

Chapter 6

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Savage Memory, Technologies of Necropower, Feminist Decolonial Resistance: A Palestinian *Antigone* in Ireland

Who entered my room when I was out / and moved the vase on the mantelpiece just a tad? / who skewed that print – a Crusader – on the far wall? / and those pages loose on my desk / they're a shade dishevelled aren't they?

of course someone's read them / and my pillow's never been dented this way / – not by any lovely head / that stray shirt I'd never leave on the floor / – some shit's dropped it

so who came into my room? who? / and who'll put the vase back exactly / as it was? who'll / straighten the mailed knight in his corner? / and who'll restore to my shirt and pillow / their full rights as citizens / of my single room?

(Walid Khazendar, 'Belongings', tr. Paulin [2012: 25])¹

Contemporary writing that engages with a critique of necropolitics through the lens of historical memory, endorses, at the same time, an expression of what Rosi Braidotti calls 'affirmative politics'.² In other words, it is a type of writing that has the potential to advocate social justice, reconciliation, tolerance, and even peacekeeping while laying bare structures of violence, annihilation, and death on a global scale between the past and the present. Echoing the complexities of such seemingly oppositional representational and discursive encounters in literary narrative archives that reflect the lived experiences of political and social oppression, disenfranchisement, confinement, and precarity, Gaza-born poet Walid Khazendar's lines above are formulated against the backdrop of an enduring recollection. The poem, thus, shows how memory lives on as the traumatic 'afterthought'³ of the absent witness who returns home to discover it has been raided. The sustained

1 Walid Khazendar (b. 1950) is a Palestinian poet born in the Gaza Strip.

2 Braidotti (2013: 122).

3 Kattago (2020: 7).

questioning and blurring of the space, materiality, temporality, and boundaries of belonging, freedom, ownership, citizenship, and agency are made manifest in the way the speaker remembers objects as they used to be before leaving the room, rendering visible the apparatus of necropower which defines the historical legacy of Palestinian dispossession, displacement, and abjection. In doing so, the poem is read as a repudiation of the necropolitical processes of cultural obliteration from official memory while the speaker's voice succinctly conjures and simultaneously resists the mnemotechnics of erasure. The traces of a ghostly, omnipotent, voiceless, sovereign intruder, self-entitled to violate, censor, and interrupt the speaker's life are imagined in that which remains. This spectral omniscience, permanence, and silencing of the masculine occupier/intruder who eradicates proof and, by extension, abuses the law by trespassing and vandalizing the room foregrounds a radical reversal of power roles from the perspective of the powerless. Here, it is the voice of the oppressed who urgently seeks answers.

Achille Mbembe compellingly analyzes the sovereign purview of necropower imposed on the Palestinian state of exception in his seminal *Necropolitics* (2019 [2016]), examining the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty' which 'largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die.'⁴ Similarly, by interrogating the necropolitical continuum of sovereignty's conscription as the power that erases both indigenous memory and the right to return, Khazendar's narrative ultimately disrupts the sovereign discourse that undergirds necropower by embodying rightlessness in mundane, everyday, uneven exchanges of power. The raided single room, thus, is turned into an expansive metaphor for the protracted Israeli apartheid occupation of Palestine. The political tenets of this type of poetics from below and from within are rooted in a resistance to forgetting. To borrow Firas Shehadeh's argument: 'settler-colonial state sovereignty is violence on the native's worlds. If sovereignty means law and order, resistance is a violation of that.'⁵ Khazendar's autobiographical exposure to necropolitical violence constitutes a palpable example that demonstrates the power to resist effacement (and death) by reclaiming a precarious memory archive that confronts its own forced *mnemocide*.⁶

4 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 66). The use of the term 'sovereignty' here is in line with Mbembe's (2019 [2016]: 197 n. 1) observation that it departs from conventional theories of sovereignty in political science and international relations (as in Jackson [1999]), and is rather aligned with Foucault's (2003 [1975–1976]) and Agamben's (1998) formulations of the term.

