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DEATH AND THE CITY: POLITICAL CORPSES AND THE SPECTERS OF *ANTIGONE*

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SUMMARY

The author argues that the politicization of life discussed by many modern and contemporary political thinkers cannot be treated differently, and hence without the similar curiosity and importance, from the politicization of death. The dead body represents a powerful symbol and as such it is often politicized. The paper deals with the problem of postmortem violence and juridico-political mechanisms aimed at excluding from the political body those not being alive but whose dead presence threatens the living. For that purposes the author reconstructs Sophocles' *Antigone* as a paradigmatic text whose reinterpretation and contextualization serve for rethinking the Greek conceptualization of the dead, and the ways in which the state penetrates into the realm of private attachments and funeral rites, especially when dealing with dead traitors/terrorists. Assuming an equal ontological status of every dead body, the author, on the one hand, defends mortalist humanism as an equal ability to grieve someone's personal loss against the state-sanctioned politics of mourning, and on the other hand, argues that subjecting the dead to bare death, i.e. by turning them to political corpses as legally constituted dead human entities disposed to postmortem political exclusion, degradation, violence, or to other dehumanizing or depersonalizing practices, accounts for the illegitimate expansion of political power, and thus for the rule of terror, as well as for the ultimate human evil.

KEY WORDS: politicization of the dead, political corpses, bare death, *Antigone*, postmortem violence, dehumanization, traitors/terrorists

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INTRODUCTION

Death is the ultimate negation of life and as such it brings all to equal terms. But death is not only a biological phenomenon. It is also central philosophical and political concept along with the concept of life. In that sense life and death fall inside of political reach. From its inception, dominant Western philosophical and political thought has always been life-centered, hence every philosophico-political construct, project and vision – from Plato’s ideal city, Aristotle’s *bios politikos*, or Hobbes’s political preservation of life through modern *civitas* – has been designed as an answer to life-enhancing and life-protecting demands. For contemporary thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben these life-centered political projects have culminated in modern biopolitical state whose central domain is the politicization of life. Foucault argued that “the emergence of technologies of power that were essentially centered on the body” (Foucault 1997, 242) turned into the power that “has taken control of both the body and life” of the population (Foucault 1997, 253), namely shifting from the simple power to kill life toward the power to regulate life and penetrate into all its pores. It was the process of uplifting life to the sole concern of political disciplinary and regulatory strategies and mechanisms exercised by the state in which “power took possession of life” (Foucault 1997, 253), where “death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’” (Foucault 1990, 138). In a similar fashion we can understand Agamben’s recent attempt to theorize a qualitative political rift behind the politicization of life – the one that can be traced back in the distinction between understanding of *bios* and *zoē* for the Greeks, and following that distinction the ways in which production of “bare life” grounds sovereign power (Agamben 1998). Although Agamben noticed that thanatopolitics as the politics in which the line between biological and political appears not to be “a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones” (Agamben 1998, 122), what usually escapes from all these analyses are the ways in which the politicization of death occurs, and likewise the production of “bare death”. Precisely, since the concepts of life and death have always been equally politicized, the politicization of life cannot be treated differently, and hence without the similar curiosity and importance, from the politicization of death. As Heath-Kelly put it: “Death seems to turn individuals into ‘sacred’ objects for projects which retroactively write the life of the nation and its people” (Heath-Kelly 2013, 59).

This paper examines the outlined problem by discussing both political and philosophical approaches to the question how we should treat the dead, especially those heinous enemies, traitors, or terrorists “that are considered outside the bounds of rationality” (Butler 2004, 72). The philo-

sophical argument is based on the so-called *mortalist humanism* – i.e. our equal “subjection to death” (White 2009, 91) presupposes equal ontological status of every dead body that retains its human identity thus allowing for legitimate mourning for someone’s loss. The political argument is based on the view that politicization of the dead by turning their biological death into “bare death”, i.e. by dehumanizing and mistreating the dead, represents repressive and illegitimate expansion of political power beyond its political bounds, and as such it should be considered as a manifestation of terror regardless of the proclaimed political order. These are important problems and arguments that cannot be separated from our contemporaneity, but I will explore them by looking back at the Ancient Greek practices toward the dead, especially by focusing on Sophocles’ tragic play *Antigone* viewed as a paradigm of the politicization of the dead, or an example of production of political corpses subjected to bare death.

Antigone may be interpreted in various different ways with various different focuses, and the whole tradition of interpretations, especially from modern Hegel’s to those contemporary ones, show that the text is inspirational for innumerable appropriations. Thus, in my interpretation *Antigone* would serve as an exemplary by showing how something that seems to be apolitical, like the treatment of the dead body, becomes politicized and fundamental for political stability in the context of political divisions and enmities. Not only the tension between Antigone and Creon, between their claims, should be our focus, but also how a dead human being like Polynices should be treated regardless of the opposite claims, as well as regardless of his deeds, i.e. simply as a human being as such. When the dead are politicized these politicizations represent a statement, and in the case of Polynices such a statement manifests in a symbolical post-mortem exercise of violence since “dead bodies have unique properties that make them powerful symbols” (Pérez 2012, 15). Auchter similarly described the symbolical political importance and power of the dead: “Dead bodies matter to us, precisely because they are not simply dead bodies. In this sense, we are reminded that the line between life and death is socially constructed, evident in the multiple potentialities of dead bodies themselves and their complex and shifting identities. To put it differently, the dead body exposes how life and death is being defined in the thanatopolitical project of statecraft” (Auchter 2014, 30).

My goal is to grasp how something that I would call political corpse, or a politicized dead body, may constitute a threat for the living body politic: the dead having propensity for being politicized are taken as political corpses able to turn upside-down the world of the living, or as Jonathan Strauss pointed out: “The corpse becomes the figure for a persistent irrationality within the rational order of the city” (Strauss 2013, 65). Sophocles’

Antigone would serve as a paramount case echoing in our own time as well. First, I will outline how the politicization of life and death occurs. Second, I will discuss the conceptualization of the dead in antiquity, especially in Ancient Greece, and how this has changed during the Classical age. Such overview will focus on the development of socio-political practices toward the dead, the politics of mourning, and the political struggles emerging out of the clash between the old and new values, serving also as a foundation for my engagement with Sophocles' *Antigone*. Therefore, in the third part I will offer my view on *Antigone*, especially having in mind these transformations regarding the dead among the Greeks, and the ways in which the play responds to them. In doing that I will especially discuss some of recent receptions of the play, while proposing the argument that postmortem violence not only includes any violation or mutilation of the body, but also dehumanizing practices of declaring someone unburiable, as well as obliterating someone's identity, i.e. producing a depersonalized dead subject, or subjecting someone to bare death. Finally, in the conclusion I will reflect on some contemporary specters of *Antigone*, namely on recent political corpses of those marked as traitors or terrorists, i.e. those cases and practices that resonate the problem of dealing with the despicable dead.

POLITICIZATION OF LIFE AND DEATH

Recently Giorgio Agamben has shown the ontological problem of sovereignty in dealing with the question of life due to the fact that the sovereign power has the ability for producing bare life – a “life devoid of value” that “remains included in politics in the form of exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion” (Agamben 1998, 11), and thus it “applies first of all to individuals who must be considered as incurably lost” (Agamben 1998, 138). For Agamben this sovereign inclusion through exclusion refers to the concept from the Roman legal tradition known as *homo sacer*, that is “the person whom anyone could kill with impunity” (Agamben 1998, 72). In other words, it signifies not politically-recognized life. For Agamben potential reducibility of life to bare life, i.e. of the political being (*bios politikos*) to the minimum of biological existence or to “life devoid of any value” (Agamben 1998, 139) is a condition to which every living being might be exposed since “the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty” (Agamben 1998, 83). Agamben adds: “In modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or the nonvalue of life as such. Life – which, with the declarations of rights, had as such been invested with the principle of sovereignty – now itself becomes the place of a sovereign decision” (Agamben 1998, 142). In further Agamben's analysis this sort of not politically-recognized life is compared

with Aristotle's understanding of the slave that "represents a not properly human life that renders possible for others the *bios politikos*, that is to say, the truly human life" (Agamben 2015, 20). Agamben focuses on Aristotle's expression "the use of the body" (*he tou sommatos chresis*) to show that the slave body, although excluded from political existence, is "an integral part of the master" (Agamben 2015, 14). This becomes foundation for understanding the ways in which life becomes political, since "life is not in itself political" (Agamben 2015, 263).

