

Introduction

Slaves, *Metics*, Citizens

For us, there is no going back to the original text of *Antigone*, no return to a pure Sophoclean drama that would be shorn of all the translations and adaptations it has inspired. There is no returning to a Greek text somehow outside the political genealogy of its multiple translators. There is no pre-political text named *Antigone*. There are only the multiple resonances, between Sophocles and Heaney, between Heaney's Sophocles and McDonald's Sophocles, between McDonald's Sophocles and Fugard's Sophocles, and so on, ad infinitum.

—Tina Chanter, “*Antigone's* Political Legacies:
Abjection in Defiance of Mourning”

The Ancient Drama of Political Membership: Slavery, *Metoikia*, and Citizenship in Sophocles's *Antigone*

Sophocles's *Antigone* (441 BCE), which narrates the story of the title character, is both globally the most frequently performed classical tragedy in contemporary theaters and a foundational text for political theory.¹ *Antigone* is the oldest daughter of Oedipus, the previous sovereign of Thebes, well known for having committed parricide and incest after solving the riddle of the Sphinx. Her brother Polyneices, having been ostracized by their other brother Eteocles, who was unwilling to share the throne, sought to destroy and enslave the city. Polyneices and Eteocles kill each other in battle, but Creon, their uncle and the new sovereign of Thebes, grants proper burial only to Eteocles, who fought on behalf of the city. Creon decides to keep

Polyneices's corpse unburied and exposed for citizens to see it ravished by dogs and birds. And Creon would not treat disobedience lightly, as death awaits whoever dares to bury Polyneices. Keeping Polyneices's corpse above ground, subjected to the indignity of exposure, ends up contaminating the whole scene of the living with that of the dead. Antigone buries Polyneices, against Creon's edict and in disobedience of her confinement to the *oikos* (household) on the basis of her gender. Antigone, Haemon (Antigone's fiancé and Creon's son), and Eurydice (Creon's wife) all commit suicide. By the end of the play, Creon regards his own life as lived in death. Only Ismene, Antigone's sister, survives, deprived of her kin.

Most summaries of the play end here, showing how Antigone orbits around two interrelated contestations of political membership. First, she contests who can or cannot be buried, when she performs the forbidden burial for her brother, declared an enemy of the state. Second, she contests the gender regulations that determine who can act and speak in the city, when she enacts the forbidden ritual by occupying the public space from which she is excluded for being a woman. This exclusion is representationally mimicked by the fact that a male actor originally had to play her role in the stage, as ancient Greek women were not allowed to perform in the theater or, according to some, even attend as spectators.

Antigone, however, is also about coerced migration. This subject becomes clearer if one reads *Antigone* in connection to the two other surviving plays by Sophocles on the same Theban myth, often published as a cycle: *Oedipus Tyrannos* (429 BCE) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (406 BCE). Both refer to events that precede those narrated in *Antigone*, according to the chronology of the story. In *Oedipus Tyrannos*, we learn that Oedipus left Corinth fearing the prophecy of parricide and incest and still believing the Corinthian rulers, Polybus and Merope, to be his parents by blood. Corinth, it is worth mentioning, was known as an important slave port in Greek antiquity, and Sophocles symbolically places Thebes in between it and the democratic city of Colonus, where Oedipus arrives with Antigone as two refugees seeking asylum. *Oedipus at Colonus* thus comes second in the chronology of the story. And Sophocles extends the migratory journeys of the main characters in the Theban cycle, since it is in Colonus that an aged Oedipus is officially granted the Athenian status of *metoikia* (which should be translated as "foreign residence" or "home-changing," but is often translated as "alien residence,"); the noun referring to the human who has the status is *metic*). But Antigone does not remain in Colonus. *Antigone*, the last play in the chronology of the story (but the first one to be written),

places Antigone in her native Thebes, where Polyneices is subjected to the indignity of exposure after death. Polyneices is treated, Antigone's speech suggests, as only slaves could be treated (A, 517 [181]); and it is in Thebes, once she learns that she will be put in a rockbound cave for daring to bury her brother, that Antigone refers to herself as a *metic* (A, 850–53 [194]).

To focus on the question of coerced migration is to focus on the problem of Athenian exceptionalism, that is to say, on colonialism, and on its impact on democracy's reliance on blood-based membership to restrict the recognition of political subjectivity. Oedipus was originally a native of Thebes, but his parents asked their servants (arguably slaves) to kill their son, fearing the fulfillment of the prophecy. Instead, the servants subversively removed him to Corinth to save his life. Raised in Corinth, a known slave center, Oedipus leaves and kills his biological father, unknowingly, at the crossroads, fearing the prophecy. He then solves the riddle of the Sphinx and, unknowingly, marries his mother, Jocasta, as a result. He thus moves from Corinth back to Thebes, and unknowingly becomes, as I will argue in the next chapter, the *metic* sovereign of his native land (OT, 452–53 [30]). He discovers his Corinthian parents not to be his parents by blood and is anxious to prove that he is not a slave (OT, 1063 [57]), but learns that he was a native of Thebes, and of his heinous deeds. Thus, as a self-imposed punishment, he blinds himself and leaves Thebes. It takes him a long time to arrive at Colonus, where he engages in supplication, following the protocols for the acquisition of *metoikia* according to the standards of democratic Athens. It is granted. When he dies, he is buried in an unmarked gravesite at the border of the Athenian *polis*, where the open, hospitable and democratic Athenians will defeat the aristocratic, enclosed Thebans (an enclosure hyperbolically dramatized through the incest).² Oedipus's migration is thus a traveling between citizenship, slavery, and *metoikia*.