5 Shehadeh (2021: 233).

6 See Masalha (2012: 137–138), Solombrino (2016: 10–11), and Gould (2023). I am particularly interested here in Masalha's (2012: 137–138) argument regarding the term 'memoricide' that she coins to unveil the systematic eradication of Palestinian infrastructure in 1948 and the appropriation of the records, documentation, and cultural heritage of the Palestinians post-Nakba. Like the speaker's room in Khazendar's poem, the research institutions and

According to Mbembe,⁷ this model of settler colonies underwriting a systemic ethnic and racial cleansing of the Occupied Territories recalls and revives the apartheid enterprise that reaches paroxysmal levels in Palestine with the dialectic of proximity, distance, and surveillance. However, despite these arguably immediate references to the Palestinian experience that emerge at home and in Palestinian poetry, this essay is preoccupied with new cultural shifts and activist frameworks that evolve in contemporary writing and performance claiming to dismantle necropolitical hierarchies of erasure while exposing rightlessness on behalf of others in Western narratives across genre. How can trajectories of such legitimately framed mnemonic experiences be examined in broader, international intercultural⁸ exchanges, alliances, and geopolitical milieus that remain resistant to the pitfalls of what Anne Mulhall calls ‘systemic, institutional whiteness’⁹ or the pervasive East/West binary of privilege without suppressing political activism¹⁰ in the arts? What types of representational limits, disparities, or continuities spring up in imagining the rights of minority and ‘subaltern’ other(ed) voices as our own when Western classical texts, for example, are used to speak for and about Palestinian rights in Irish theatre and academia in order to challenge the universality of human rights discourse in the current context of late modernity and globalization for a better, more just world? Ultimately, who else has the right to enter that ‘room’ to tell, represent, and memorialize those stories in the absence of the resident storyteller?

Drawing from these critical, ethical, and aesthetic insights, this essay traces connections and ruptures in the work of performing memory, formations of necropower, technologies of death and possibilities of decolonial resistance in diverse cultural spaces in so far as these continue to shape, transform, and most importantly disrupt utopian imaginaries often ‘excavated from the recesses of colonial

archival documentation centres continued to be regularly raided and the documents confiscated by Israeli forces as documented in the cases of the Palestinian Research Centre in Beirut in 1982 and the Arab Studies Society archive in east Jerusalem in 2001. In addition, during the Israeli occupation of Palestinian cities in 2002, many Palestinian institutions across the West Bank, such as public libraries and public archives, were damaged and records and files were destroyed. A notable example is the vandalism of the Khalili Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah, a famous foundation dedicated to the preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage, whose public archives and property records were eradicated.

7 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 44–45).

8 See McIvor (2019).

9 See Mulhall (2020).

10 I refer here to R. R. Gould’s positioning in her book *Erasing Palestine* (2023) regarding the erasure of Palestinian/pro-Palestinian free speech and rights as the effect of both physical and linguistic tools. For this, she critiques the language used in the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of anti-Semitism as a strategic means of employing the Zionist tactic of Palestinian identity erasure.

archives'¹¹ by representing otherness as rightlessness on the Irish stage. For the purposes of this analysis, I return to Conall Morrison's theatre work,¹² this time to explore how his post-9/11 translation and production of a quintessentially Palestinian *Antigone* (2003) for the Project Arts Centre in Dublin frames and provokes such contested contexts of representation in theatrical modalities of performance.

One of the earliest texts of the Western canon to deeply explore the dialectical tension between law and justice, Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 441 BCE) revolves around a contested body: the forbidden burial of Polyneices by his sister Antigone. The contested corpse thus has stayed in memory as a powerful visual metaphor of dissent against the law of the state. Antigone flouts Creon's decree precisely by performing the burial rites of her slain brother Polyneices who has been declared a traitor to the state of Thebes. For respecting the unwritten word of the gods, she is sentenced to a live burial. Burying the corpse of Polyneices, however, represents her human right to dignity. By observing customary laws and by burying her dead brother against Creon's sovereign claim, Antigone enacts her rights to kinship and religious piety.

In his essay, Mbembe provides ample ground for reflecting on the Palestinian condition through the figure of states of exception, biopolitics, and the apartheid system. These necropolitical environments at work and in progress reminiscent of Antigone's ever singular abjection are constructed around the tropes of contingency, the burial of a slain brother, and the exposure of the enemy corpse. Antigone's performative transgression has been read by a genealogy of feminist and political thinkers as an 'appeal to a long-repressed feminine alterity'¹³ against patriarchy and oblivion that seems all too real still in the 21st century. In light of an Irish translation and production of *Antigone* by Conall Morrison for the Peacock Theatre as a retelling of the Palestinian case, I want to return to her act of resistance and examine it in the context of memorializing female grief, reminiscent of the Palestinian women freedom fighters who resisted and continue to resist Israeli apartheid necropolitics. Conversely, it is Creon's enforced avowal and capacity to dictate by law who shall live and who shall perish that becomes the ultimate expression of necropower: As such, anyone who buries the corpse of the traitor of the state, Polyneices, essentially anyone who grieves and performs burial rites will face death. In Maurice Blanchot's words, this might constitute an example of law as disaster¹⁴ in its extremity whereby writing resists forgetfulness. The tragic plot largely sums up what Achille Mbembe means when he discusses collateral violence, viscerality, and enmity in his seminal essay on necropolitics and the work of death. Creon's niece, Antigone, a teenage princess and orphaned