The same analogy with the politicization of life and its reducibility to bare life can be made in terms of the dead. Namely, the sovereign power can alter and suspend the ontological status of the dead human being by declaring someone unburiable, by the power to withhold human remains from the family, or through the dehumanization that usually coincides with depersonalization, i.e. with eliminating all human and personal/identity marks from the gravesite. If so, the line between human and non-human postmortem status corresponds to the distinction between a person and what can be classified as a thing, hence "any categorization of an entity as a person or thing depends on contingent distinctions made in particular situations, which in turn implies that law is in fact a powerful ontological device creating the world to which it refers" (Bevilaqua 2010). Therefore, if for Agamben the politicization of life "founds the city of men" (Agamben 1998, 7), it is no less true that the same extends to the politicization of the dead. This politicization of the dead has not only belonged to the ancient Greek world, but can be traced as well in the ancient Roman legal institute *damnatio memoriae* – the idea was to inflict a posthumous violence by destroying someone posthumous reputation along with obliterating his/her presence from the public consciousness. It included "the negation of artistic monuments for political and ideological reasons" in order to "alter posterity's perception of the past", along with enacting "a wide array of post mortem sanctions against a condemned individual's memory and monuments" (Varner 2004, 1–2). Romans, particularly in the Republican period, were also practicing "desecration of corpses as acts of *poena post mortem*. Important examples include Antonius's insistence that Cicero's head and hands be cut off and then draped over the ship's beaks of the Rostra in the Forum Romanum..." (Varner 2004, 18). Similarly, in our own time, as Katherine Verdery shows in her study of the treatment of the dead bodies as well as the statues of the dead in the postsocialist era "the fates of statues and of actual dead bodies have been thoroughly entwined" (Verdery 1999, 13). Namely, parallel with some incentives for reburying the dead perceived odious with the regime change, their statues have been symbolically punished, but also in some occasions the public space those statues had inhabited became the place for memorializing and observance.

Verdery adds: “By repositioning them, restoring them to honor, expelling them, or simply drawing attention to them, their exit from one grave and descent into another mark a change in social visibilities and values, part of the larger process of postsocialist transformation (Verdery 1999, 19)¹.”

Since Agamben’s “bare life” epistemological referent is Hobbes’ metaphor of leviathan according to which all political subjects are exposed to the necropolitical capacity of the sovereign (Mbembe 2003), it misses, according to my view, an important fact, namely that the political body has been often constituted, not necessarily as opposed to the common fear of death (Hobbes 1996), or as the techniques of bio-power looking at “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (Foucault 1990, 140), but also and fundamentally through the ability of the sovereign to exercise the postmortem power and violence over the dead. Such power and violence represent juridico-political mechanisms aimed at excluding from the political body those not being alive but whose dead presence threat the living. In that sense, producing political corpses through the politicization of the dead is the ultimate expression of the sovereign power that goes beyond the ability to command over life and to exercise legal violence over the living. It is the power directed toward commanding over the dead and subjugating the dead to the power of the living, i.e. it is a political statement regardless of the ways in which the politicization of the dead manifests – either as glorification of the dead, or as their dehumanization, i.e. as an ability to inflict “bare death”. My focus, as I outlined earlier, is on that last type of practices aimed at identity-shaping and political exorcism i.e. those manifesting in excluding the dead from the community of human beings as such, not in the politicization of the dead as such. The focus on dehumanizing practices toward the dead, especially those perceived as enemies, traitors, or terrorists, results from the symbolic property the violence over such corpses entails, or as Verdery put it, “the significance of corpses has less to do with their concreteness than with how people think about them” (Verdery 1999, 28). In other words, as Pérez also highlights, “the manipulation of the corpse holds significance for both those committing violence to the corpse and the community to which the corpse belongs ... Complete destruction of human remains symbolizes the undisputed success of the victors and serves as a transition from war to victory” (Pérez 2012, 15).

1 Verdery offers various examples from the former communist leaders, but one of the most interesting, especially in the context of the most recent removal of his statue, is the example of Imre Nagy’s reburial from 1989. Other interesting example is a reburial of Vlatko Maček in Zagreb as a symbol of linking Croatia to its precommunist as well as pre-ustasha past (Verdery 1999, 29–31, 98).

Examples are vast, from the literature to the historical cases including demeaning treatment of dead soldiers in the aftermath of the Second World War in former Yugoslavia when the Ministry of Internal Affairs had ordered destruction of “ghoul fascist” presence, calling for desecrating graves of fallen enemies; or one recent controversy from May 2013 when the body of the Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev was banned from burial in the state of Massachusetts. These were not isolated cases, but a pattern that reappears depending on political circumstances. Recent terrorist attacks in Europe provoked similar controversies concerning the burial and legal status of dead terrorists. I will come back to these examples at the end. Before that, let me first show how the transformation of Greek values affected their perception of the dead, in other words how the development of *polis* reflected on the *necropolis*. After that, in the section that will follow, I am going to discuss political mistreatment of the dead by using and interpreting Sophocles’ *Antigone* as a paradigm case of the politicization of the dead.

DEATH AND THE CITY (PT. 1): *ANTIGONE* AND THE GREEK CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE DEAD

The very first lines of the Western literary tradition are related to the treatment of dead bodies. Namely, the opening of Homer’s *Illiad* reflects on horror and concern of the dead becoming “a prey to dogs and vultures” (Homer 1999, 7). The Greeks were obsessed with dead bodies. One of the emblematic scenes is the Greeks fighting over the dead body of Patroclus in Book XVII. What follows is Achilles becoming obsessed with Hector’s death – Hector has to fall in order for Achilles to continue with his life: “I will not live nor go about among mankind unless Hector fall by my spear” (Homer 1999, 285). Eventually, Achilles’ violation of Hector’s dead body will signify a symbolic act of the victorious in which the mutilation of the corpse in front of the enemy serves to further dishonor and harm the living enemy, but also to show that enmities do not cease even in death. Actually, according to the standards of the Greek Heroic Age that Homer’s *Illiad* refers to, “it is a recognized custom for the victor after stripping his dead enemy to throw the body to the dogs and vultures” (Basset 1933, 47) if willing, because the dead body of the fallen belongs to the victor whose postmortem violence toward the enemy is primarily symbolic. The reason way the Greeks were fighting so bitterly over Patroclus’ dead body in fact mirrors this perception that the fallen hero, if not rescued or ransomed by his fellows, would end up in the enemy hands and likely exposed to postmortem violence. If this would not be the case, “the only reason for not ‘throwing to the dogs’ the body of a slain foe are (1) that the combat involved no bitterness, and (2) that the defeated warrior had some claim

to unusual respect” (Basset 1933, 49). Achilles’ rage is thus understandable, and dragging of Hector’s dead body to the Greek military camp was nothing unusual. Actually, if the Trojans would be successful in the fight over Patroclus’ dead body, Patroclus would end up dragged by Hector (Basset 1933, 56). However, what was not considered acceptable and honorable, and hence fundamentally damaging for Achilles’ reputation was his unremitting violation of Hector’s body that was not against the law, but it irretrievably ruined Achilles’ own honor. As Basset pointed out “no law of Greek chivalry in the Heroic Age was broken by Achilles’ treatment of Hector’s body until Patroclus was buried ... But persistence in dragging the body after the funeral of Patroclus was unknighly” (Basset 1933, 60). Achilles’ postmortem violence toward Hector’s dead body ends up with Priam’s intervention who came to the Greek camp to beg Achilles for allowing him, as Hector’s father, to bury his son properly.

Similarly, in the Classical period, Sophocles’ *Antigone* (around 442 B.C.E.) discusses, among all, a sociopolitical controversy regarding the treatment of the dead body of Polynices. It should be noted, however, that in this fictional settings of the play, Creon’s decree according to which Polynices’ body “must be left exposed, in shame, food for dogs and birds of pray (*Anti* 205–206 [224–225])² involves different set of issues that mirror Sophocles’ fifth-century Athens. Precisely, democratic Athens of the time was challenging the old Homeric values and this has reflected on its funeral practices. These changes between the old Athens and the vision of new democratic *polis* have been carved out with Solon’s reforms from the sixth-century B.C.E., thus about 150 years before the time of Sophocles. In terms of dealing with the dead, these reforms, among all, affected the ways in which funeral rites were performed by outlawing “public, female and oral mourning”, thus setting the stage for “two discursive modes in which mourning is channeled ... the tragedy and the official, state funeral oration, the *epitaphios logos*” (Taxidou 2004, 8). Those women “who disobeyed Solon’s laws were to be punished” (Holst-Warhaft 1992, 83). This was dramatically opposite practice from those Homer’s protagonists in the *Illiad* to whom tears were common and the excessive lamentations lasting for days nothing unusual.³ But in the Classical age such practices were attempted to be displaced from public life as echoed as well in Plato

2 My references to Sophocles’ *Antigone* in the first bracket refer either to the verses from Richard Jebb’s translation, or the translations from Ruth Fainlight and Robert Littman, while the verses in the second bracket refer to David Green’s translation.