Antigone's migratory drama equally travels across these positionalities. Antigone is forced to leave her homeland with Oedipus in order to become his eyes through foreign lands. But she does not reside at Colonus as a *metic*. No longer a sovereign of Thebes, the ostracized Polyneices marries Argeia (Adrastus's daughter) and assembles an army in Argos in order to fight against his brother. He is told that he needs Oedipus's favor in order to win the battle; so he solicits an audience with his aged father in Colonus. Antigone is the only one able to persuade her father to listen to Polyneices (OC, 1181–1205 [134]). Instead of giving his favor, though, Oedipus curses his sons to kill each other in battle (OC, 1373–75 [140]). Antigone has to return to Thebes to stop what seems unstoppable: the

fratricide of her brothers. There she decides to bury Polyneices because it was Eteocles's brother, "not his slave" (A, 517 [181]) she claims, who died in the battlefield. And it is in Thebes, after Creon commands her to be displaced to a cave with enough food to give time for the gods to save her, that she regards her condition as that of a *metic*. Polyneices's and Antigone's forced migrations, like Oedipus's, travel across the positions of the slave, the *metic*, and the citizen.

It is my argument in this book that what *Antigone's* coerced migrations between Corinth, Thebes, and Colonus dramatize is the conflictive, triangular organization of political membership between the positionalities of the slave (full exclusion), the *metic* (partial inclusion/partial exclusion), and the citizen (full inclusion). Political membership is only intelligible against the logic that relationally sustains these different positionalities, and it is the colonial dimension of such logic that I seek to interrogate in this book.

In revisiting *Antigone's* tragedy, however, I am not interested in giving a different picture of ancient democracy by emphasizing the constitutive modes of exclusion that value citizenship on the basis of fully devaluing slaves and partially including *metics*. My real interest lies in exploring how this triangular model of political membership informs our modern/colonial world, which is drastically affected by the racialized logic that settler-colonial capitalism produced through the European conquest of the Americas and the institutionalization of modern slavery via the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In other words, this is a book about *Antigone* in the Americas and a book about the Americas in *Antigone*, which openly and anachronistically seeks in a different time, a time foreign to Sophocles, for a problematic that might help us to politically reinvent *Antigone* for our times.

The assumption of this book is, of course, that the very *Antigone* deprived of the Americas to which we have access—that is, the *Antigone* that we have received through its multiple translations by Hegel, Lacan, etc.—is already an *Antigone* remade by the conquest of the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. *Antigone* can play the mediating role that it plays in Hegel and onward, because the intimacies between four continents, to echo Lisa Lowe's work, brought up by the European conquest of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, already speaks through him, if in disavowed form.³ The Spirit can move from the unintelligible Egyptian hieroglyph to the rational solution of the riddle of the Sphinx by Oedipus, which is said to inaugurate the symbolic order of the West, because modern colonialism has already redistributed knowledge and deprived black and indigenous peoples of history and recognizable humanity.

This is not, however, a book about the ways in which the conquest and the slave trade speaks through Hegel, Lacan, etc. It is a book that attempts to articulate an alternative political interpretation of the tragedy, by voicing what that colonial genealogy of translations has thus far silenced. Hence, rather than look to Greek antiquity in order to illuminate the political inclusions and exclusions of modernity, my book operates in the opposite direction. Given the disavowed role of the conquest in the colonial formation of a dominant literary and theoretical interpretation of classical texts, such as *Antigone*, why not look to settler colonial critique, black and women of color feminisms, and queer and trans of color critique in order to illuminate the political inclusions and exclusions of Greek antiquity, to which our Western political theory and its main conceptual vocabulary remain committed? This explains why the emphasis is on *Antigone* in the Americas, with only one chapter on Greek antiquity. Such emphasis leads me both to confront ancient democracy with its hierarchized and quasi-naturalized system of blood-based political membership but more importantly, to confront the ways in which that colonial history remains unchallenged in contemporary democratic, feminist, queer, biopolitical, and deconstruction theory's turn to the ancient Greeks for a contemporary re-politicization of *Antigone*.

By situating *Antigone* in the Americas, I want to offer an alternative genealogy to the multiple translations that mediate our engagement with the play. Doing so, I am not trying to make Greek antiquity into the origin of the Americas, in the way in which Hegel, and arguably the whole Romantic and post-Romantic tradition of German Idealism, can be said to have made Athens the birthplace of Germany. That is not the point of *Antigone in the Americas*. More *anti-gone*—as in against *genos*/genealogy/generation—I want to tell the story of a decolonial disaffiliation. Hence, I want to explore the tragedy through a more contentious historiography, what I would call, following Mieke Bal, a “preposterous history” of *Antigone* in the Americas.⁴ What I want to write, even perhaps to invent, is more the history of a rupture than of a continuity, to document not a passage (i.e., from Europe to the Americas) but the violent history of a “middle passage,” the one that connects the four continents together and yet remains politically undertheorized.