11 Looser (2011: 254).

12 See Remoundou (2021).

13 Colebrook (2021: 805).

14 Blanchot (1995 [1980]: 2, 85).

grieving sister becomes that criminalized other, a dissonant fly on the horse of the state of exception, a resistant feminine alterity whose transgressive perception of the personal inscribes a political – and simultaneously illegal – gesture overnight by activating the necropolitical means of her own death penalty. Her mourning becomes an overcoming of masculine sovereignty, the grand narrative of ‘man’ which dismantles the masters’ house.¹⁵ Performances of sovereign biopower are exclusively triggered, Mbembe writes, in states of exception from *apartheid* South Africa to Palestine (in ancient Thebes, no less). A nuanced re-reading of Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Giorgio Agamben, Mbembe’s postcolonial theorization on the perils of necropolitical sovereignty in states of exception brings into sharper focus that kind of neocolonial power and capacity self-entitled to ‘dictate who is able to live and who must die’¹⁶ that is implemented by right:

But under what practical conditions is the power to kill, to let live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right? What does the implementation of such a right tell us about the one who is thus put to death and about the relation of enmity that sets such a person against his murderer? Can the notion of biopower account for the contemporary ways in which the political takes as its primary and absolute objective the enemy’s murder, doing so under the guise of war, resistance, or the war on terror? War is, after all, a means of achieving sovereignty as much as a way of exercising the right to kill. When politics is considered a form of war, the question needs to be asked about the place that is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular when it is wounded or slain). How are these aspects inscribed in the order of power?¹⁷

So, what has a Palestinian *Antigone* to say about current global regimes of biopower and necropower beyond the classical tradition and the insular concerns of Irish politics and the 21st century Irish stage? Through the binary spectrum of the living and the dead, this essay attends to the ways contemporary political Irish theatre exposes the uneven technologies of sovereign necropower that prevail in contemporary zones of enmity to discuss savage memory, feminist decolonial resistance, and technologies of necropower. Resisting the impulse to ‘stay shy of excessive engagement’,¹⁸ Morrison’s *Antigone* deliberately foregrounds an ethically engaged rethinking of current dramatic practices and aesthetic approaches of affirmative politics in political theatre representing those whose lives and deaths are deemed *less* liveable and grievable. For ‘if art is to be meaningful to people it must help to animate the problems that are very current’,¹⁹ in Morrison’s words.

15 See Lorde (2018 [1979]) and Colebrook (2021: 806). Audre Lorde delivered her address titled ‘The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ during a feminist conference in 1979 before it became a seminal book of Black Lesbian Feminism.

16 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 66).

17 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 66).

18 C. Morrison in Meany (2003).

19 C. Morrison in Meany (2003).

Visual Topographies of Cruelty: Staging Savage Memory

The pervasiveness of current critical debates on memory in theatre have dramatically shifted to open up new, provocative ways in which we talk about, practice, and perform remembering. With the proliferation of memory studies in cultural practices amidst a thriving globalized heritage memory industry, we nowadays frame transnational and transcultural memory as a recourse to mnemonic processes no longer limited to history alone. Memory now has come to encompass trans-disciplinary discourses of aesthetics, semiotics, race, gender, class, religion, art, and ideology. According to Andreas Huyssen, with the emergence of the so-called 'memory industry' during the end of the 20th and the turn of the 21st century in post-structuralism and postmodern philosophies of history (Klein [2000]), the memory paradigm revisits the past with a view to undermine inherited quasi-absolutist terms: Jean-François Lyotard's 'end of grand narratives', Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history', or Reinhart Koselleck's 'collective singular' view of history.²⁰

Seeking to examine the convergences between human rights advocacy and theatre activism²¹ and their relationship to what Maurice Halbwachs calls a 'social framework of memory',²² Morrison's adaptation solicits a mnemonic use of the figure of Antigone as an archetypal image that remediates a collective memory archive at the backdrop of contemporary Middle Eastern politics. Morrison's technique, hence, is structured by means of a multiplication of framing devices whereby the European, logocentric source text generates a series of intertextual mnemonic 'landscapes'.²³ That Morrison essentially rewrites an ancient *logocentric* text from the western canon perceptively reactivates the work of literary, historical, cultural, and political memory in broader, multifaceted and multidirectional ways. No less important is the fact that Morrison adapted the Sophoclean play in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. As a critique of

20 In cultural theory, memory research encompasses an expanded field of formulations with references to a predominantly 'nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise' (Olick and Robbins [1998: 106]). Indeed, since the 1920s the concept of 'memory' has been synonymous with terms and phrases such as 'mémoire collective', 'mnemosyne', 'storia e memoria', 'lieux de mémoire' / 'sites of memory', 'realms of memory', 'cultural memory vs. communicative memory', 'social memory', 'memory cultures', 'cultural remembrance', but also 'social forgetting', or the 'cultural brain', 'memory in the global age', and 'trans-cultural memory'. For an in depth analysis of such theorizations on memory in culture, see Klein (2000), Huyssen (2003), Erll (2011 [2005]), Erll and Nünning (2010). Especially, see Lyotard (1979), Fukuyama (1992), and Sebastián and Fuentes' (2006) interview with R. Koselleck.