3 Gail Holst-Warhaft outlines some characteristics of Homeric funeral and mourning rituals: “Extravagant, out-of-control behaviour, including loud wailing, tearing the hair and lacerating one’s face. This is a common initial response to death especially by men but also by women” (Holst-Warhaft 1992, 94).

who, similarly in the *Republic*, argues against “weeping and lamenting to the extent and in the manner Homer describes” (Plato 2004, 68 [388b]). Taxidou emphasizes:

Laws attributed to Solon and established in the sixth century set out deliberately to curtail or reform funeral rites. To quote Plutarch, the sixth-century legislation prohibited ‘everything disorderly and excessive in women’s festivals, processions [*exodoi*] and funeral rites (Solon 21.4). The process of outlawing female mourning, which in the same gesture underlines its theatrical and public dimension, is parallel to the development of the democratic *polis* ... Before the introduction of Solon’s laws, during the archaic period, aristocratic funerals were lavish displays of wealth and power (Taxidou 2004, 175–176).

With the rise of the democratic *polis* thus “the restrictive legislation on funerals, can be seen as part of the broad process of democratization ... the attempt to limit the powers of the clan cults” that goes hand in hand, among all, with the glorification of the fallen heroes of the state and strengthening of the democratic ideal according to which “women’s loud and demonstrative behaviour at funerals could create a danger to society by stirring up feelings of revenge” (Holst-Warhalf 1992, 96–97). In other words, the clash between the aristocratic and democratic funeral practices is a product of an attempted transformation from the clan-oriented loyalty toward the *polis*-oriented loyalty, toward the new citizenship ideal of unity, but also of the general transformation of the *polis*.⁴ It is interesting that Rousseau’s description of the Spartan woman reflects this perception of an ideal citizen akin to Creon’s view in *Antigone*. Rousseau, in this anecdote from his *Emile*, writes: “A Spartan woman had five sons in the army and was awaiting news of the battle. A Helot arrives; trembling, she asks him for news. ‘Your five sons were killed.’ ‘Base slave, did I ask you that?’ ‘We won the victory.’ The mother runs to the temple and gives thanks to the gods. This is the female citizen” (Rousseau 1979, 40). Rousseau’s depiction

4 Various reflections on these issues from the same time period can be found, among all, in Plato’s writings. For example in *Menexenus* Plato shows the importance of eulogies for the city heroes, but also in the *Republic* related to his views of the immortal soul, and especially in the *Laws*. Plato’s attitude in the *Laws* toward the dead shows not only how the state should regulate the dead, but also the idea that the body is secondary in comparison to the soul. Plato first confines the dead to the special regulations: “No tomb, whether its mound is large or small, should be constructed anywhere on land what can be farmed; graves must take up space only where nature has made the ground good for nothing except the reception and concealment of the bodies of the dead with minimum detriment to the living” (Plato 1997, 1606 [958de]). Second, Plato limits the transcendent domain viewing that we can help someone while alive, not when dead: “And once he’s dead, there’s not a great deal we can do to help a man: all his relatives should have helped him while he was still in the land of the living, so he could have passed his life in all possible justice and holiness” (Plato 1997, 1607 [957bc]).

of the Spartan ideal, however, fits well with the state-supported practice of Funeral Oration in democratic Athens that “memorializes the dead by collectivizing lament and focusing on the dead’s contribution to the polis, and not – as in Homer or in laments identified with women in the fifth-century polis – on the unique individuality of the dead and the grievous loss to surviving family and comrades (Honig 2013, 129).

Hence, during the Classical period of Ancient Greece this issue of what should be a proper treatment of the dead, as the issue that affects both political and non-political spheres of life, shows that new rules and rituals were polemical and thus these tensions between the old and the new practices have reflected in literature, speeches, and philosophical writings. As Taxidou observes: “Since death is a contested field, whoever controls death is crucial for the functioning of the city-state ... Recent studies by classicists, anthropologists and archaeologists stress the importance of mourning both for the creation of the laws of democracy and for the creation of tragic form” (Taxidou 2004, 8). Therefore, the politicization of the dead becomes an outcome of the new political settings in which the state-supported funeral orations for those citizens giving lives for their country and not for their personal gains, paralleled the fear from political instability that might be caused by stirring the city into commotion when turning “tears into ideas” (Holst-Warhalf 1992, 98), i.e. inciting to revenge, as it was perception regarding potentially destabilizing effects of the pre-classical politics of lamentation.

Since “the corpse is seen as a transitional object between life and death” (Pérez 2012, 20) and as such prone for exercising political violence over it, while also an entity whose presence in the city might involve serious social ramifications beyond mere political controversies, all these should be taken into our consideration when approaching Sophocles’ *Antigone* and showing its lasting political importance. Moreover, as we can figure it out from the Athenian sociopolitical context where Sophocles’ play appears, it can be seen as a reaction to that context, yet with universal questions regarding different set of loyalties and obligations. Namely, *Antigone* reflects the tensions within the Greek society of the given time regarding the sphere that *polis* aims to control – i.e. the private domain with its traditional beliefs and family attachments as something beyond political control, hidden from the public, and potentially causing political instability. In other words, as Martha Nussbaum explains: “Creon, like Eteocles – but with much greater persuasiveness and subtlety – is attempting to replace blood ties by the bonds of civic friendship. City-family conflicts cannot arise if the city *is* the family, if our only family *is* the city” (Nussbaum 1986, 57). Sophocles discusses these controversies not to make his audiences more fearful of what can happen when the civil authority clashes

with the family, its loyalties, or religious beliefs. The play shows the ways in which the state has already penetrated into the family issues: those above-mentioned reforms allowed for the city to rule over the sphere of *oikos*, so the politicization of the dead occurs out of commemorating fallen heroes, those not belonging to their families anymore, but becoming the property of the state, its political symbols and the matter of its eulogies; hence, the same logic extends to the fallen enemies and traitors becoming the business of the state, not that of the family, or at least not exclusively belonging to the private sphere. In that sense Sophocles' play shows reality of these social anxieties and possibilities of resistance to political invasions into personal attachments through the tension between outlawed aristocratic funeral practices and the new democratic ones.

Antigone can be also viewed, on the one hand, as a story over the identity of the city in which the politicization of the dead and thus "uplifting" someone to a status of political corpse becomes the starkest manifestation of political power able to determine humanity of a dead human being, in other words to project its power eschatologically: "My enemy is still my enemy, even in death", says Creon (*Anti* 523 [575]). W.R. Connor writes: "For many Greeks in antiquity acts that subverted the existing social and political order were accordingly not purely political or secular matters. They could also be represented as offences against the gods or as a kind of sickness in the body politic" (Connor 1985, 92). On the other hand, the whole horror of such politicization of the dead is linked with animalization – not being buried means being exposed to the forces of nature like an animal – and thus with dehumanization.⁵ The Greek expression *átaphon rhiptesthai* – "to be disposed of without burial rites" thus have the same properties as "to be disposed of like an animal" (Lindenlauf 2001, 87). Such postmortem punishments aiming at destroying someone's humanity and attempting "to communicate the worthlessness of these individuals" were assigned to those "who had acted beyond the limits of human society and custom, including temple-robbers, traitors, tyrants, captive enemies, foreign soldiers, rebels and suicides" (Lindenlauf 2001, 88, 95). The practice also included throwing such corpses into the sea or "throwing them (*ekbállein*) beyond the boundaries of the city-state", and it was common in both Athens and Sparta where the political authorities had "the power to punish their foes beyond death by legally sanctioning and carrying out the denial of burial of traitors and heinous criminals" (Lindenlauf 2001, 89, 88).⁶

5 Demosthenes, as Lindenlauf shows, "frequently called traitors and law-breakers who used to be disposed of without burial rites, *miaroi* (shameless and disgusting creatures) and animals (*theria; ágrioi*)" (Lindenlauf 2001, 87).