To focus on the *metic* and the *slave*, is to think about this tragedy anew, and thus to accentuate other passages that have not received the same level of commentary. Most interpreters of the play (Hegel, Lacan, Irigaray, Derrida, Butler, Honig, etc.) focus their attention on two passages that appear, at first sight, contradictory. In the first passage, Antigone justifies

her burial of Polyneices on the basis that “the god of death demands these rites for both” (A, 519 [181]). This is the claim that, as we know, champions the civil disobedience of Antigone as a figure of universal humanism. Death is the grand equalizer and marks a limit to politics; all bodies are, in principle, exempt from state instrumentalization post mortem. The second passage refers to Antigone’s controversial answer to the question posed by the Chorus, vis-à-vis the law that backs her up, when she cites the Persian story of Intaphrenes’s wife’s reasoning: “If my husband were dead, I might have had another, and child from another man, if I lost the first. But when father and mother both were hidden in death no brother’s life would bloom for me again” (A, 909–12 [196]). Singularity, rather than universality, is what gets emphasized in this case. She would only do it for her brother, who is uniquely irreplaceable. The dominant political-theoretical interpretations of *Antigone* all focus on these two reasons. Democratic theory, psychoanalysis, feminist and queer theory, biopolitics, and deconstruction, all offer different answers to the puzzle of Antigone’s move from universality to singularity, a puzzle whose solution enlists other oppositions in its wake.

There is, in short, a vast theoretical tradition that one could trace back to the Hegel-indebted opposition between the family (*oikos*) and the state (*polis*), the divine and the civic, life and death, and the feminine and the masculine, that comes to supplement the incompatibility between these two justifications for her acts: the god of the dead demands the rites for all and I would only do it for my brother. There is, however, a new theoretical tradition, to which my book belongs and contributes, that makes the question of freedom and slavery central to the literary adaptations of *Antigone* in the Global South. This tradition, which Tina Chanter inaugurated through her excellent analysis of the Hegel-indebted marginalization of slavery in the political interpretation of Greek tragedy, focuses instead on Antigone’s claim to have buried Polyneices because “it was [Eteocles’s] brother, not his slave, that died” (A, 517 [181]).⁵ According to the logic of that claim, some bodies could presumably be treated under some undignified manner by the sovereign without eliciting the same kind of public response that Polyneices’s mistreatment does, namely, the bodies of slaves who were also spoils of war. But slaves have not been the sole ones neglected, as Antigone’s reclamation of *metoikia*, otherwise misunderstood as only a rhetorical flourish, has also been only marginally touched upon by the vast readership of this play. And yet, Antigone refers to herself three times as a *metic* (A, 852, 867, and 890 [194–95]), as does Creon, when he calls on the guards

to confine her in a cave, in order to deprive her “of her metic status on earth” (A, 889–90 [194–95]).⁶

Reading is a performative act, and the theoretical texts with which we interpret a text inevitably modify it. *Antigone in the Americas* is the performance of such transformative reading. I am well aware that the *Antigone* I offer in this book will be unrecognizably classical. That is not a problem for me. What I hope is that it will also be uncomfortably modern. Moreover, I hope it will be, if not anticanonical—as the repetition of *Antigone* cannot help but to solidify the position that the play already occupies in the Western canon of political theory—at least alter-canonical.

The Modern/Colonial Drama of Political Membership, Settler-Colonial Capitalism, and the Slave/*Metic*/Citizen Triad

As an authorized immigrant in the United States, my interest in *Antigone* first emerged from the parallels I noticed between the double contestation of political membership in the play and the double contestation of political membership often led by unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. Organized unauthorized immigrants are subjects who are not allowed to speak politically because they lack proper documentation, yet often occupy the public spaces of the city to protest the terms of their social marginalization. The bodies of dead unauthorized immigrants are also routinely subjected to improper burial in the United States, and the group Humane Borders reports that such improper burials are not exceptional but a normalized act of sovereign violence.⁷ Improper burial is, in fact, the last injury in a series of acts of violence that facilitate disregard for the dead by the sovereign institutions of the inhospitable city. These series include, but are not limited to, the militarization of the border, the criminalization of the crossing, and the capitalist marginalization of labor conditions in the immigrants’ cities of origin and arrival, which forces them into such dangerous crossings in the first place.⁸ The colonial organization of labor movement then gives continuity to the endangering of peoples’ lives and facilitates the potential desecration of their deaths, afterward.

When I set out to translate the politics of unauthorized immigrants’ burial onto the political drama of membership in *Antigone*, I realized that the dominant secondary literature on the play analyzes its political value as an allegorical commentary on democracy from the standpoint of Athenian

citizens.⁹ Though they composed the main audience of the play, when it was first performed at the Festival of Dionysus in 441 BCE they were not the sole spectators; *metics* and at least eight slaves (those who served the Council) attended them as well.¹⁰

Inspired by what James Martel calls a “yet more minor” literature, (echoing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work), I wanted to read *Antigone* from the perspective of those who are “misinterpellated” by its message, to use Martel’s term.¹¹ I wanted to read the play from the positions of the *metics* and slaves who were not its intended audience and who heard Antigone claiming *metoikia* to inform her condition and justify her heroic disobedience on the basis that Polyneices was not a slave. The substance of my interpretation, however, does not rest in simply claiming that the references to the *metic* and to the slave convey empirically accurate statutory conditions in Greek antiquity. Rather, the substance of my reading lies in Sophocles’s own metaphorical use of these terms to frame the politics of Antigone’s burial. In other words, if Antigone can instrumentalize *metoikia* and *slavery* to frame the differential exclusion to which she and her brother were subjected, why not make it possible for *metics* and slaves to instrumentalize her agency as well.

