymoron that the woman “must be both an element of commerce, a mobile entity, and the immobile field; she must incarnate not her own land, but that of her husband”.<sup>253</sup> That places her in the center of the gender politics while she has been excluded from them. She operates from the outside, within. She belongs to the economy of the oikos and the polis and is yet excluded from there. The Maenads go beyond the portrayal of the chaste mother, as they are not receptacles for mere reproduction but are wandering entities opt to the consumption of the body. It is poignant that even when the female body struggles “with the conflicts generated by the particularities of [its] subordinate social position, [its] demands for identity” are crafted in a way “for exploring the male project of selfhood”.<sup>254</sup>

Zeitlin draws a connection among women and their association with madness “the limits of the female body are perceived as permeable, [...] as there is the possibility for the intrusion from the outside, and are less easily controllable from [...]

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<sup>249</sup> Eur. Bacch 752-754

<sup>250</sup> Schotten 2008, 10

<sup>251</sup> Schotten 2008, 13

<sup>252</sup> Schotten 2008, 13

<sup>253</sup> DuBois 1988, 217

<sup>254</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 67

logic.”<sup>255</sup> The women not only renounce their femininity but also acquire a queer identification. “Madness, the irrational, and the emotional aspects of life are associated in the culture more with women than with men.”<sup>256</sup> “The boundaries of women's bodies are perceived as more fluid, more permeable, more open to affect and entry from the outside, less easily controlled by intellectual and rational means”.<sup>257</sup> The female body is rendered as culturally more frail than its male counterpart. The female agent disrupts the stability of orientation, as it disrupts the power of the male over it. “In Greek theater [...] the self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male, while the woman is assigned the role of the radical other”.<sup>258</sup>

The women in the mountains challenge the “civic, masculine authority of the king” by abandoning their oikos.<sup>259</sup> Pentheus desires to go to the mountain to spy on the women who had left Thebes and live there as maenads. He believes that the “violations of the sexual order are violations of the political order, and vice versa”.<sup>260</sup> At the beginning of *the Bacchae*, the Maenads are sitting at a particular, fixed point on some rocks “ὅπ' ἐλάταις” 38. As the play goes on, they try to reach Pentheus but are unable to do so. However, this is remarkable, as they could have reached him because of their positioning on a cliff towards the tree on which Pentheus was at, as indicate in line 1097, but did they not, as he had a different sense of sexual orientation than they had.

Pentheus thinks this disruption of the boundaries of the city was caused by the gender ambiguity of Dionysus. He views the transgressions “as violations [of] the city’s order and Greek sanity.”<sup>261</sup> The women have committed a transgression as they have escaped the confines of the oikos and have gone to the mountains. They constitute queer subjects as their identification is delimited by the spatiality of the mountain. However, their queer identification carries negative undertones. The women turn violent once Pentheus tries to re-establish the disrupted order and assert

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<sup>255</sup> Syropoulos 2000, 94. See also: Zeitlin Froma. 1990. “Playing the Other; theater, theatricality and the feminine in Greek drama”, in *Nothing to do with Dionysus?* 63-96

<sup>256</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 65

<sup>257</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 65

<sup>258</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 66. See: Bamber, Linda .1982. *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare*.

<sup>259</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 63

<sup>260</sup> Schotten 2008, 8

<sup>261</sup> Schotten 2008, 8

his authority because they wish to subvert the existing order of things and modify existing structures.

All the women married or unmarried have escaped all male companionship or supervision and have gone to the mountains where they perform rituals. Pentheus believes that these women threaten his authority and function as a disruption as they attempt to overturn the rule of the men. He has taken up the government of Thebes, as the grandson of Cadmus. Pentheus wishes to infer punishment upon the god who induced the women to abandon their oikos and at the same time these women themselves as they<sup>7</sup> wished to overturn his authority and have transgressed the boundaries set by their gender and the 5<sup>th</sup> century society. The representation of space in the antiquity requires a center; in order for direction to be established. The Maenads disrupt this fixed point and expose the possibility for the existence of an alternative direction. The Maenads have spatial access to a set of powers beyond men's control. It should be noted that the "same exclusion which relegates them to the inside as mistresses of the interior space equips them for deviousness and duplicity, gives them a talent, or at least a reputation, for weaving wiles and fabricating plots, marks of their double consciousness with regard to the world of men."<sup>262</sup> The Maenads cross every type of boundary of the body and of identity as a dissident community.

Agave could be viewed as the leader of the women. Agave seems "befuddled by latent masculine traits".<sup>263</sup> She rejects the divine nature of Dionysus, therefore denying the very own fabric of her identity, her femininity as she came into being by the very performance of the characteristics that Dionysus embodies. She does not come to terms with her sexual identity. She is incapable of accepting herself as a woman, as she rejects the very life that was created in her womb which ultimately leads to Pentheus' atrocious death. Her assumption of a queer identification brings upon her demise, her downfall, as she commits the most atrocious act by becoming aggressive, a predominantly male trait and in the end she collapses as her identity dissolves.

Agave has had a great impact on Pentheus' psyche, as she induced him to experience an alternative reality where the bacchae practice rituals in order to satisfy Dionysus' longings. In his fantasy, these women are greatly intuned with their

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<sup>262</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 75

<sup>263</sup> Dunbar 2017, 49

sexuality. Pentheus' "bared desire climaxes in his wish to see them performing their rites: he claims that he "would pay a great sum to see that"; "ἄ· βούλησι σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν; μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δούς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν"<sup>264</sup> and is aroused by the thought of returning to town cradled in his mother's arms"<sup>265</sup>; "φερόμενος ἦξεις ... ἀβρότητ' ἐμὴν λέγεις. ἐν χερσὶ μητρός. καὶ τρυφᾶν μ' ἀναγκάσεις."<sup>266</sup> He experiences an oedipal longing. He has an unhealthy fixation on his mother. He "is afraid of sex, but loses all psychic stability with the idea of watching his mother involved in sexual acts".<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, Pentheus' oedipal longings which seem to have contributed to his queer identification are reinforced by the disappearance of Echion, his father from his mother side as Dionysus seems now to have a central role in Agave's life. Pentheus views Dionysus as a father-figure. He is fixated on his oedipal anxieties due to this change of his perception of Dionysus.