6 For example, according to the records, "Athenian punishments for treason and conspiracy seem for a long time to have included the children of the *genos* in the penalites. By the

However, any political power acting in a way that deprives the status of the human being through postmortem violence has tyrannical traits irrespective of the nominal political order, and should be regarded oppressive in its character. In a similar way in which “bare life, life conceived as biological minimum, becomes a condition to which we are all reducible (Butler 2004, 67), reducing someone to “bare death” is opposed to the *mortalist* humanism defended here – a view emphasizing “that what is common to humans is not rationality but the ontological fact of mortality, not the capacity to reason but vulnerability to suffering” (Honig 2013, 17).⁷ This “ontological fact of mortality” that corresponds to the ultimate equality of dying also presupposes determining the same equality in the ontological status of the dead, i.e. the kind of entity the dead body is – for instance, is it a person or a thing, and thus reflecting on the legal status of the dead. Legal scholarship differs among the view “that the personality ceases at death – biological existence and legal existence must coincide”, and the view that “identifies the spouse or close kin as legitimate representatives of the dead person in legal proceedings” (Bevilaqua 2010), namely that the dead retain some sort of personality and dignity akin to human that has to be protected especially due to the fact of an impossibility of someone’s own defending from violations or acting in legal matters. Such view has been additionally supported with legal and penal regulations premised on the respect for the dead, preserving the memory of the dead, as well as sanctioning inhuman treatment of the dead that includes any violation of someone’s mortal remains. As Petrig writes: “The command that mortal remains must be respected is a concretization of the general obligation to protect the dignity of persons and the prohibition of outrages upon personal dignity” (Petrig 2009, 350).⁸

late fifth century, however, there are signs of departures from this practice ... This reluctance is not necessarily a sign of growing humaneness and gentleness among the Greeks ... Nor are the changes to be explained by the history of some abstract ideas ... It is more likely to reflect an important social and political reality: the family had been tamed, if not completely, at least enough to make possible on some occasions a disassociation of the kin from the guilt of the perpetrator” (Connor 1985, 95–96).

7 This is the position that Bonnie White draws from Stephen White’s argument about “our common vulnerability as mortals” (White 2009, 91), as our common minimum that has already been recognized by Hobbes. In her interpretation of *Antigone* Honig links mortalist humanism, or “mourning-centered humanism” (Honig 2013, 32) to the politics of lamentation, or what she also calls an “anti-politics of grief” (Honig 2013, 25) defended by Loraux and Butler, but according to her not similar to Sophocles’ position of what she calls “a natalist’s pleasure-based counter to grief” (Honig 2013, 27) that she finds, although in my view unconvincing, among all in the Chorus’ invitation “to bring forgetfulness of these wars ... and dance all night long” (*Anti* 150–152 [166–168]).

8 In Petrig’s analysis of the international legislation, it is said that the term ‘person’, in that context “includes the dead”. Petrig also clarifies the meaning of respect when linked with the

In other words, although we know our bodies will decay one way or another, what is perceived even worse than death is someone's manipulation with the corpse. This is why political corpse of an enemy is often exposed to the violence of bare death where the dead body is subjected to the politicization while paradoxically at the same time becomes stripped of any political significance; it becomes an entity external to the city, a stranger or an outcast who should suffer posthumously along with all those of his/her kind. At the same time, as it symbolizes "the remains of meaning" (Strauss 2013, 82), it is considered an always-present negation of our own kind, of our own identity, the enemy in the Schmittian conceptualization of the political. Jonathan Strauss observes: "The unsatisfied and vulnerable dead are fantasies that the survivors produce, and they are fantasies of a fragile subjectivity on the verge of death again, laid open to the predations of lower forces. Or, to put differently, if the dead can die, it means that they are still alive" (Strauss 2013, 56). Hence, the punishment has to go beyond simple death and has to extend posthumously. For the Greeks this sort of punishment has been linked with the idea of pollution (*miasma*) and the practice of *kataskaphê* (κατασκαφή) reflected as "razing of the house" and "the permanent removal from society of the transgressor and his descendants" (Connor 1985, 88). As Connor further explains:

In this culture the consequences of murder and other heinous crimes may be represented as a pollution that extends beyond the individual to the entire polis and beyond the immediate generation to those yet unborn. Such crimes may cause an infection or *miasma* ... The consequences may also be personified as an *alastôr* or *daimôn*, an avenging spirit ... Pollution, while invisible, is not abstract. It inheres in physical objects that come into contact with the guilty person, including the soil upon which he treads and the place in which he is buried ... their presence brings divine anger on the entire community ... Pollution beliefs and their reverberations in Greek law do not exist in a vacuum. They arise from the tensions in social life, are attested by the society on countless occasions, and shaped, modified, or abandoned over time (Connor 1985, 91–92, 95).

In the light of the sociopolitical conditions and tensions between the old and the new values, the aristocratic and the democratic *polis*, the

dead: "The general notion of respect includes preventing the dead from being despoiled. This concretization of the general prohibition of pillage is intended to guard the dead from those who may seek to lay hands on them and to prevent them from falling prey to the 'hyenas of the battlefield'. The US Military Tribunal at Nuremberg stated, in the Pohl case, that robbing the dead 'is and always has been a crime'. While this pronouncement relates to the belongings of the dead, the prohibition of ill-treatment and mutilation protects the mortal remains as such. Trials held in the aftermath of the Second World War revealed odious acts of mutilation of dead bodies, as well as cannibalism. Respect further requires that dead bodies not be exposed to public curiosity and that this be avoided by placing them in an appropriate place before burial or cremation" (Petrig 2009, 351).

tensions between written and ‘unwritten’ laws, traditional rituals and civic ideology, and the domains of political power, my reconstruction of *Antigone* follows that route but it cannot be a comprehensive take on the play, as it would be beyond the scope of this article. However, I will discuss various interpreters to the degree relevant for problematizing illegitimate exercise of political power able to turn the dead into political corpses, the question of grieving, and the status – ontological and legal – of the dead enemy/traitor.

DEATH AND THE CITY (PT. 2): *ANTIGONE* RECONSTRUCTED

Sophocles’ tragedy not only opens moral, religious and transcendent questions, the questions of loyalty and civil disobedience, but also discusses the ways in which political power is able to fabricate legal hierarchy among the dead. On the one hand this hierarchy constitutes a distinction as well as a boundary between so-called “bare death” of political corpse prone to legally approved postmortem mistreatment, dehumanization and violence, and a regular non-politicized biological death of a human being as such protected by legal provisions. Therefore, in my reconstruction of Sophocles’ *Antigone* I will take this text as a subtext for problematizing political corpse of an enemy/traitor exposed to, what I would consider, bare death of an illegitimate exercise of power. Such political corpse emerges at the threshold of political life, representing and communicating symbolic political message, and showing who should be symbolically and even spatially excluded from (politically exorcised), or included in political body of the living that “finds its legitimation...through the dead” (Strauss 2013, 103).

In Sophocles’ tragic drama the aftermath of the civil war evokes new chaos. During the civil war both of Antigone’s brothers have been killed, Eteocles on the victorious side defending the city, Polynices on the other side leading the Argive army’s attack on his own city in attempt to reclaim the throne. The background of the conflict is outlined in Euripides’ *The Phoenician Women* (*PW*). Euripides depicts Polynices coming from the exile with the army to demand his right to take back his right to rule based on an agreement he had with his brother Eteocles to rotate in power every year (*PW* 530–538). Their mother Jokasta appears as a mediator who summons for the principle of equality that “binds kin to kin, city to city, ally to ally” (*PW* 588–589), and warns about injustice that comes from greed and ambition. Yet, her attempts for reconciliation fail eventually regardless of her warnings about what can happen to both of them, or to the city. She warns Eteocles not to be blindfolded by power as this would

likely bring the city to ruin: “Which do you prefer: to stay in power, or save your city? Is your answer power? But what if Polyniekos conquers you... Will you see your Theban city shattered, most of its women taken captive, raped by enemy soldiers?” (*PW* 606–612). Burian and Swann summed up the whole conflict in their commentaries to Euripides’ play:

Eteokles justifies his unrelenting ambition with the will-to-power ethics of the unabashed tyrant, and Jokasta answers with an Athenian democrat’s praise of equality as the foundation of civilized life. Polyneikes dwells on the hardships of exile ... But by pressing his rightful claim on what is his – a share in the rule of Thebes – Polyneikes becomes a traitor to the city he has come to sack, if he cannot win it by negotiation (Burian and Swann 1981, 6).