I do not claim my reading to be the right one and that all the other readings that have missed the political potential of these metaphorical associations are wrong. If anything, like Martel, I want to deliberately “not get the reading right,” so as to gain access to “undertext(s) that normally would escape our attention.”¹² Those undertexts refer to the buried history of a colonial drama, one replayed in modernity and intensify in what I characterize as neoliberal postmodernity. I thus argue in this book for a more complicated dramatization of political membership in *Antigone*, one better equipped to explain why Antigone claimed the position of *metoikia* to inform her condition at Thebes and why she claimed to have performed the disobedient deed on the basis that Polyneices was Eteocles’s brother, not his slave.

The inclusive exclusion of the *metic*, I realized, occupied a middle position in the structural organization of political membership in Greek antiquity—between the full inclusion of the citizen and the full exclusion of the slave—making any interrogation of *metoikia* inseparable from a confrontation with both citizenship and slavery.¹³ Given the dominant association of ancient citizenship with the political, my interpretation constitutes a critical intervention that, by addressing the structural relation of citizenship to *metoikia* and slavery, displaces citizenship as the dominant

locus of the political. Thus, I do not offer a reading of *Antigone* from the exclusive perspective of the citizen; I focus instead on the subordinated and misinterpellated *metic* and slave as positions from which to rethink the politics of this play.

My main interest, however, lies not in Greek antiquity but in the modern/colonial configuration of political membership in the Americas. An interrogation of political membership in the Americas is, however, inescapably mediated by the racialized logic of social (de)valuation that modern capitalism inaugurated. Race, however, “in no way pivots around ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ in antiquity, despite the centrality of those categories to racial thought today,” as Denise Eileen McCoskey claims.¹⁴ “The closest parallel in antiquity to the modern racial binary of ‘black’ and ‘white,’” McCoskey rightly affirms, would be that of “Greek versus barbarian.”¹⁵ The problem, however, lies not only in the difficulty—if not impossibility—of equating the more ethnic Greek-versus-barbarian division to the racialized one of white versus black. The problem lies in the fact that, despite contemporary efforts to trace modern racism back to ancient attempts at naturalizing slavery, most notably in the political theory of Aristotle, such genealogical efforts often obscure the role that modern capitalism played in the biological construction of race as a heritable trait, in opposition to other ancient modes of naturalizing social hierarchies among peoples regarded as different.¹⁶

That is not to say that in the ancient world bodies were not “othered” and even physically marked as different in ways almost identical to those in modernity.¹⁷ From Solon’s law forbidding slaves from exercising at the gymnasium, thus producing “visible” somatic differences of “otherness,” to the identity trials of the *dokomasia* (membership test) and the Periclean prescription of double endogamy to grant Athenian citizenship in 451/450 BCE, male, able-bodied Greek lives were valued based on devaluing physically marked others.¹⁸ Those lives were marked as more essentially linked to their socially constructed corporal traits in what Lape has justifiably characterized as “racial citizenship.”¹⁹ Democratic tragedy itself, as Edith Hall demonstrated, was an important representational effort at reproducing that hierarchy through the literary invention of the barbarian, one sustaining the cultural superiority of the Greek over that of the non-Greek.²⁰ Yet, by simply regarding the invention of the “barbarian” as an early mode of racialization, we obscure processes characteristic of modern capitalism, such as the trans-Atlantic construction of a global market that expropriated workers from their means to socially reproduce their own communities. In other words, the race that is presumably traceable to Greek antiquity

takes for granted the incommensurability between times and the ways in which different colonial modes of production affect the social regulation of differently marked bodies. In this book, I focus on the invention of the Americas through the violence of the conquest and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as well as in its historical disavowal, as the most important events affecting political membership in modernity. This is the rupture that brings four continents (Asia, Europe, Africa, and America) into intimate contact with each other, and makes capitalism into a world-historical and highly differentiated system of labor exploitation and land expropriation.

Thus, in this book I follow the persuasive thesis of Iyko Day vis-à-vis the explanatory framework for understanding different logics of racialization in the Americas as the products of subtending logics of settler-colonial capitalism. To those logics I trace the colonial effort at distinguishing full inclusion (citizenship) from full exclusion (slavery) via the differential inclusion/exclusion of some (*metoikia*).²¹ Day explores those logics through the migratory characteristics of the positionalities involved, generating a triangular understanding of settler colonialism that distinguishes the native (indigenous to the territory) from the alien (coerced to migrate as exploitable labor force in place of the native) and the settler (who voluntarily migrates in order to appropriate the land of the native and exploit the labor of the alien). Day's triangular account of settler-colonial racialization in the Americas allows us to interrogate the different logics by which this triad is organized. Those logics are the logic of elimination, which subtends the relationship between the settler and the native organized around the appropriation of the latter's land, and the logic of exclusion, which subtends the relationship between the settler and the alien organized around the exploitation of the latter's labor. Elimination and exclusion, Day also clarifies, are often used in conjunction with each other but they characterize different modalities of settler-colonial capitalist accumulation. They distinguish the settler interest in accumulating the land of indigenous peoples (thus seeking a claim to territorial indigeneity that wants to replace the native population with that of the settlers) and appropriating the labor power of the black people, as the original aliens of the Americas (thus seeking a disclaimer to the extreme condition of excessive exploitability). Through this distinction, Day argues, the assimilation of indigenous peoples to whiteness constituted a logic of elimination—unlike the “one-drop rule,” which “relegated to blackness a biological permanence that would survive any amount of interracial mixing.”²²