Pentheus is taking up a disguise in order to see what these women are doing in that space. Being visible is problematic, as visibility "provokes voyeurism [and] fetishism."<sup>268</sup> Dionysus suggests to Pentheus that he needs to dress as a woman to perform this action. Even though in the beginning, he seems to get outraged, later he accepts Dionysus' proposition because he accepts his reasoning that if he does not get dressed as a woman, he will lose his life. Pentheus provides an example of crossing the heavily policed boundaries of normative sexuality. It is interesting to examine sexual morphing through the change of clothes into the other's sex clothes in the context of the Greek tragedy.<sup>269</sup> The audience was familiar with the practice of putting into scrutiny the non-hyperbolic constituent of cross-dressing. However, there were no exact definitions for the settled changes of sex or clothes. "This unpredicted absence reflects something about their perception of homosexuality, transsexuality and bisexuality (as Euro- Americans understand those essential terms)".<sup>270</sup> Even though it existed, they thought that they did not need to castigate it in a separate category. Dionysus' stratagem opens up the locus for the existence of a potential alternative sexual identification. Pentheus wants to protect his so called "unequivocal

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<sup>264</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 810-812

<sup>265</sup> Dunbar 2017, 48

<sup>266</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 968-969

<sup>267</sup> Dunbar 2017, 48

<sup>268</sup> Phelan 1993, 6

<sup>269</sup> Lateiner 2009, 126. See also: Forbes 1990, 149

<sup>270</sup> Lateiner 2009, 126

masculine identity” but clearly fails to.<sup>271</sup> He does not want to be seen therefore he needs to conceal his identity and adopt Dionysus’ stratagem. Winnington- Ingram denotes that Pentheus “is obsessed with the aestheticization of the God” and “a desire of the power that is similar to the source of the Dionysian frenzy.”<sup>272</sup> The aestheticization of the God seems to derive from an attraction to his stylistic excess which drives him to acquire a queer identification. His aestheticization is a self-contained act which spawns in the domain of queerness. Agency needs to be conceived in terms of the notion of performance. Pentheus adopts those characteristics towards which he exposes contempt, thus the notion of inversion is central to the adoption of a queer identification. He becomes more emotional instead of logical, he exposes illusiveness instead of having discipline. Doubling and reversal function as forces that reinforce the ambiguity of Pentheus’ identity.

He allows Dionysus to dress him “in an elaborate toilette and in a flowing wig and headdress, a long pleated robe and belt, to which he adds the typical insignia of the maenads-the dappled fawn skin and ritual thyrsus”.<sup>273</sup> Pentheus wants Dionysus to lead him as he is dressed as a woman to “the mountainside through the main streets of the city, highlighting not simply his pleasure in feminine attire, but also the development of a new desire: to be seen by others (as taking pleasure) in this attire”.<sup>274</sup> He undergoes the gaze as he parades around the city exposing a forbidden desire. The gaze demarcates the space, as the subject enters this entity and performs his desire. The gaze is dependent on the spatial and temporal dimension; it is linked therefore to the dialectic of phenomenology. Once he arrives in the mountain with Dionysus, he remains hidden and is not subjected to the gaze but watches the women from afar. Pentheus “makes the first discovery of his corporeal self” while being dressed as a woman. Prior to this discovery, he is obstinate to any kind of touch of the other.<sup>275</sup> Pentheus’ body is grotesquely feminine. He turns into a spectator, viewing the women’s physical contacts with the others. The dialectic of the gaze of the body is

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<sup>271</sup> Zeitlin 1985,63

It should be noted that: “The men’s sanctioned man-dressed- as-woman cross-dressing at unofficial (and non-religious) social events found on some Attic vases (500-450 B.C.) stresses, for both ideological and artistic reasons”, “their absolute failure, as transvestites, to hide their masculinity”. Miller 1999, 247

<sup>272</sup> Winnington – Ingram 1969, 54

<sup>273</sup> Zeitlin 1985,63

<sup>274</sup> Schotten 2008, 10

<sup>275</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 71

highly performative. This body is continuously at odds with itself, subject to a congenital dissonance between inside and outside.<sup>276</sup> The exhibition of the body in the genre of tragedy is constant, as the body and especially corpses are exposed to public view all the time.

Pentheus' former reluctance to be seen in drag “καὶ μὴν δοκῶ σφας ἐν λόγμαις ὄρνιθας ὡς λέκτρων ἔχεσθαι φιλάτοις ἐν ἔρκεσιν”<sup>277</sup> turns into some kind of exhibitionism “κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός· μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ' ἀνήρ τολμῶν τόδε”.<sup>278</sup> He turns into a figure that wants to be seen by others, thus fully encapsulates his voyeuristic tendencies. He comes into being through the gaze.

“Pentheus' unconscious visual echo of his grandfather and Teiresias' sentiments as they walked towards Cithaeron, seeing themselves “as the only men” “μόνοι δὲ πόλεως Βακχίῳ χορεύσομεν”<sup>279</sup> ; willing to go, is echoed by the sight of one man in Bacchic attire leading another who [...] is unsteady on his feet. Pentheus is about to undergo an agon, a “competition”, or “struggle”, but not the heroic kind.”<sup>280</sup>

He undergoes this change of identity through Dionysus. It should be noted that the choice of the word “pompos” carries “sinister undertones in Greek” as Hermes was the one who lead the souls “to the Underworld”.<sup>281</sup> The orientation which Pentheus adapts seems to be dark and obscure, just as the underworld because not many others had the chance to go on that direction. His orientation was limited as there were no clear markers that would have helped him transition towards attaining a radical subjectivity as a queer subject. Despite that he managed to undergo change and become aware of his queer longings. His arrival to the place where the women were gathered points towards the underlying menace of his mother being the leader of the

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<sup>276</sup> See: Belaval, Yvon. 1965. “Ouverture sur le spectacle,” in *Histoire des spectacles*, ed. R.Queneau. 3–16.