Indeed, Polynices’ act of coming with the army was perceived not only as a threat for the city supporting the view that if he “had been successful the city would be destroyed and its citizens killed or carried into slavery” (Badger 2013, 86), but as a treacherous act as well.⁹ Although Polynices’ army was defeated, Creon in *Antigone* expressed similar views and worries when legitimizing that Eteocles has to be buried with the highest honors because he was defending the city, and Polynices denied from the burial because he was a traitor, implying his presence – living or dead – is disturbing and divisive, and thus he should be put outside the city’s moral and political order:

Eteocles, who fell fighting in behalf of our city and who excelled all in battle, they shall entomb and heap up every sacred offering that descends to the noblest of the dead below. But as for his brother, Polynices, I mean, who on his return from exile wanted to burn to the ground, the city of his fathers and his race’s gods, and wanted to feed on kindred blood and lead the remnant into slavery – it has been proclaimed to the city that no one shall give him funeral honors or lamentations but all must leave him unburied ... This is my will, and never I will allow the traitor [κακός]¹⁰ to stand in honor before the just (*Anti* 194–205, 207–208 [213–224, 226–228]).

Now, what basically looks like a non-political question related to the private sphere of funeral rites, grieving and religious rituals, becomes fundamentally political issue: namely, should a political community allow traitors, rebels or terrorists to be properly buried? This is the question that echoes in our own time. In other words, the paradox of the politicized and “criminalized” dead body is the following: for a family member it is something lifeless whose loss is eternal and cannot be substituted; for the state political corpse is still living – its symbolic representation is alive

9 Creon described Polynices as someone coming “with a sacrilegious lust to burn” as well as to “slaughter his family and lead the people to slavery” (*Anti* 200–202 [218–221]).

10 Greek word κακός means bad but in this context it has been translated as a *traitor* (Jebb), *evil* man (Fainlight & Littman, Gibbons & Segal), or *wicked* man (Grene).

since it would be “irrational to punish nothing”, i.e. “the corpse apparently retains some hold on the criminal” (Strauss 2013, 64). Pérez also emphasizes: “The destruction of the bodies symbolizes the political dismemberment of the enemy and the power of the new rulers. Mutilation of the vanquished also emphasizes total subjugation and the dominant ideology of the victors” (Pérez 2012, 20). If Polynices is buried this would preserve him in the collective political memory. When Creon decides to leave the corpse exposed and decaying, he denies Polynices’ presence in the city’ memory – the body is succumbed to natural forces and it vanishes. Badger points out:

We give the body over to a hidden realm that transcends time and place, thereby preserving something that would otherwise be corrupted or lost ... It is true that that when human beings die their bodies are absorbed into nature; we hide this from our eyes in order to preserve our poetic vision of human life. To lose this vision would be to lose our humanity. To see the truth threatens our humanity. Creon shows the city the truth about Polynices: without the city he is not really human (Badger 2013, 88–89).

This possibility of political power (in this case of Creon) for dehumanization and thus humiliation and punishment beyond death, of subjecting the dead to “bare death” is what I would like to problematize first. Creon radiates its political power beyond mere life through the politicization of the dead by either uplifting the dead to the collective memory, or by erasing them from the collective memory through the ultimate dehumanization. As the dead appear to be at the mercy of the living, Creon’s political decision deliberately aims to deny Polynices humanness as well as possible transcendent existence. The enemy has to be defeated in this world, but also in eternity by exposing them to physical and spiritual postmortem violence. Accordingly, if Polynices’ soul will be doomed without proper funeral rites, the victory is complete. Otherwise it is always a danger that the dead may “return”, namely that their phantasmal presence will unleash extrapolitical forces that would pull the city into new chaos. For Creon, the state is imagined as a haven from savagery, chaos, death and unorganized violence that resides outside of the well-established political order (Badger 2013, 86), hence, it protects us from the forces that take political form and having state-eradicating properties. From this perspective, Creon’s politicization of the dead body of Polynices is perceived as a shield against unbridled political and transcendent passions destructive for the city. But this sort of political rationalism had failed to save the city since it undermined private affiliations and duties related to love, family attachments, rituals, as well as people’s transcendent concerns. In other words, while faced with the post-war political fragmentations, Creon does not see a different part of threat coming. His vision of politics in which private affiliations and transcendent concerns should be ruled out in the name of

new order will bring the city into the vortex of tragic events and eventually to its final downfall.

However, as we outlined earlier, the relationship toward the dead has changed in the fifth-century civic life and thus Creon's actions should be reconsidered in that light. Sophocles' fictional Thebes mirrors the tensions resulting from these changes in front of the Athenian public, namely what Honig describes as "a larger divide between two paradigms of political culture: aristocratic Homeric/heroic individuality (and the elite community it postulates) and classical democratic community (and the forms of individuality it permits)" (Honig 2013, 103). In other words, the democratic *polis* by restricting the politics of lamentation and prescribing the ways in which burials might be conducted actually confronted the aristocratic/elitist norms of both burials and lamentation that were considered divisive as they privileged the noble. Loraux emphasizes that new Athenian funeral orations and burials reflected the democratic egalitarianism of the living: "In this egalitarianism can be discerned the democratic wish not to make distinctions among the citizens ... the equality of all Athenian citizens beyond death" (Loraux 1986, 22). This new encompassing civic ideology urged citizens to see the city's glory and destiny above their own glory and destiny, thus an ideal of "civic death illuminated the entire community with the brightness of its glory, and all the sequences of this funeral ceremony combined to proclaim the eternal nature of the polis" (Loraux 1986, 27). In this context, restricting aristocratic and clan-based funerals seen as glorifications of kinship over citizenship, along with postmortem violence toward dead enemies or traitors by practicing *átaphon rhíptesthai* – "the deposition of corpses without a burial or without a token act of burial rites respectively" (Lindenlauf 2001, 87) – were compatible with the democratic Athens. Furthermore, postmortem punishments for the most hated political enemies sometimes included that feature of a socio-political spectacle where the corpses were left exposed "to carrion animals or the elements within the boundaries of a community" (Lindenlauf 2001, 90).¹¹ However, in the given context in which aristocratic customs and traditional beliefs regarding the dead have been pushed below, yet still existing under the surface of the new civic heroization of the dead fallen for the city, Creon's decree to leave the body of Polynices unburied is not only divisive, but also imprudent. Thus, the tension in *Antigone* is not only regarding the rival paradigms of the city – the old and the new – in terms of the politics of lamentation and the postmortem friend-enemy distinction that undermines ontological equality among the dead, but also regarding the consequences of Creon's politicization of the dead. His understanding of the

11 Lindenlauf points to a case mentioned by Plutarchos according to which Demosthenes and Nikias ended up that way (Lindenlauf 2001, 90).

state rests on the foundational myth according to which the very political body comes into being by turning the dead into political corpses.

All these shed completely new light to Creon, as well as to Antigone. For Honig “Creon metonymizes democracy substantively”, i.e. he conspires with democracy by responding to the expected standards of the democratic *polis* since the “ban on lamentation and his repeated emphasis on the harms of individuality represent the fifth-century democratic view” (Honig 2013, 98). Accordingly, Creon can be seen as a figure epitomizing “the newer breed of elites who are willing to work within the democratic system and to shape their own claims and choices to conform with what is ‘good for the city’” (Griffith 2010, 123), while Antigone as reactionary, as someone, to paraphrase on Marx, willing to roll back the wheel of history. Namely, Antigone objects this new civic ideology that suppresses the old aristocratic/Homeric values regarding the politics of lamentation including new politicized practices regulating the dead. In these new circumstances of the fifth-century democratic settings, those like Antigone would likely perceive that “Creon does not depart from, he rather instances, democratic practice when he mistreats the dead and prohibits burial”, and therefore, as Honig emphasizes, “democracy would appear tyrannical to mid-fifth century Athenian elites”, while “Creon’s apparently tyrannical traits are fully compatible with his character as representative of, or complicit with, the democratic order” (Honig 2013, 99).