The triangulation I focus on here—citizen, *metic*, and slave—does not seek to contest Day's; rather, it is inspired by it. And if I speak not of

settler, native, and alien positionalities but of citizen, *metic*, and slave ones, it is in order to translate the settler-colonial logic of racialization into the hierarchical organization of political membership in the settler state. Thus, I further extend Day's claim that "blackness was not the only condition for enslavability" in the Americas, as indigenous peoples were also enslavable, to account for settler colonialism's necropolitical formula: "Take life and let die."²³ In my account, the settler first subjected the native and the alien both to slavery, in order to more effectively enforce the elimination of indigenous peoples and the hyperexploitation of black people, the original aliens of the Americas. Slavery's capacity to subhumanize the subject, who was targeted with extreme state violence, made it possible for settlers to commit genocide against both black and indigenous peoples, as it was considerably easier to annihilate a population that was not endowed with recognizable rights. Genocide, however, performed very different functions: it allowed the expropriation of indigenous peoples' land, and the intensification of black people's labor exploitation. Citizenship was the settler's privilege and when slavery was eventually abolished, it was not citizenship but something akin to *metoikia*, an in-between position, that was first extended to natives and aliens. Recall, also, that manumitted slaves did not become citizens in Greek antiquity, but *metics*.²⁴ As I will also demonstrate in this book, however, even when black and indigenous peoples were eventually de jure recognized as equal citizens in the Americas, they continued to be subjected to the racialized stratification of membership that these logics engendered, thus giving slavery an aftermath. I am, in short, interested in translating this racialized logic of settler-colonial capitalism into the dominant organization of political membership through the hierarchical distinctions among the citizen (full inclusion), the *metic* (half-inclusion/half-exclusion), and the slave (full exclusion). I am interested in that translation, in order to rethink the severity, obscurity, and historical indebtedness of contemporary forms of state and parastate violence to settler colonial capitalism.

My terms, not unlike Day's, are theoretical abstractions, categories by which to make a problem visible, rather than accurate representations of an empirical reality. There is, obviously, neither a single and monolithic modern slavery, any more than there was a single ancient one. Nor is there a single modern citizenship, anymore there was one in Greek antiquity. Citizenship, *metoikia*, and slavery, even as analytical terms, are changing historical categories, the unstable result of socially contested practices. My preposterous historical use of these categories is not trying to flatten history and deny the vast modifications in the meaning of these terms. Why, then,

turn to *Antigone* and continue to employ this triad? First, because *Antigone*, as one of many classical texts that Europeans used in order to “modernize” the colonized subjects they retroactively constructed as “primitive,” already participates in the coloniality that its theoretical reception often disavows. Second, because *Antigone* has already been reappropriated in the Americas, made to voice the cry of a different mourning. Finally, because the problem that interests me, the political problem of the *polis*’s ground, or more adequately, of the lack of ground, is what is at stake in this play. The unburied body is, to put it differently, not just a symptom but perhaps *the* symptom of the political.

The slave/*metic*/citizen triangulation that I offer in this book, as a complement to Day’s triangulation of native, alien, and settler positions, seeks to redefine how contemporary political theory draws from ancient political thought in general, and Sophocles’s *Antigone* in particular, in order to rethink the political in ways that foreground its subtending racialized logic of social (de)valuation. This is a relational logic that values citizenship by devaluing slavery, inventing the *metic* as the malleable in-between position. By means of this logic, black- and brown-marked bodies are kept from full membership in the colonial and postcolonial states of the Americas. Just as emancipated slaves in antiquity did not become citizens but *metics*, emancipated black and indigenous peoples in the Americas do not become full citizens either, even when citizenship is eventually extended to them. Other alien labor forces are subjected to a more compartmentalized system of *metoikia*, but some citizens and *metics* in fact continue to be subjected to slavery’s aftermath. The abolition of modern slavery, however, does not end it. The “racial calculus and political arithmetic” that settler colonial capitalism engendered survives it, in what Saidiya Hartman has adequately named slavery’s aftermath.²⁵

Redefining the Political Through Its Subtending Racialized Logic of Valuation

One might explain the significant marginalization of *metoikia* and slavery—as two alternative subject-positionalities for interpreting *Antigone*’s drama—in political theory’s long investment in this ancient tragedy, based on the fact that neither *metics* nor slaves, irrespective of gender, could participate in the *agora* (assembly). Unlike citizens, slaves were not allowed to speak in public, or own property, as they were the property that others owned.

Metics, who were allowed to own property, except land, were also excluded from proper political participation. *Metics*, however, could still influence political outcomes, either through forms of legal ghostwriting and political advising, or by pretending to be citizens, a practice common enough as to merit legal regulation. *Metics* and slaves were, thus, differentially deprived of *lexis* (speech) and *praxis* (action), and differentially subjected to the private sphere—as animated objects for the master, in the case of slaves, and as nonproprieters of the land, in the case of *metics*. If citizens were free and slaves were unfree, *metics* were “free,” in that they were not under another master’s rule, ruled their own *oikos*, and yet, had no political rights to participate as equals in the government of the city, which is what freedom really meant in Greek antiquity.