<sup>277</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 957 – 958

<sup>278</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 961- 962

<sup>279</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 195

<sup>280</sup> Ringer 2016, 333

<sup>281</sup> Ringer 2016, 333

women and thus is rendered grotesque.<sup>282</sup> Watching the women points to the unheimlich as it imparts a strangely familiar sensation. The uncanny brings forward Pentheus' forbidden impulse to be merged with his mother. His Oedipal longings are apparent; as he will "become" his mother when he will trade "his mask for that of Agave".<sup>283</sup> The fluidity of his position is obvious, as he wavers from one side of the spectrum to the other.

The transgression of vestimentary codes of the Athenian society of the 5<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the theater was a common practice. The practice of cross-dressing is the most obvious performative action in which Pentheus engages. "References to ritual cross-dressing- although scattered in the sources- point to the significance of gender-specific clothing, as opposed to some other cultural artifact, for distinguishing and establishing social norms."<sup>284</sup> Cross-dressing enables the display of the body to a viewing audience, thus the notion of the gaze is essential in this dialectic. It could be viewed as a performative act that undoes, deconstructs gender and has a social function. Clothing is a marker of the transgression of one's gendered identity. The theatrical body needs to be explored. Women's clothing is "associated with dissimulation and deception in the eyes of a male spectator" thus it is "closely aligned with overt disguise on the continuum of bodily display" even when it does not consist the medium of performative cross-dressing.<sup>285</sup> The adoption of an overt disguise by Pentheus is associated with feminine subjectivity. In this case disguise signifies "a radical change of status in which the integrity or constancy of the masculine subject [...] is at risk."<sup>286</sup>

From the prologue of the *Bacchae* Dionysus declares that he is a disguised god in a man's costume "μορφήν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν πάρειμι Δίρκης νόμαθ' Ἴσμηνοῦ θ' ὕδωρ"<sup>287</sup>. The actor who embodied Dionysus was a male who was dressed in a god's suit and then in an effeminate way. Charles Segal states that

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<sup>282</sup> Dionysus tells Pentheus that his mother "ἡ τεκοῦσά γε" will bring him back. Eur. *Bacch.* 966 This prolific statement seems to function as a premonition of Pentheus' demise and tragic death.

<sup>283</sup> Ringer 2016, 333

<sup>284</sup> Bassi 1988, 106

<sup>285</sup> Bassi 1988, 114

<sup>286</sup> Bassi 1988, 114

<sup>287</sup> Eur. *Bacch* 4-5



“Dionysus operates as the principle that destroys differences”.<sup>288</sup> He encompasses differences in the fabric of his identity and therefore he diminishes differences across gender identification. “Dionysus’ body is deceitful, an act, a performance within a performance within a performance”<sup>289</sup> as “he goes beyond the one-sided femininity of a male-to-female cross-dresser”.<sup>290</sup> Dionysus’ metaperformative nature is both an acknowledgement and disavowal of an essential identity. By celebrating performance, a split of the core of a normative identity occurs. He is a figure that encompasses characteristics of both the male and the female and creating the space for the emergence of a queer figure that is relatable to the other gods. His body that is in the center of this dialectic cannot be castigated neither as male nor as female. He deconstructs the binaries of singularity of an essential identity. Dionysus is “rendered almost immaterial by his perpetual imitations and transformations”.<sup>291</sup> His essence is dissolved.

Cross-dressing was considered as a “form of deviance, simultaneously challenging [yet] supporting the perpetuation of the “normal” and the “normative””.<sup>292</sup> The polis was considered the framework through which the tendencies that were considered marginal were purged. Dionysus is the figure that persuades Pentheus to dress as a woman. Pentheus hesitates to follow Dionysus’ plan. His first reaction towards his plan is rage as he believes that he will get killed if the women discover that he is a man, “τί δὲ τόδ’; ἐς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελεῶ;”<sup>293</sup> He then “hesitates again, pleading αἰδώς”.<sup>294</sup> Afterwards, he agrees to get dressed as a woman. Dionysus’ power over Pentheus is clear. He convinced him to follow him because “transvestism was inherent in Dionysiac mystic initiation”.<sup>295</sup> Once Pentheus adapts a constructed image of a female figure, he becomes extremely aware of his appearance and outwards characteristics<sup>296</sup>. He suddenly becomes aware of the gaze.

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<sup>288</sup> 1982, 234

<sup>289</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 77

<sup>290</sup> Raymond 1996, 218

<sup>291</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 77

<sup>292</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 76

<sup>293</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 822

<sup>294</sup> Neumburg 1987, 228

<sup>295</sup> Segal 1982, 33

<sup>296</sup> See: Eur. *Bacch.* 932-944

He starts employing willingly the behavior of women, as becomes cunning and adapts hiding and spying, which are overtly feminine practices. Segal notes that Pentheus:

“takes on the alter ego that he most scorns... and acts out of the opposite of the values of his male peer group: effeminacy instead of masculinity; emotionality instead of rationality; illusion, magic, and trickery instead of realistic clarity, forthrightness, and martial discipline”.<sup>297</sup>

This image of his is contrasted to his previous attachment to the military code. He is presented “εμφανώς” and not “λάθρα” as a woman “ἀλλ’ ἐξιχνεύσουσίν σε, κἂν ἔλθῃς λάθρα. ἀλλ’ ἐμφανῶς· καλῶς γὰρ ἐξεῖπας τάδε”.<sup>298</sup> His behavior is overtly performative.

Pentheus act of dressing up as a woman is highly performative as “he embodies the double reality of a cross-dressed actor [...] thus both exposing the mechanism of female representation on-stage and drawing attention to the very origins of performative transvestism, associating it with the cross-dressing often practiced in Dionysiac cult”.<sup>299</sup> He has a queer identification which reinforces the duplicity of his nature. The symbol of the double is a “symptom of madness [...], but madness is the emblem of the feminine,” linked with the “double consciousness that a man acquired by dressing like a woman and entering into the theatrical illusion”.<sup>300</sup> Therefore, the pertinence of duplicity signifies the inaccessibility of the original self and exposes the oppositions that undergird the construction of identity.