As we know from the play, Antigone is threatened by the death penalty if she disobeys Creon’s decree that forbids the burial of Polynices as a declared traitor. Simon Goldhill describes: “For Antigone, it is as if Creon and the law he has passed are to be disobeyed because the treatment of a traitor and enemy is at odds with the divine law concerning the family” (Goldhill 1986, 97). This view has been actually depicted by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, yet without explicit references from the drama, according to which “the conflict is pictured as the schism between divine and human law” (Hegel 2018, 273), as well as in his *Philosophy of Right* where Antigone’s piety is based on plethora of loyalties derived from kinship, tradition, and eternal unwritten laws “presented as the law of the woman, the law of the nature, which realizes itself subjectively and intuitively, the law of an inner life, which has not yet attained complete realization, the law of the ancient gods, and of the under-world, the eternal law, of whose origin no one knows, in opposition to the public law of the state” (Hegel 2001, 144). In this view Antigone is seen as a metaphor for the private and transcendent duties set against the state-based monopolization of loyalty extending in life and death, as defended by Creon (*Anti* 210 [229]).

Antinomies of the political and transcendent thus represent a gridlock that can hardly be overcome. Defending what she considers true values, she knows her actions will be disapproved of. Ismene warns her “how miserable our end shall be if in the teeth of law we shall transgress against the sovereign’s decree and power” (*Anti*, 59–60 [67–69]). But Antigone has a different measuring rod according to which private and especially transcendent duties outweigh political obedience since eternity is longer than this (civic) life, thus above the state laws and any fear of death penalty: “I shall be a criminal – but a religious one”, adding that “The time in which I must please those that are dead is longer than I must please those of this world. For there I shall lie forever. You (Ismene), if you like, can cast dishonor on what the gods have honored.” Ismene responds: “I will not put dishonor on them, but to act in defiance of the citizenry, my nature does not give me means for that” (*Anti*, 73–78 [84–90]). This view, however, is at odds with the dominant current of “the Greeks of the classical period” who, as Loraux pointed out, “were quite happy to conceal the religious beneath the political” (Loraux 1986, 41). On the contrary, Antigone defended her view saying to Creon she does not believe “that your decrees, or those of any other mortal, are strong enough to overrule the ancient, unwritten, immutable laws of the gods, which are not for the present alone, but have always been...” (*Anti*, 453–457 [496–501]).

On the one hand, Antigone argues that meaningful political order has to observe so-called non-political duties as well – not only transcendent as shown, but also those required by tradition, and as such it should not disregard the ‘law of tradition’ demanding for decent burial of a person.¹² Accordingly, her loss has nothing to do with the state’s understanding of her brother’s treachery. It is a personal loss.¹³ On the other hand, her understanding of meaningful living conditions goes beyond her private-oriented claims. Namely, as Judith Butler emphasized in her critique of Hegel’s interpretation of the drama, Antigone’s choice is not solely regarding kinship as such: “Antigone refuses to obey any law that

12 According to the customs, women in general, but Antigone as the oldest daughter, had the responsibility to bury a body, however not alone. But confronted with no help she felt the obligation to do everything in her power not to leave her brother’s soul eternally doomed. Hame writes: “Without access to the bodies, the women cannot conduct the elements of funeral ritual that are traditionally expected of them. With regard to Polyneikes, Antigone and Ismene, female relatives of the dead, are in a difficult position because it seems that in order for him to receive a funeral they must initiate and conduct it, contrary to the expected roles of women in Greek death ritual. Ironically, the nearest male relative who is customarily responsible for Polyneikes’ funeral rites and expected to see to their completion is Kreon, the author of the edict that prevents Polyneikes’ funeral” (Hame 2008, 8).

13 Moreover, as Jonathan Strauss emphasized: “In *Antigone* the heroine asserts that she was born not to hate but to love – even the excluded of the city, even the corpse of her brother” (Strauss 2013, 81).

refuses public recognition of her loss” (Butler 2000, 24). For Honig this public/political dimension of Antigone’s acting is beyond mere grieving and burying, but likely an opportunity for Antigone to additionally question both the boundaries of permissible memorializing of the family’s dead dominant in the fifth century (Honig 2013, 97), as well as the treatment of the dead under democracy since it was not unusual for the democracy to exercise postmortem violence over the dead enemies and traitors – “what Creon did in this exceptional case was not atypical of what was routinely done in Periclean Athens” (Honig 2013, 113). Honig additionally supports her view about Antigone’s political dissidence as a symbolical message to the *polis*, and not merely the urge to fulfill transcendent and traditional demands of the “unwritten laws”, with the thesis of so-called two burials (Honig 2013, 156–161). Namely, the guard reported to Creon that someone had covered Polynices against the order (*Anti*, 245–247 [268–270]). After that the guards “brushed away the dust that cloaked the corpse” (*Anti*, 409 [449]). Finally, Antigone came, as told by the guards who captured her, and “when she saw the body stripped of its cover, she burst out in groans, calling terrible curses on those that had done that deed”, hence performed a burial again along with funeral offerings (*Anti*, 426–431 [468–475]). This ‘second’ burial indicates that she was aware of the ‘first’ one, namely that the body has already been covered and the ritual performed. Accordingly, we can assume that it is not the problem of the ritual as such (as it has already been done once), but of the political order producing political corpses, i.e. able to inflict postmortem violence and restrict grieving.

In this context, the question is does Antigone need to accept the state’s decision regarding her brother’s status in death? Does her resistance make her a criminal, bad citizen, or what? How to evaluate Creon’s statesmanship? Can we see the conflict as “the balance of blame” (Griffith 2010, 111)? Strictly speaking, the Greeks understood that good civic behavior means, among all, obeying the city’s laws (Christ 2006, 2), while the statesmanship has been often linked to the craft of sailing and navigating the ship. Plato introduces the captain/ship analogy in the *Republic* to show the problem of lacking the knowledge of all those aspire to sail the ship, or to rule the city, and hence disorder (Plato 2004, 181 (488b)), while for Aristotle the “safety in navigation is the common end which all must serve and the object at which each must aim. What is true of sailors is also true of citizens” (Aristotle 1972, 101 (1276b)). Creon similarly emphasizes the necessity of proper navigation of the state/ship: “If she sails upright and we sail on her, friends will be ours for the making” (*Anti*, 190–191 [208–209]). However, Creon’s interpretation of sailing “upright” is problematic. Actually, his son Haemon, regardless of being

Antigone's fiancé, foreshadows collapsing of Creon's democratic legitimacy and his tyranny (usually perceived as the "most extreme disease of cities" (Plato 2004, 239 [544c])) while arguing with his father about Antigone's case:

Creon: Is she not tainted by the disease of wickedness?

Haemon: The entire people of Thebes says no to that.

Creon: Should the city tell me how I am to rule them? ... Must I rule the land by someone else's judgment rather than my own?

Haemon: There is no city possessed by one man only (*Anti*, 732–737 [792–799]).

The conversation between Creon and Haemon shows that Antigone's resistance is not considered as bad civic behavior in the eyes of the people. Even if Antigone acts in "defiance of citizenry", as Ismene said earlier, Creon's acts are even worse and imprudent when not taking at all into account the Greek burial norms and war customs. First, these customs allow for the corpse of an enemy to stay unburied after the battle. Second, no one would expect burying an enemy or a traitor within the borders of the city. However, this does not mean banning the burial. Creon by politicizing the dead and leaving the body unburied within the borders of the *polis* became guilty for the moral pollution (*miasma*) that fell on the city (Hame 2008, 7–8). Namely, if the body of an enemy or a traitor stays unburied in a vicinity of the city, this would affect the city in terms of religious pollution.¹⁴ Nussbaum clarifies this problem and takes the play to be representative of the tensions in Sophocles' Athens of the time:

Polynices was an enemy of the city; and not simply an enemy, but a traitor. Corpses of enemies may be returned to their kin for honorable burial; traitors are not given this much consideration. Although the law apparently did not prevent the relatives of traitors from arranging for their burial outside of Attica, burial within Attic territory was strictly forbidden; and the city itself charged itself simply with depositing the corpse unburied outside these limits. To do more would, presumably, subvert civic values by honoring treachery. As the city's representative, then, Creon must take care not to honor Polynices' corpse – although he would not be expected to go to the extreme of forbidding or preventing a burial at a considerable distance from the city (Nussbaum 1986, 55).