Prior to Pericles’s 451/450 BCE Citizenship Law, and during its suspension (from 430 to 403 BCE, according to some sources), *metics*’ children could become citizens if the other parent was a citizen. Things get more complicated when we understand that *metics* were also manumitted slaves, rendering all of these boundaries permeable through the reproductive politics of democracy. In other words, citizens and slaves met in *metoikia*, making the regulation of *metic* sexuality in particular, a subject of great anxiety in Greek antiquity. As Rebecca Futo Kennedy argues, *metic* women were “the ultimate Other and the gravest threat to Athenian exceptionalism and democracy.”²⁶ The equation of the citizen with the political, thus, rested on the compromised prepolitical exclusion of *metics* and slaves from blood-based membership, reconfigured by Pericles’s Citizenship Law, and the differential subjection of all women to such stratified regulation.

But this exclusion did not affect all women equally, either, as women’s status depended on their genealogical filiation, making women married to citizens differently regulated from those married to *metics* and those enslaved. As Kennedy argues, *metic* women were subjected to taxes and to the law courts “in ways that no citizen woman ever would be.”²⁷ *Metic* women were subjected to the charge of *graphê xenias* (pretending to be a citizen), *graphê aprostasiou* (failure to register and pay the *metic* tax) and *dike apostasiou* (disregard of their *prostates*). If found guilty of the first charge, the punishment could be as harsh as a death sentence, if guilty of the second and third charges, they could be sold into slavery. A portion of the profits from the sale, furthermore, went to the prosecutor, rendering independent *metic* women “extremely vulnerable,” “a legal non-entity” “as far as private law was concerned.”²⁸ Because the most radical difference between the free and the unfree, between citizens and slaves, could be undone through *metic*

reproduction, it became crucial for democracy to control their sexuality, and police their intimacy.

A different understanding of the political, however, inverts the terms of that exclusion. If one were to qualify an action as political, not because it happens in a specific (public) space but because it troubles the logic of the “proper” that governs the location of some bodies within specific spaces and the dislocation of others, *metics* and slaves, rather than citizens, would become the primary subjects of the political. Jacques Rancière seems to have proposed such an understanding of the political. According to Rancière, what we normally understand by “the political,” as in the official public institutions of the ancient city-state, or the modern state, should rather be understood as “the police” instead: the regime that determines what is sensible to the community by distributing and assigning bodies to particular places.²⁹ In this logic, the community is distributed in parts that belong to different spaces: some to the public sphere, others to the private. The political, Rancière argues, occurs when the part that has no part, that is incommensurable with any of the already identifiable parts, takes the part of the whole as its part, and thus breaks with the idea that property (*arkhê*) is needed to participate.

To the extent that neither *metics* nor slaves, irrespective of their gender, nor “free” Athenian women could attend the assembly because they lacked the *arkhê* to do so, this most iconic political space should rather be understood as a policing space. But this was not the part that Rancière had in mind, when he defended democratic an-*arkhê* against birth and wealth (the two main policing forms of *arkhê* in Greek antiquity). Rancière, like many contemporary democratic theorists who turn to the ancients, fails to confront the ethnic/gendered logic of blood-based status, through which democracy also regulated membership in the *demos* (people). Thus, Rancière might have been able to translate the ancient part that has no part (the *demos* of Greek antiquity) into the modern proletariat—as the class that dissolves all classes—but it is unclear how such historical translation includes the differentiated racialized and gendered working class of modernity.³⁰ For that to happen, I contend in this book, one must confront racial/sexual capitalism, that is to say, the logic of social (de)valuation that causes the political integration of the settler to rest on the sexually differentiated expropriation of native land and exploitation of alien labor.³¹ This triangulation is my own way of redefining the political in ways in which the racialized and gendered logic of value that members some through the dismemberment of those that

the ongoing settler state “others,” stays at the foreground of the analysis and at the center of the radical political claim for equality.

Creon, Antigone, and Polyneices, as the main characters of the political conflict that *Antigone* dramatizes, stand for the interrelated positionalities of the citizen, the *metic*, and the slave, as the positions through which political membership was hierarchically organized and relationally sustained in colonial antiquity. The full visibility and audibility of Creon, as carrier of sovereign speech, here contrasts with the partial visibility and audibility of Antigone, confined to the *oikos* on the basis of her gender. Both contrast with the full invisibility and complete silencing of Polyneices, mistreated after death in ways that, as Antigone’s speech suggests, only slaves could have been treated.³² Actually, this extension of *metoikia* and slavery to those previously immune to it, might very well be what makes this play politically relevant for citizens in the audience. Had Antigone truly been a *metic* and Polyneices truly been a slave, there might have been no *Antigone*.

The social legibility of the citizen body, which moves from aboveground in life to underground in death, here contrasts with the enslaved body, which moves from underground in life (intensively employed in the mines for the extraction of metals) to aboveground in death (exposed to the indignity of nonburial). The *metic* lies somewhere in between, and the equivocal placement of Antigone in a cave with enough food to survive, after she self-identifies as a *metic*, manifests the worse forms that such liminal inclusion can take. The selective inclusion of the *metic*, however, differs from the extreme desecration of the slave, of Polyneices’s corpse, left to rot and be chewed by dogs and birds under the coerced gaze of citizens. Whether or not this was a historically accurate representation of the ways in which despised slave burials were desecrated in Greek antiquity is less important than the fact that Antigone considers that distinction to be of value. Equally important to me is the fact that it has played a rather minor role in the dominant political interpretations of this play.