Trying to “pass” as being a member of the opposite sex and not being noticed, sheds light to the aspect of the social construction of gender. It breaks down essentialized notions of identity. He experiences anxiety and therefore attempts to pass as a member of the opposite sex. The “presence of the transvestite interrupts and reconfigures the established definition of and relationship between genders”.<sup>301</sup> This configuration is perceived as stable but is rather fluid. The situated self enters the dialectic of exhibitionism. His desire for access leads him to an exploration. Access and openness are notions essential for the queer self. He wants to guard the difference that might be noticed and therefore open up the locus for questioning in regards to his

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<sup>297</sup> Dunbar 2017, 49

<sup>298</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 817-818

<sup>299</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 80

<sup>300</sup> Zeitlin 1996, 363

<sup>301</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 75

identity and positioning. His sexuality impinges on questions related to his positioning, revealing contingencies inherent in the construction of male identity.

Pentheus desires to learn about everything that the maenads are involved in, so Dionysus bends the upper tip of a fig tree in order to help him see everything. However, once he releases the tree he is brought to sight. This could be viewed as a “coming-out maneuver”, which underscores his desire to be seen.<sup>302</sup> This underwrites his troubled connection with desire; the fig tree could be viewed as a phallic symbol exposes his troubled relationship with desire. He is vulnerable to be manipulated due to his desire; as much as he tries to keep it hidden, the more he is subjected to everyone’s gaze. At this moment, Dionysus tells the women where Pentheus is. They “dislodge Pentheus from his perch, uprooting the tree at its base in a symbolic castration that effectively destroys the male desire and power the erect phallus represents.”<sup>303</sup> They uncover his sexual tendencies and bring him to the forefront.

Pentheus yearns to explore his sexual identity. He experiences the “initiant’s transition from fear and ignorance to idyllic certainty” however, his desire leads him to his downfall.<sup>304</sup> At the beginning, he was not certain of his sexuality because he had not fully explored it; he undergoes a process of self-realization. Pentheus’ lack of self-awareness is obvious, due to the profound confusion he experiences in terms of his sexuality. He is prone to “sexual perversions- [such as] voyeurism, transvestism, and prurience- and [has an] urge for violence”.<sup>305</sup> Others view Pentheus’ sexuality as dissident. He tells him not to “mistake for wisdom the fantasies of [his] sick mind”.<sup>306</sup> Therefore, he wavers towards a certain pathology. It should be made clear though that I do not side with the parallelism of a queer identification to a deviant psychological condition. Dionysus reinforces Pentheus’ lack of awareness of his sexuality, as he states “οὐκ οἶσθ’ ὅτι ζῆς οὐδ’ ὁ δρᾶις οὐδ’ ὅστις εἶ”.<sup>307</sup> However, this is problematic as it mirrors Pentheus’ amathia – lack of knowledge as something stable however it is transient. It denotes the start of his transition towards awareness. He undergoes a rite of passage. Dionysus implies that even his own name brings him closer to death, as it derives from the root of the word “penthos”- mourning; “ἐνδυστυχῆσαι τοῦνομ’

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<sup>302</sup> Schotten 2008, 10

<sup>303</sup> Schotten 2008, 12

<sup>304</sup> Dunbar 2017, 48

<sup>305</sup> Dunbar 2017, 48

<sup>306</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 311-312

<sup>307</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 506

ἐπιτήδειος εἶ”.<sup>308</sup> Finally, this leads to his death, as ultimately he sits on the “erect” tree to observe the festivities from above which brings his downfall. This is further reinforced by the aggression exhibited by Pentheus.

On the most part, his violence is directed towards Dionysus. He “desires to cut his neck”; “παύσω κτυποῦντα θύρσον ἀνασειόντά τε κόμας, τράχηλον σώματος χωρὶς τεμῶν”<sup>309</sup> which indicates a wish to castrate” him<sup>310</sup>. Pentheus exposes violent traits as he swears that he will beat anyone who will pose a threat to his father “Τίς ἀδικεῖ, τίς σ’ ἀτιμάζει, γέρον; τίς σὴν ταράσσει καρδίαν λυπηρὸς ὄν; λέγ’, ὡς κολάζω τὸν ἀδικοῦντά σ’, ᾧ πάτερ”.<sup>311</sup> He is portrayed as extremely violent; a reflection of normative masculinity which forges heteronormative relationships as the norm. Another instance of the desire for castration is when “Pentheus cuts Dionysus hair (potency) and takes his thyrsus (phallus)”.<sup>312</sup> Pentheus himself exposes a desire himself to be castrated; he achieves that metaphorically by dressing up as a woman. “His castration disorder also emerges in his fear of Aphrodite, women, and sex; in “πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ μαινάδας θυοσκόους, τὴν δ’ Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ’ ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου”.<sup>313</sup> He claims it is Aphrodite, the bacchae worship not Dionysus really.

Pentheus experiences a rite of passage; he is in a liminal state “characterized by disorientation and a breakdown of normal concepts of identity and behavioral norms”.<sup>314</sup> He renounces his position as a king and escaped his masculinity. “Pentheus’ feminization transfers him to a different sphere of reality, as common sense does not apply to him.”<sup>315</sup> He has a different understanding of reality than he had before acquiring a queer identity. Pentheus will die by getting dismembered by his mother Agave. He begs his mother to forgive him and entices her to recognize him as her son. However, she fails to recognize her own son because she was under Dionysus’ spell. He plants her foot against his ribs and tears his arm apart by holding his wrists in her hands. The other women participated in Pentheus’ sparagmos and continued dismembering him. This could be viewed as “the orgy of which Pentheus

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<sup>308</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 508

<sup>309</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 240-241

<sup>310</sup> Dunbar 2017, 48

<sup>311</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 1320-1322

<sup>312</sup> Dunbar 2017, 48

<sup>313</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 224-225

<sup>314</sup> Csapo 1996, 253

<sup>315</sup> Syropoulos 2000, 96

dreamed, though he never imagined he would participate in it in this way.”<sup>316</sup> I do not stand with the view that his dismemberment occurs from the transgressive nature of his desires. Pentheus is “undone by his attempt to maintain a decaying sexual-political order”.<sup>317</sup> He becomes dismembered because he disrupts the existing structures.