In his rage Creon actually ordered unburying Polynices. Even if he does not believe in the pollution, or if not being fearful from it as he said (*Anti*, 1043 [1101]), he does not understand that leaving Polynices unburied will symbolically allow for his continuous presence in the city, since the

¹⁴ W.R. Connor further explains the issue of religious pollution: "It implies that the corruption of sound government is almost physically infectious and hence calls for strong treatment – the extirpation of the sources of the sickness and all that is physically linked to them – including even ancestors' bones and in some cases the houses of the guilty" (Connor 1985, 93).

purpose of a burial is to help others to move on (Honig 2013, 113). Teiresias, the blind prophet that enters the stage as a representative of the old beliefs, also warns Creon not to leave the body “unburied, unmourned, unholy” (*Anti*, 1072 [1041–1042]). For Teiresias Creon’s arrogance and imprudence will affect the transcendent domain thus having the consequences for the city: “The city is sick because of your will. All the altars and hearts of the city are tainted by birds and dogs with carrion from the ill-fated body of Oedipus’ son. This is why the gods will not accept our sacrificial prayers...” (*Anti*, 1015–1019 [1072–1076]). Furthermore, Teiresias challenges Creon’s power to expose the dead to bare death and thus every type of similar political acting, even if supported by the majority, by urging: “Yield to the dead man; do not stab him – now he is gone – what bravery is this, to inflict another death upon the dead” (*Anti*, 1029–1030 [1086–1088]). But unlike Creon who had linked bad citizenship to Antigone’s disobedience to the law, Teiresias, without supporting Antigone’s deeds, however, has introduced a new paradigm: bad citizenship is the lack of civic excellence in ruling – it is commanding the city/ship irrationally and violently. He said to Creon: “These acts of yours are violence ... All the cities will stir in hatred against you...” (*Anti*, 1074, 1080 [1044, 1052–1053]). The Chorus, while being critical about Antigone’s zealotry – “it is your own self-willed temper that has destroyed you” (*Anti*, 875 [927–928]) – sided with Teiresias and further pressed Creon to “go and free the girl from her hollowed chamber. Then raise a tomb for the unburied dead” (*Anti*, 1100 [1175–1176]).

All these show that Creon lost his legitimacy even if his decision-making in terms of the politicization of the dead had been backed-up with some standards of the Periclean age. This implies that Sophocles’ tragedy pinpoints the hollowness of the solely city-oriented values directed toward uplifting the idea of civic friendship over any private and traditional attachments in the public sphere, and thus over recognizing so-called mortalist humanism. And this is why Antigone looks reactionary to the prevalent standards. Honig writes: “Creon’s action represents in hyperbolic form what, to a heroic or aristocratic point of view, look like the democracy’s generally excessive violation of the bounds of the permissible when it comes to the treatment of the dead” (Honig 2013, 113). However, Creon’s “conspiracy with democracy” (Honig 2013, 115) shows tyrannical traits being hidden beneath the democratic sentiments of a victor. For Creon it was not enough for the enemy to be defeated. He wanted all his enemies to be dehumanized in death. Intoxicated with the victory in war, and out of retribution, yet without being able to anticipate the consequences of his actions, he tore apart the very fabrics of the community he had wanted to weave together. Instead of politics of reconciliation his politics of retribution furthered moral and political fragmentations. Even if

Creon's political order legitimately sought stability, this quest was tainted. Through the illegitimate expansion of the state's power into the realm of funeral rites as well as by carrying out abusive and dehumanizing practices, political authority denied its citizens meaningful life outside the sphere of the *polis*. Thus, it was Creon's "law and order" that brought the city to its end.

As for Antigone, by questioning Creon's decree she disrupts the order, but her acting allows for exposing the other face of order – the one whose tyranny was cloaked beneath the aura of victorious political leadership reflecting perverted rationality of political power. Her guilt is not the fact that she is not sharing the same view on civic attachments the state wants to impose. Antigone can be considered guilty solely on the ground of her unconditional attempt to bury an enemy/traitor within the confines of the city, not because it is forbidden by Creon's edict, but because this is as well considered a ritual pollution (*miasma*) for the city. In theory, she could insist on the funeral rites, of course if not interrupted by Creon, outside of the city's territory since her love for her brother and her irreparable loss have nothing to do with the state's perception of the enemy.

Antigone and Creon represent two paradigmatic figures embodying opposing conceptions of the good. For Creon the civic good requires honoring the city, its ideals and heroes. Creon understands his edict as a patriotic act since any other decision, according to him, would dishonor those loyal to the city, namely Eteocles, who has died as the city champion. A good citizen is viewed as a citizen loyal to political authority, as disobedience is taken as the cause of all civic evils. Creon says: "There is nothing worse than disobedience to authority. It destroys cities, it demolishes homes" (*Anti*, 672–674 [726–728]). Accordingly, Antigone is perceived as someone challenging the state-oriented civic good by attempting to turn the values upside-down, or as Creon says: "When people plot mischief in the dark, it is the mind which first is convicted of deceit. But surely I hate indeed the one that is caught in evil and then makes that evil look like good" (*Anti*, 493–496 [536–538]). As I discussed earlier, Antigone's conception of the good – taken as reflecting traditional values and duties of the old rank and order, as well as being the transcendence-oriented – can hardly be reconciled with such expressed state-oriented civic good. Nussbaum sums up the narrowness of both articulations of the good as they would inevitably lead to a conflict: "Creon's single-ended conception has prevented him from having an adequate conception of the city – which, in the wholeness of its relationships, does not appear to have a single good ... Antigone's rigid adherence to a single narrow set of duties has caused her to misinterpret the nature of piety itself, a virtue within which a more comprehensive understanding would see the possibility of conflict" (Nussbaum 1986, 61,65).

SPECTERS OF *ANTIGONE*

There is something utterly disturbing in disrespecting the dead that likely mirrors our own anxieties, fears, sense of justice, our own fate, desires to be remembered, or at least not to be violated as human beings, or, as Verdery similarly puts, “any manipulation of a corpse directly enables one’s identification with it through one’s own body” (Verdery 1999, 33). Creon’s politicization of the dead enemy being a transformation of the dead human body into political corpse reduced to bare death, manifests as dehumanization and depersonalization of the dead. In such read Sophocles’ *Antigone* exposes political and human failure, namely of how the dead should not be treated, of how our civilization should not look like, of what the true face of horror means, a horror to which political power is able to expose both the living and the dead. For Hannah Arendt such face of horror is the face of totalitarian terror. Modernity substituted Creon’s personal tyranny transforming it into totalitarian terror of the state apparatus. Its paradigm is the concentration camp “in which the most absolute *conditio inhumana* that has ever existed on earth was realized” (Agamben 1998, 166), as Agamben, inspired by Arendt, pointed out. Moreover, the camp (as well as any organized mass execution site) represents the ultimate dehumanization and depersonalization of the dead. This is the place, as Arendt put it, where “organized oblivion” happens “by making death itself anonymous”, because the “Western world has...even in its darkest periods, granted the slain enemy the right to be remembered as a self-evident acknowledgment of the fact that we are all men (and *only* men). It is only because even Achilles set out for Hector’s funeral, only because the most despotic governments honored the slain enemy, only because the Romans allowed the Christians to write their martyrologies, only because the Church kept its heretics alive in the memory of men, that all was not lost and never could be lost” (Arendt 1973, 452). While Arendt did not realize that the Greeks, even in their greatest moments of the Classical age, had practiced some of the most depriving methods of postmortem violence toward the dead, she correctly points toward modern or contemporary illegitimate exercise of power able to dehumanize the dead in yet unseen proportions.