The sensible distribution of visibility and invisibility through burial mimics the sensible distribution of audibility and inaudibility in speech. Creon delivers his speech standing aboveground, and his position is most radically contrasted by the silent body of Polyneices, exposed while dead when he should have been underground. Antigone delivers her speech from the ground, but her grounds are not stable enough for her to be “above” and she risks being displaced to the underground precisely when she renders that ground contingent, through the fierceness of her speech. As Kennedy argues,

“The metaphorical use of *metic* in *Antigone* gives us the first real hint that to be a *metic* is to be without secure status, rights, or even visibility.”³³ Her public speech is only partially audible and almost immediately disqualified by the sovereign as “mad.” Polyneices, altogether expelled from the acoustic realm through the extreme silencing of his claims that the desecration of his death performs, in death is further invisibilized through the hypervisible exposure of his dead body as a debased spectacle. Overground (citizen), not quite in the ground (*metic*), and unable to rest underground (slave): *Antigone* dramatizes the refusal of these bodies to occupy the locations assigned to them, and the contingency and instability of the grounds that is *the political*, when it is the coloniality of the *polis* that gets accentuated.

What interests me the most about this triangular relationship, however, is the relational structure, the one that explains why Antigone’s need to revalue Polyneices into the human order of the citizen—she claims to have lost herself, through her own references to *metoikia*—can only take place via her devaluation of the slaves, for whom she would not have protested this injurious treatment. Based on Lindon Barrett’s groundbreaking work, I make the disjunctive dynamic of racialized valuation—which members settler lives by devaluing native and alien lives—into the logic that supports and reproduces the hierarchical distribution of political membership in the contemporary theoretical reception of the play.³⁴ Thus, in this book I redefine the decolonial politics of the tragic as the confrontation between two modes of re-membering: one that members the lives it values through the settler colonial devaluation of those it “others,” and one that values those devalued “others” by decolonially dismembering the subtending racialized logic of value.

The preposterous history of *Antigone* in the Americas that I offer does not work by establishing a simple correlation between terms, making the citizen, *metic*, and slave of antiquity equivalent to the ways in which those statuses are regulated in modernity. Nor, do I want to suggest that the colonial forms of domination that explain such stratification in antiquity, rather than the terms themselves, are equivalent to the relations of power by which colonial capitalism founds modernity. This is not what this book is trying to do, even when I continue to use citizen, *metic*, and slave in order to tell the story of abyssal political ground. My preposterous history seeks neither to force the colonial modernity of the Americas into the ancient tragedy of *Antigone*, nor to impose *Antigone* as a meta-framework by which to understand the history of the Americas. This book is trying to understand, complicate, and problematize why *Antigone* is in the Americas, and

suggest how it can be otherwise. This is not unrelated to what a different interrogation of the play might help us to undo here, to unbury, where the very stability of the “here” is already what is at stake. After all, the very literature and politics from which I draw connect the naturalization of the Americas to the violent burying of *Abya Yala*.³⁵ To unearth that history is to confront the colonially interdicted memory, which forbids us to mourn the sixty million and more black people, and the sixty million and more indigenous people, who continue to lose their life to settler colonial capitalism violence.

Antigone in the Americas is thus structured via a double journey between the past and the present that in fact entails a multiplicity of travels. I thus move back and forth between the classical tragedy of Sophocles in the democratic order established by Pericles in ancient Athens, and contemporary adaptations/recreations and theoretical reception of *Antigone* in the Americas under the ongoing structure of settler-colonial capitalism. This movement in time, through time, also distorts time. What I am proposing is more a series of Nietzschean leaps than a Hegelian dialectics of history. I am not trying to offer the Americas as an alternative location for Minerva’s owl, for another worldview retrospective that can reintegrate the previous moments of a universal spirit under a grammar that finally confronts the colonial violence of Eurocentric progress. More Nietzschean than Hegelian, I am trying to use history as nourishing food, to chew on the corpse of ancient Greek tragedy and, like the birds in the play, disperse its message to noncanonical places, thus intensifying the pestilence of a corrupt reading. The problematization of the Americas, then, comes first in this book. But the ancient *Antigone* that follows does not follow in any linear way. That is the sense of a double journey, of a preposterous history, of a different relationship between the past and the present that takes neither as stable and both as interactive. The very ancient *Antigone* that a certain problematization of the Americas helps to make readable anew also affects our understanding of the Americas, where *Antigone* metamorphoses and takes new shapes, pluralizing the literary journeys of the classical text in order to dig out what a certain reading of the political has improperly buried underneath.

From *Antigone* in the Americas to the Americas in *Antigone*

Martin Bernal’s groundbreaking *Black Athena*, as its subtitle indicates, explores the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization; or, in more specific

terms, the Semitic and Egyptian origins of Greece in the Middle and Late Bronze Eras.³⁶ By genealogically tracing Greece back to its disavowed Afro-Asiatic origins, Bernal troubles the romanticized circumscription of Greece as the origin of Europe, geographically displacing the imaginary that sustains the study of classical civilization. The force of the Eurocentric circumscription that *Black Athena* troubles is quite noticeable in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, arguably the most theoretically influential interpretation of *Antigone*. Recalling Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, Baillie calls attention to Hegel's rewriting of history via Sophocles's tragedies, as if signifying the geopolitical transition of the spirit from the East to the West and from the South to the North, purging the classics of their Afro-Asiatic roots. From Egypt's inability to solve the riddle of the Sphinx to Oedipus's satisfactory solution in Sophocles's classical text, Hegel champions ancient tragedy as the founding of the "humanities" in the West. And, as Chanter proves, Hegel also proceeds, primarily through his reading of *Antigone*, to exclude slavery as an inappropriate topic for tragedy, passing that prohibition onto contemporary critical theory.³⁷