Pentheus’ cross-dressing could be viewed as the beginning of his sparagmos. His body seems “to loosen its structures so that it will easily become “unbound,” undone and fragmented”<sup>318</sup>. Through the performative act of cross-dressing the concreteness of the male body has been dissolved, as he assumes a fluid identity. Through his body he has acquired the fluidity that renders his body as the other. His body becomes a spectacle, as it is subjected to the gaze. However, what is interesting is the inversion that takes place as Pentheus has become a voyeur that devours the spectacle of the Bacchae. Pentheus falls into a third identitarian space, as he “becomes this third gender inside the performance, thus unconcealed by the theatrical illusion.”<sup>319</sup> Therefore, in this context, manliness and womanliness could be “exposed as a masquerade, a garb.”<sup>320</sup> It metaphorically constitutes a prop.

The messenger describes the sparagmos as being three-fold; each stage representing every daughter of Cadmus. Agave is joined by Ino and Autonoe. Agave’s identity as a member of the chorus has gone awry. Agave decides to leave the other members of the chorus – her sisters and operate as an individual. She “represents the kind of troublesome event [...] in orderly, civilized life”.<sup>321</sup> The sparagmos of Pentheus by the women of the chorus “is a perverted version of choral experience”.<sup>322</sup> Thus, the community that these women experience is turned into something grotesque.

The dismemberment of Pentheus’ body points from a gender perspective toward the undoing of the male body by the female. The sparagmos signifies the fragmentation of essence of one’s core identity. Therefore, the male is “determinedly opposed [...] to the feminine [and] the masculine finds itself torn apart in a ritual

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<sup>316</sup> Schotten 2008, 12

<sup>317</sup> Schotten 2008, 12

<sup>318</sup> Zeitlin 1996, 352

<sup>319</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 83

<sup>320</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 83

<sup>321</sup> Murnaghan 2006, 104

<sup>322</sup> Murnaghan 2006, 104

dismemberment”.<sup>323</sup> The word cannibal was coined by Columbus. It is “a corruption of the term “Carib”, the name of an Amerindian people from the Caribbean islands and northern South America, which also means “bold” or “fierce” in their language.”

<sup>324</sup> What is interesting is that “the Greek idea of mythical sparagmos is particularly pertinent to postcolonial receptions of classical literature, with all the violence [and] dislocation the sparagmos entails”.<sup>325</sup> The branch of postcolonial studies is intricately connected to the notion of dismembering and uprooting. The cannibalism imputed to the Maenads therefore has postcolonial nuances and could be therefore linked to queer diasporic subjects.

Castigating the Maenads as the “cannibals” equals their labeling as “the other” and signals towards the superiority of their male counterparts. Devouring Pentheus is depicted as “a bestial [act], or worse-than-bestial; a peculiar homology in which [the Maenads] can [...] be accepted as savingly *non-* human.”<sup>326</sup> The kinship between the other and us imparts anxiety in our psyche, as there is no clear delineation of the notion of humanity. Performing such a rite, places into question the Athenian civilization. The scene of the sparagmos is characterized by circumvention and ambiguity as it points towards a hidden desire and the attainment of an unspeakable pleasure.

Cannibalism seems to always exist in the antiquity as a practice. There have been many allusion of dismembered animals and people such as Pentheus, however “not a single example of anyone ever eating the flesh”.<sup>327</sup> A sole “seemingly unambiguous evidence from the classical period that *ώμοφαγία* means the eating of raw meat occurs in [...] the *Kretes* of Euripides”.<sup>328</sup> Myths of actual cannibalism of the flesh of people describe the condition of humanity at a later point than the fifth century. The dismembered body of Pentheus points to a profound identity crisis. On the one hand, the body is reduced to its mere members and on the other hand, it constitutes an entity that is greatly desired. The body turns into a subject of

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<sup>323</sup> Zeitlin 1990, 75

<sup>324</sup> Rawson 1999, 168

<sup>325</sup> McConnell 2016, 2

<sup>326</sup> Rawson 1999, 185

<sup>327</sup> Hubert 1930,9

<sup>328</sup> Valdis 1996, 160

consuming desire. Attention is drawn to the flesh that consists a material strand of one's sexual identity. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the sparagmos is linked to the notions of introjections, of oral pleasure and of homosexuality. The act of sparagmos “depends upon and enforces an absolute division between inside and outside”; yet, at the same time, the act “dissolv[es] the structure it appears to produce”.<sup>329</sup> The image of the dismembered body functions as a trope that signifies the transgression from simplistic divisions. To mark Pentheus' body away from the audiences' normative expectations, entails violence- therefore he is dismembered. His body gestures towards the existence of alternative possibilities and signifies an otherness, a queerness.

Agave is the one that begins to slaughter her son as “priestess (hierea) of the sacrifice”.<sup>330</sup> Her action is turned into a mystical experience as she dishevels the unity of the body of Pentheus. Each scene of the sparagmos “is announced by grammatical subjects, each referencing a daughter, of increasing length.”<sup>331</sup> At first Agave pulls Pentheus arm, then with the help of her sister Ino, she extends the assault and finally, Autonoe and the rest of the women join in the sparagmos. Pentheus does not die instantly but lives for a little while, “ὁ μὲν στενάζων ὅσον ἐτύγγαν' ἐμπνέων”.<sup>332</sup> This shows that the agony and the stress he undergoes is prolonged. His body is cut in two parts. His arms and legs are sparse while the women carry around his torso. The scene ends by the tossing of scraps of Pentheus' skin, not his whole limbs.

The body could be viewed as an unfragmented whole. His body was “searched [...] out with difficulty”<sup>333</sup>. His dismembered body was brought back on stage. The irony of it all is that Pentheus wished to dismember Dionysos but instead he got dismembered. Through the sparagmos “the raw-eating of his flesh”, he “reurn[s] to the immaterial state of death, incorporated again by his mother” as “her body is now a burial place instead of a cradle of life, her womb now a tomb”.<sup>334</sup> Pentheus has an unsuccessful rite of passage as he gets “separated from the community, reaches a liminal condition when dressed as a woman but he is not re-incorporated in the end—

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<sup>329</sup> Kilgour 1990, 4

<sup>330</sup> Murnaghan 2006, 104

<sup>331</sup> Weaver 2009, 38

<sup>332</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 1132

<sup>333</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 83

<sup>334</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 83

or he is, in a very perverted and grotesque way”.<sup>335</sup> He is an insider of a community in which he does not belong.