From antiquity the answer to irrational power of the dead to disturb the living, to their spectral presence that cannot be contained, has been equally irrational exercise of postmortem violence and the politicization of the dead enemies, traitors, or nowadays terrorists. This sort of violence and politicization is a sort of political exorcism – an “attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force, most often an evil-doing spirit, a specter, a kind of ghost who comes back and who still risks coming back *post mortem*” (Derrida 2006, 59). Political corpse, thus,

becomes an entity whose politicization, political exile, dehumanization, or depersonalization is prefigured in its ghostly presence, and having propensity to chronically haunt the living.¹⁵

Similarly to Creon's decree, in July 1945 Yugoslav Ministry of Internal Affairs issued the order targeting enemy graves: "Any trace of the ghoul fascist rule should be erased. All visible signs according to which someone would be able to recognize the place where those graves were erected should be leveled to the ground"¹⁶. This order exemplifies a sovereign ability to produce bare death in which those dead bodies were not only assumed unburiable, but they were legally subjected to both, the physical destruction (of their all "visible signs", of their remnants), as well as to symbolical political exorcism of their ghostly presence from new political reality. As Auchter noticed, there is "the specular asymmetry of the ghost" as it is invisible to us, but we have a sense of the ghost looking at us, permanently returning, ungoverned but hovering over our community, while "the realm of visibility" is taken "as a precondition for entrance into a political community" (Auchter 2014, 29).¹⁷

Postmortem dehumanization, depersonalization, or any sort of degradation, including declaring someone unburiable, thus become a threshold of our humanity since such practice creates an entity – political corpse – as "a legally unnamable and unclassified being" (Agamben 2005, 3).¹⁸ Today, in our recent anxieties regarding the treatment of the dead terrorists, we are witnessing the specters of *Antigone* again. In 2013 the dead body of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the Boston bomber and a traitor (since he was the American citizenship), became the dividing issue in Massachusetts. "Bury this terrorist on U.S. soil and we will unbury him" (Mendelsohn 2013)

15 While the focus of this article was on those political corpses whose dead presence had been denied from the political body, it should be noted, although it is beyond the scope of this article, that politicization of the dead and manipulation with human remains, was fundamental for inflaming the nationalist hysteria in former Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s when the dead became an important political symbol in legitimizing certain political goals, as it was, for example, the case when "Vuk Drašković, Serbian nationalist and leader of the opposition to dictator Slobodan Milošević, put it succinctly: 'Serbia is wherever there are Serbian graves'" (Verdery 1999, 98).

16 Translated from: Dizdar, et. al., 2005.: *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944.-1946.: dokumenti*, Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, pp. 177–178. The production of the nameless dead in the concentration camps served as a symbolical political exorcism of a similar sort.

17 For detailed account on how Auchter follows Derrida's concept of hauntology as being relevant for the statescraft, see Chapter 2 of her book (Auchter 2014).

18 When Agamben uses this terminology he is describing the consequences of the military order issued by George W. Bush that allowed for indefinite detention of those involved in terrorist activities, hence removing or suspending their previous legal status. I am arguing that the same logic can be extended to the dead terrorists as well.

appears on one of the slogans of the protestors, while some suggested that the “trash” (i.e. Tsarnaev) should end up where all the thrash go – at the dump. Mendelsohn has described the boiling atmosphere in this issue: “Cemetery officials, community leaders and politicians in the Boston area were concerned that a local burial would spark civic unrest” (Mendelsohn 2013). It was argued that having his burial within the city would disturb its peace. “If the people of Massachusetts do not want that terrorist to be buried on our soil” declared Representative Edward J. Markey, a Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate, “then it should not be” (Mendelsohn 2013). Following these events, even the attempts to bury him somewhere else in the state, the dead body of the terrorist/traitor was denied to reside within the walls of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and even Connecticut, the second pick and the neighboring state, appeared to be too close. Finally, Tsarnaev’s body was buried in a small Muslim cemetery in Virginia, but in an unmarked grave. More recent treatments of dead terrorists show similar patterns of this “legal no-man’s land” (Mendelsohn 2013) condition regarding those not considered strictly unburiable, but rather “unnamable and unclassified” and as such allowed, without any clear procedure, to be buried somewhere in the outskirts, in silence.¹⁹ In Russia, the manipulation with the dead bodies of terrorists is even more problematic since “a federal law forbids authorities to return the bodies of persons qualified as terrorists to their families or to inform the relatives about their place of burial” (Petrig 2009, 354). Such manipulation with the dead is aimed at the living since “not returning mortal remains to the relatives constitutes a form of collective punishment and violates the prohibition of cruel or inhuman treatment and of outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment” (Petrig 2009, 354). One of the examples involving, on top of that, public defamation and degradation, has set to take place in eastern Istanbul where the authorities in 2016 have decided to build the “Traitors’ Cemetery” with unmarked graves for all those involved in the state coup, so the humiliation of the traitors can be publicly celebrated: “May every passer-by curse them and let them not rest in peace”, said Istanbul Mayor (Becatoros 2016).

Politicization of the dead and the problem of burying or manipulating with the dead bodies of terrorists/traitors seem to be one of the greatest and permanent socio-political challenges especially for the post-conflict societies or those affected with the problem of terrorism. Like in the ancient times, contemporary societies struggle with the presence of the unwanted dead assuming they would disturb the peace and lead to new divisions. As such, the politicization of the dead body also serves as

19 Similar burials have been conducted in the case of the suicide attacker at the Bataclan in Paris 2015, Samy Amimour, as well as in the cases of the London Bridge attackers from 2017.

a new foundational myth for the living political body. But even when the dead body of a terrorist/traitor is not declared unburiable, as it recently happens, the body was de-personalized, i.e. removed from any personal attributes. Namely, as all those examples show, in order to perform some sort of a burial of the unwanted dead – those burials that not include casting the dead body into the sea – it is the identity of the dead that was erased by disposing the body in unmarked graves and in undisclosed locations. Some recent ordinances and anti-terrorist laws adopted such post-mortem identity-erasure politics, thus violating the Geneva Conventions that oblige governments to respect the burial places and mark gravesites so they can be always recognized and found (Petrig 2009, 358).

The way we treat the dead affects our vision of ourselves, of what our humanity consists of. We should differentiate between a human being as such and the deeds of that person. It is inhuman to utterly remove every trace of someone's personhood, even in the case of those who committed the most heinous things. This is one of the reasons why we should be still inspired with *Antigone*, or at least we can read the drama that way. As a representative of the family of the killed "London Bridge" terrorist said: "The family are distraught with what he did but he is still their son and brother" (Osborne 2017). Unless the kinship has been deliberately disrupted, human beings can hardly move on if they are unable or prevented to observe their dead family members, if the burials have been denied, if their burial sites are nonexistent, or not marked properly. Sometimes it is out of our power to bury the dead properly. But this paper was not about those conditions involving *vis major*. This paper was arguing that equal subjection to death determines equal ontological status of the dead body. Following that view, mortalist humanism would advocate for equality of kin-related grieving for someone's loss, not for the need of the political order to equally mourn or honor the dead. Finally, subjecting the dead to bare death by turning them to political corpses as legally constituted entities disposed to postmortem political exorcism, degradation, violence, and other dehumanizing or depersonalizing practices, should be politically accounted for the illegitimate expansion of political power linked to the rule of terror, and ethically for the ultimate human evil.

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SAŽETAK

SMRT I GRAD: POLITIČKI LEŠEVI I SABLASTI *ANTIGONE*

Autor tvrdi da se politizacija života, o kojoj govore mnogi moderni i suvremeni politički mislioci, ne može tretirati drugačije, a samim tim i bez sličnog zanimanja i važnosti, od politizacije smrti. Mrtvo tijelo predstavlja snažan simbol i kao takvo je često ispolitizirano. U radu se govori o problemu posmrtnog nasilja i pravno-političkim mehanizmima koji imaju za cilj isključiti iz političkog tijela one koji nisu živi, ali čija mrtva prisutnost prijeti živima. U tu svrhu autor rekonstruira Sofoklovu *Antigonu* kao paradigmatički tekst čija reinterpretacija i kontekstualizacija služi za ponovno promišljanje o grčkoj konceptualizaciji mrtvih, kao i o načinima na koje država prodire u domenu privatnih veza i pogrebnih obreda, posebice kad se bavi mrtvim izdajnicima/teroristima. Pretstavljajući jednak ontološki status svakog mrtvog tijela, autor, s jedne strane, brani mortalistički humanizam kao jednaku mogućnost žalovanja nečijeg osobnog gubitka nasuprot državno određenim politikama žalovanja, a s druge, strane tvrdi da podvrgavanje mrtvih goljoj smrti, tj. njihovim pretvaranjem u političke leševe kao pravno konstituirane mrtve ljudske entitete podložne

posmrtnom političkom izopćenju, degradaciji, nasilju ili drugim dehumanizacijskim i depersonalizacijskim praksama, čini nelegitimno širenje političke moći, a samim time i vladavinu terora, kao i krajnje ljudsko zlo.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: politizacija mrtvih, politički leševi, gola smrt, *Antigona*, posmrtno nasilje, dehumanizacija, izdajnik/terorist.