Classical scholarship has thus troubled Eurocentrism in two interrelated ways: first, by no longer giving us a Greece purged of its Afro-Asiatic roots; second, by interrogating the complementary process that follows that erasure, one by which Egypt is then Hellenized.³⁸ The double gesture of such a critique, originated by *Black Athena*, has made it possible to interrogate the colonial roles of the classical tradition, as well as to explore the role of the classics in general, and ancient tragedies in particular, in the symbolic constitution of postcolonial worlds.³⁹ *Antigone in the Americas*, albeit inspired by this tradition, looks elsewhere, in the direction of the Americas in *Antigone*. I am neither a classicist nor interested in giving a yet more historically contextualized interpretation of the play that focuses on its otherwise disavowed Afro-Asiatic roots. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which the conquest of the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as well as their disavowal, affect the theoretical interpretation of *Antigone*, inclusive of the Eurocentric circumscription of the classics.

This is a book about the political interpretation of *Antigone* in contemporary critical theory, not in Greek antiquity. It is also a book about how focusing on the disavowed conquest of the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade affords us a vantage point of view by which to question the limits of the most dominant theoretical interpretations of the play. It is, finally, a way of reinventing *Antigone* for our settler colonial present, through the

disavowed perspectives of *metics* and slaves. I thus follow one of decolonial theory's main theses, by foregrounding the coloniality of modernity, in claiming race as "the most effective and long-lasting instrument of universal social domination."⁴⁰ By emphasizing race as a political structure of social (de)valuation, I do not claim that race holds a more significant role in the distribution of political membership than gender does. Like many contemporary decolonial and critical race theorists, I regard race as an intersectional category, always informed and constructed by other differences that it helps, in turn, to construct as well.⁴¹ Yet I am sympathetic to Chanter's main criticism of the reception of *Antigone* in contemporary critical theory: its inability to interrogate race.⁴² I am, thus, as concerned with *Antigone* in the Americas—the reception, translation, adaptation, and rewriting of the play in the continent—as I am with the Americas in *Antigone*—how the colonial invention of the Americas affects our interpretation of the play by forcing us to foreground the racialized logic of social (de)valuation that regulates the distribution of political membership.

Antigone in the Americas by no means suggests that, from now on, there needs only be the Americas in *Antigone*. Ancient slaves, *metics*, and citizens were subjected to very different forms of state violence from those targeting modern slaves, *metics*, and citizens. There is a historical *Antigone* that is as unrelated to the Americas as it is to Europe. But the *Antigone* to which Europe traces a genealogical origin, and the one on which critical theory focuses in order to say something universal about the human condition, is not. This book offers one interpretation, of how the conquest of the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade that founded colonial modernity, affects the political interpretation of *Antigone* and troubles what critical theory regards as Antigone's politics. This book, in short, is an answer to two interrelated questions: First, what would happen if one resituated the dissident mourning of Antigone under settler-colonial conditions that make the interdiction of native and alien burials into the condition of possibility for the humanization of the settler's dead? Second, how does such recontextualization of *Antigone* affect the political interpretation of the play in critical theory (democratic theory, feminist and queer theory, the theory of biopolitics, and the theory of deconstruction)?

To read the Americas in *Antigone* is, in short, to understand the role that racial/sexual capitalism plays in regulating who counts and who does not count for the settler *polis*. I thus move back and forth between the ancients and the moderns, between Sophocles's *metic* Antigone and the

slave for whom she would not have protested the violence to which Polyneices's corpse was subjected, and the ways in which today's black and indigenous peoples in particular, are forced to occupy these positions in the Americas. This movement back and forth does not assume that these positions are eternal. These positions are historical and have themselves changed. Acknowledging those changes, their relationality persists, and it is the colonial aspect of that persistence that I want to offer as the main object of political critique.

From Classicization to Decolonial Ruminantion

Since *Antigone* is the most frequently performed ancient tragedy in contemporary theaters around the world, there is an obvious appeal in framing a current political problem in its script.⁴³ The literary status of the play offers contemporary adaptations the possibility to enlarge the scope of its audience and, perhaps strategically, to present the problems in which the audience is invested within a frame that makes the localized plight more universal, as Ariel Dorfman puts it.⁴⁴ However, the aesthetic claim to universality, to evoke James Porter's influential distinction between classicism and classicization, is empty if all that supports that claim is a mere effacing of the conditions of production of the original text, by which such text is ultimately rendered a "classic."⁴⁵ Against empty claims to the universality of classicism, Honig interprets Porter's classicization as an interpretative technique that, while focused on the present, "turns for understanding to ancient circumstances, scripts, or images for analogies that might illuminate our condition or even mirror our circumstances."⁴⁶ Building on this, Honig adds that such an interpretation should treat "the classical past as alien and resistant to appropriation" in order to become "more instructive than the sort that seeks and finds our stammering selves in the mirror."⁴⁷

Refusing to efface the historical conditions of production of the original text, by which the political theorist recognizes the foreignness of the past, onto which such theorist tries to map the present, Honig remains sensitive to the deconstructive understanding of that interpretative mirroring as inescapably equivocal. According to this interpretive tradition, the very originality of the ancient text is troubled, as there is no access to the past that is not already mediated by a cumulative set of readings, commentaries, and interpretations. But these mediations not only make the past more or