The murder of Pentheus could be viewed as the “destruction of a source”.<sup>336</sup> These women’s power lies in their femininity and in their role as mothers thus they needed to take away from Pentheus what they thought as his strength. These women manage to reverse the gender hierarchy. They do not accept the divine nature of Dionysus. Pentheus’ does not want to admit that he is attracted to the feminine and this leads to his downfall. What is interesting is that Pentheus discovers what was invisible to him by acquiring a different identification; “his attraction to the powerful, feminine [...] his interest in his own sexual gratification, and the overwhelming threat these desires pose to his sanity and self-control”.<sup>337</sup> This opens up the locus for an alternative identification. He has now access in a space which he could not reach before.

Pentheus is a contradictory figure as he refuses the qualities that Dionysus embodies but at the same time takes up their very embodiment. These qualities are “sexual gratification, lack of control and inhibition, transgression of boundaries, reversal of gender hierarchy, femininity, fertility, and female power.”<sup>338</sup> All these characteristics are also exhibited through his female counterparts. This complicates his gender positioning. Not only is he fearful “of women and femininity per se, but [also] of the erosion of gender hierarchy the Dionysian blurring of boundaries entails”.<sup>339</sup> He tries to revert his desire in order to maintain social order, however this has the opposite effect. He was at war with himself as he tried to suppress his desire. Pentheus clamps down on his desires and experiences contradictory emotions; this complicates his standing.

He operates as a means of deconstruction of a normative sexual identification as he operates within and at the same time from the outside of the strictures of his gender, opening up the space for a queer identification. What has led to the undoing of gender is his failure to identify the possibility for the existence of the other and its sexuality. The use of metatheatrical space is evident in the scene of Pentheus’ sparagmos. Agave emerges in a self-referential space as she carries the mask of

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<sup>335</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 83

<sup>336</sup> Schotten 2008, 13

<sup>337</sup> Schotten 2008, 9

<sup>338</sup> Schotten 2008, 12

<sup>339</sup> Schotten 2008, 13



Pentheus. This complicates the spatial dimension of the play. The spatiality of the scene is reinforced by Euripides, as the actor who embodied Pentheus is now embodying Agave, the figure that killed him. The space that is attributed to the male-female pairing of Agave and Pentheus is transformed overlaying one on the other “the spatial inversion is made explicit.”<sup>340</sup> Horror is played out on the body of Pentheus, as his dismembered body is exposed on stage. After his death, Pentheus’ corpse is brought back on stage which is considered his home. In order for him to attain a queer identification it is essential for him to occupy this familiar space.

The violence in the scene of the sparagmos is central in this dialectic. Through the reversal of gender roles “the maenad is often endowed with this power, especially against the male body.”<sup>341</sup> Role reversal is obvious, as Agave has masculine traits, she exposes violent traits. She is “endowed with [...] power, especially over the masculine body, and is the model herself for the male.”<sup>342</sup> The murder of Pentheus disrupts the order of the polis. Once she kills Pentheus, she holds in her hands his head and thinks that she has killed a lion. Pentheus is viewed “as a man, and most probably as a male, too (as the gender of the word for the ‘climber’, *τον αναβάτην*, indicates); [hence] he dies as a man.”<sup>343</sup> He reverts to his original identity as he pleads for his life. He exclaims: “Ἐγὼ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος.”<sup>344</sup> He only regained consciousness right before his death however Agave was not aware “κόρας ἐλίσσουσ’, οὐ φρονοῦσ’ ἄ χρη φρονεῖν”; on the one hand, the blame for the murder of Pentheus cannot be imparted on these women but on the other hand these women are killers of a human being.<sup>345</sup> They were induced to do such a thing by god but at the same time they carry part of the responsibility, so their action is not justifiable. There is an interplay between the actual and the figurative. In a state of “primitive regression, women undo the body; its structures cannot hold, its limbs are unbound, and the masculine self, originally so intent on opposing himself to anything feminine, is fragmented and flies apart”.<sup>346</sup> The maenads are endowed with power over the masculine body. The violence that they

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<sup>340</sup> Rhem 2002, 174

<sup>341</sup> Syropoulos 2000, 97

<sup>342</sup> Syropoulos 2000, 97

<sup>343</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 50

<sup>344</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 1118-1119

<sup>345</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 1123

<sup>346</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 71

exhibit is directly associated to madness, as they are in a state of frenzy. Pentheus standing in terms of his gender identification is not clear cut and thus he is identified as a queer subject.

The passage when Agave comes to the realization that she has actually killed her own son consists a peculiar scene of recognition. Agave who is “in a state of denial, of trauma, of crisis, of blurry vision — of *δύσγνοια*, perhaps painted with touches of *ἀλογία*, *ἀφροσύνη*, *ἔκπληξις*, *τάραγμα φρενῶν* some other nuanced state confused with, or subsumed under the unmarked term *μανία*” as she is holding her son’s head in her hands realizes her horrible action.<sup>347</sup> After completing the *sparagmos*, she has an altered state of mind. She cannot process “external sensory or emotional stimuli” rationally.<sup>348</sup> Her cognitive state seems to be impaired. The lion is perceived as “a figure of Pentheus or as a symbol of fierceness and violence; a tamed version of this figure, reversed in its helplessness (a lion cub, slaughtered, and held like a baby in a mother's arms) is present in her derangement.”<sup>349</sup> She cannot think clearly and is forced to produced an essential identity. The *sparagmos* that Agave undertakes as the representative of women leads her to a complete reversal of gender. Her action though represents more than a barbaric rite, as it signifies way more than the exposure of violence. The scene of the *sparagmos* is the “moment when a precise dramaturgical moment and its associated visual image [...] become, by a visual equivalent of what the ancient rhetoricians called *synecdoche*, iconic”.<sup>350</sup> The gruesome image of the disheveled head is ingrained in the audience’s memory and planted in its psyche.<sup>351</sup> What is vital in this scene is that the performative act of cutting Pentheus’ head, is “dislocate[d] from the temporal framework of the play, allowing it to transcend the moment of performance and acquire[s] the status of an iconic representation” of a profound identity crisis.<sup>352</sup>

Agave has decided to kill Pentheus because he has entered her space and tried to reinforce the previous order. She is in a state of insanity when she commits the

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<sup>347</sup> Shalev 2012, 163

<sup>348</sup> Shalev 2012, 163

<sup>349</sup> Thumiger 2006, 203

<sup>350</sup> Wyles 2007, 15

<sup>351</sup> See Hall 2004, 68-71 for the exploration of imprints on the psyche of an individual by the particular choice of a prop.

<sup>352</sup> Wyles 2007, 15

action. By deciding to kill her son, she consciously resists victimization from the oppressive patriarchal system she exists in. Subjectivity and agency are intricately connected, as one's identity is one of the sites that operate as a way for others to construct his subjecthood. The personal is turned into the political as the trauma of the individual is turned into collective trauma. At this point, it would be useful to think about Agave in relation to the space she occupies while applying a phenomenological critique on her action, which depends on the spatiality and temporality of the locus in which it takes place. This space she occupies is marked by the specificity of its history and it is branded by its gender specificity. By killing Pentheus, she unsettles the prevailing power dynamics by performing counter to them. Foucault argues that "to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history".<sup>353</sup> By addressing the invisible, she brings it into existence. Thus, in this context the concept of the mountain can be viewed as a perilous zone which operates as a site of resistance. This act of hers is "the source of a counter-politics, a counter-imagining, a counter-metaphysics [originating] from the outside space she possesses as the 'other'".<sup>354</sup> Agave has the status of the other, as her identity is riven with tension and conflict. The gendered body of Pentheus, in and out of the locus of the mountain is a body at risk. Agave challenges the legacy of the gendered body as she moves from silence to discourse.<sup>355</sup> By taking action, she projects her voice and gets inscribed in history. She reshaped "the socio-political atmospheres in the geographies within which" she assumes this identification.<sup>356</sup> This gendered individual goes through an internal act of transforming her identity that is nevertheless informed by her societal surroundings.

The use of metatheatrical space is evident in the scene of Pentheus' sparagmos. Agave emerges in a self-referential space as she carries the mask of Pentheus. This complicates the spatial dimension of the play. The spatiality of the scene is reinforced by Euripides, as the actor who embodied Pentheus now embodies Agave, the figure that killed him. The space that is attributed to the male-female

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<sup>353</sup> Spivak 2003, 81

<sup>354</sup> Anim-Addo 2013, 9

<sup>355</sup> It should be noted that "one of the major scenes involving Agave has been lost in the manuscript transmission, so she can hardly qualify as one of the central characters of the surviving script." Syropoulos 2003, 51

<sup>356</sup> Gairola 2002,308

pairing of Agave and Pentheus is transformed overlaying one on the other; “the spatial inversion is made explicit.”<sup>357</sup> Horror is played out on the body of Pentheus, as his dismembered body is exposed on stage. After his death, Pentheus’ corpse is brought back on stage which is considered his home. In order for him to attain a queer identification, it is essential that he occupies this familiar space.

Agave attains a new sense of selfhood through her final act of dismembering Pentheus. She is an agent who enacts a violent act of resistance to oppression. Her action could be viewed as an act of resistance to her gendered conditions. Agave tries to redefine herself through violence. She is a body that is able to think beyond the ravages of her confinement. Pentheus’ dismemberment is a life-changing act which empowers her. Thus, control over the body is central to this discourse. Agave had to proceed towards completing this action in order to attain radical subjectivity. Her action to kill her son is an act of radical resistance to victimization. Through her action she moves towards the attainment of subjectivity and agency. Even though she was placed in a liminal position and having limited agency, she manages to assert herself. She moves beyond the churning network of the constraints of the patriarchal society and emerges as a radical subject.

In conclusion, the *Bacchae* is a play about boundaries and the transgression of limitations in relation to the construction of identity. As Segal suggests “the limits between the self and the world, between the rational and the irrational, between imagination and the reality” are explored.<sup>358</sup> I undertook the exploration of the signification of the construction of an alternative identification, a queer one of the *Bacchae* and Pentheus as not only they overturn the normative bounds of an essentialised identity, but emerge as queer figures with an independent standing. The scene of the sparagmos is central to the queer reading I have employed. Desire is central to this dialectic. Pentheus undergoes a major change; he undertakes the characteristics which he scorns, experiencing an inversion, he is a “barbarian instead of Greek, female instead of male”.<sup>359</sup> He exposes the opposite traits of his peer group. He seems to have lost his place in the political life of the polis but at the same time he is placed at the very center of it. The same applies to the *Bacchae* and especially to the leader of their group Agave. They deconstruct the bounds of their feminine

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<sup>357</sup> Rhem 2002, 174

<sup>358</sup> Zeitlin 1985,63

<sup>359</sup> Syropoulos 2003, 50

identification and move beyond their subliminal positioning. The fine line between male and female, desire and self-restrain, sanity and madness reinforces the queer identity of the Bacchae and Pentheus.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my thesis is an exploration of the politics of the female bodies in the gender-bending plays, Sophocles' *the Antigone* and Euripides' *the Bacchae*. This thesis examines the construction of queer identification. I have selected *the Antigone* and *the Bacchae* because they are both plays with a rich performance history and intertextual allusions, prominent in culture up until this day, as they open up the space for a queer identification. The re-interpretation of these classics through queer theory and phenomenology is an innovative approach. The theater is the perfect space for a queer reading as through the exposition of spectacle, one can explore gender inversion. It is a space conducive to the deconstruction of boundaries as it can reveal through performance one's true self. The lack of fixity and constructedness of the human identity in theatrical contexts "is precisely what makes theatre the queerest art".<sup>360</sup> Identity can be further explored without essential strands being imparted on it. It could be argued that through theatre, the fixity of boundaries is deconstructed. So, the theater provides the perfect space for performative rites to occur. In theater, the emphasis is on "the body-the performing body of the actor as it embodies its role, figures its actions" as it is exposed through its gestures.<sup>361</sup> The theater consists the viewing place where the body is brought to life through performativity. The body "occupies different areas at different times on stage" as it is situated on the stage in relation to others. The body "projects the human voice in all its inflections".<sup>362</sup> In the context of tragedies, theater has been characterized as "the misadventure of the human body."<sup>363</sup> The theatre is the most prominent form of art that enables deconstruction. It should be noted that "for Athens [...] the gap between gender and its performance migrates from the individual to the collective through the theatrical experience".<sup>364</sup> Thus, the individual is a political being closely linked to the societal whole. One's experience can become a collective one, as it becomes a political matter. The representation of an individual is extremely important, as it can enable the emergence of alternative of existence for the whole; thus gender and politics are inextricably linked.

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<sup>360</sup> Solomon 1997, 2

<sup>361</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 69

<sup>362</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 69

<sup>363</sup> Zeitlin 1985, 69

<sup>364</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 84

*The Antigone* and *the Bacchae* could be viewed as plays evocative of the subversion of one's identity and of traditional gender roles and moreover as plays that expose the queer identification of their protagonists. The emergent dissenting possibilities of the female body as a radical subject are exposed. The female body is finally able to come to the forefront and be heard. Desire is central in this dialectic. The transvestite theater poses a critique on the representation of women within and without the bounds of the patriarchal society and deconstructs the binary opposition of male and female. It is the theater that endorses change and breaking down the limits of the body. Essential to the notion of queerness are the notions of "the "flamboyant," and the "closet," which is secretive, withdrawn and self-contained".<sup>365</sup> One that identifies as a queer subject could be on either ends of the spectrum or even waver his subject position from being secretive to being extravagant. Coming out is a process, as it entails time to shift from one side of the spectrum to another one. In the case of *the Bacchae*, the Dionysian context in which the play takes place was further explored because it is linked with the practice of cross-dressing. Dionysus was the god linked to transvestism, as he deconstructs the distinction among male and female, human and beast. He is the one that enables the existence of an identity that is based on the interplay of different kinds of identifications. Thus, the feast organized in his honor could be viewed as one of inversion. It is almost a rite of passage, as it entails the altering of one's positioning through performativity. In the context of this festival, "the flamboyant and the closet become one and are inseparable" as "at the heart of a respected institution of the city are men dressed as women, problematising and reflecting on some of the most pressing political, ideological and philosophical issues."<sup>366</sup> This exposes the frailty of boundaries and deconstructs the discourse in which the subject exists as a homogenous being reiterating a stereotypical understanding of its experiences. Beneath the existing discourse, lies a more nuanced identity; one where the protagonist's identity is conceptualized as fluid and diverse.

In *the Antigone*, Antigone is able to construct her new identity and sexuality by asserting her queer longings by choosing the way she dies. She escapes the performance of traditional gender norms of the 5<sup>th</sup> century as she transcends the limits of her oikos, her polis and her gender. She constructs the image she wants to project and defines herself through her desires as a subject. She transitions from being an

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<sup>365</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 75

<sup>366</sup> Theodoridou 2008, 76

object of the desires of others to being an active agent. Even though in the beginning she seemed to have had limited agency, she turns into a subject with a voice. She escapes her liminal position by making the choice not to escape death. She is well aware of the consequences of her choice.

Both *the Antigone* and *the Bacchae* toy with the strict gender norms. Butler notes that “[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative nature of gender itself”<sup>367</sup> and further argues that this “elusive” original identity is “an imitation without an origin”.<sup>368</sup> The subversive potential of cross-dressing is exposed. Through the evocation of Judith Butler’s concept of performativity gender essentialism is put into question. *The Bacchae* by presenting the spectacle of cross-dressing, they offer to the audience the possibility to reflect on this practice which exposes the very core of gender performance. Euripides invokes the spectators through their own very willingness to have their assumptions in regards to the formation of gender identity challenged and ultimately subverted. What makes the deconstruction of the investment in the fixity on the masculine and the feminine successful is that “gender subversion [...] offers itself as essentially an erotic thrill” while carrying political undertones.<sup>369</sup>

In the case of Pentheus’, transvestitism complicates the expression of desire. It should be noted that “erotic desire is predominantly male desire in the classical Greek culture.”<sup>370</sup> The norm was that the male was the one to display desire while the desire of its female counterpart remained hidden. David Halperin notes that “the gender system of classical Athens constructed male desire as “wide ranging, acquisitive, and object-directed,” while it constructed female desire (in opposition to the male desire) as “objectless, passive and entirely determined by the female body’s need for regular phallic irrigation.”<sup>371</sup> Thus, the female body was castigated as the other. It should be noted though that there is the possibility for an aggressive sexuality however such a stance was condemned. Pentheus’ desire is wide-ranging and gestures towards the existence of a male body displaced in a feminist discourse. “In the (homo) erotic economy of classical Athens, it is also, if less overtly, a reference to his

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<sup>367</sup> Butler 1990,187

<sup>368</sup> Butler 1990,188

<sup>369</sup> Harris 2006, 78

<sup>370</sup> Bassi 1988, 108

<sup>371</sup> Halperin 1990, 36



unwillingness to deny the desire for his (other) male half.”<sup>372</sup> I argue here that the male desire that Pentheus exposes is antithetical to normative male desire; he is a queer subject.<sup>373</sup>

Ultimately the approach that I have employed in this thesis is innovative because of the use of phenomenology and queer studies to expose how the body constructs its identity in *the Antigone* and *the Bacchae*. What is interesting is how intricately connected these two plays are in relation to the narratives of the body and of the construction of identity. I have built my arguments on the overall theoretical and literary discussions about the female body of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and identity while opening up the space for an alternative existence. I have opened up the possibility for further research to be carried out. I expose how scholars today can use these texts to new ends.

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<sup>372</sup> Bassi 1988, 110

<sup>373</sup> “An adult, male citizen of Athens can have legitimate sexual relations only with statutory minors (his inferiors not in age but in social and political status): the proper targets of his sexual desire include, specifically, women.” Halperin 1990, 30

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