21 For an in-depth analysis on representations of the Middle Eastern *Other* in contemporary Irish drama, see Remoundou (2021).

22 Halbwachs (1992 [1925]).

23 See Lehmann (1999: 59).

contemporary necropower, Morrison's version does something more than just scrutinize the crisis of representation in theatrical memory. Attuned to the impossibilities of representing the traumatic memory of world wars, genocide, colonial and postcolonial experiences, famine, global terror, and environmental disaster, Morrison's theatre work makes astute claims about the role of theatre in making these representational failures manifest.

Born and raised in post-conflict county Armagh in Northern Ireland at the height of the paramilitary violence between Unionists and Republicans, Morrison is familiar with the legacy of a history of catastrophes. His *Antigone* dramatizes the renegotiation of the political work of mourning blurring the line separating traitors and terrorists from heroes, martyrs, and patriots in the tradition of Tom Paulin (1985) and Seamus Heaney (2004) who also wrote versions of *Antigone* in an Irish postcolonial, post-conflict context in the aftermath of the 1960s civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. By rewriting *Antigone* 'as a work of fierce moral outrage'²⁴, Morrison's text seeks to energize the absolute claims of both sides of the Hegelian polarities, from the perspective of the savage, the enemy, the suicide bomber, the extreme dissident, like Brendan Kennelly's big Other and Aidan Mathews' worn-out, passive martyr. The experience of witnessing the displacement and depredation of the people of Palestine by working with them through theatre workshops in Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah in 2006, allowed Morrison to sustain the Middle Eastern setting through costume and stage design in his subsequent play following *Antigone*, *The Bacchae of Baghdad* (2006), based on Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*. In the staging of his *Antigone*, the atmosphere of exoticism and immediacy were dramatic features highlighted by the mournful music score composed by Conor Linehan, played on cello, saxophone, keyboards, and percussion, and performed by four of the actors based on eastern-influenced folk melodies.

Antigone read opposite Khazendar's lyric situates us in a critical reflection on how we are connected to the past and how we represent the past, but also on how we are connected and how we represent rightless others in Western narratives. Included in the poetry collection *Love's Bonfire* (2012) by the Northern Irish poet, academic, and critic Tom Paulin, to begin with, the poem forms part of a solidarity campaign taken up by Paulin who opened his 2004 general keynote address with these lines during the Resisting Israeli Apartheid Conference organized by SOAS London for the academic boycott of Israel. In his speech, Paulin, who also wrote a version of *Antigone* titled *The Riot Act* (1984), saw in the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence a mirroring of the political legacies in Northern Ireland:

24 Causey (2003: 50).

Today the Palestinian flag flies over working-class nationalist estates in Belfast, and the Israeli flag flies over Protestant estates. Ian Paisley and his deputy Peter Robinson visited Israel and were photographed there – at an army post, as I recall. They were drawing an analogy for the benefit of their supporters – an analogy first drawn by a British civil servant in the 1920s, who protested against the creation of another Ulster in the Middle East.²⁵

Whilst Khazendar's poem recited in Paulin's speech invites (Western / European / White / English-speaking) listeners and readers to a communal act of collective remembering that is borderless and transnational, it nonetheless highlights the largely racialized class frontiers of the historical Palestinian record which resonate radically with minoritarian, oppressed, marginal, inferior, rightless, racialized (savage(d) / beastly / animalized) subjects and identities. This type of congruent semiology between race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion and their intersection with the animal, non-human figure is conveyed in the expression of savage memory as a further key metaphor for the rightless Middle Eastern, Islamic, Arab, savage other. What is more, Paulin's trademark radical politicizing²⁶ is largely aligned with Morrison's depiction of Antigone as a suicide bomber, complicating the frontiers of representation through the lens of the work of savage memory reminiscent of the Northern Irish Troubles.

The use of the term, however, critically departs from Claude Lévi-Strauss's theorization²⁷ of the concept of human memory in primitive societies as an elaborate mnemonic system of transmitting and preserving social norms, myths, rituals, and cultural knowledge across generations through the art of storytelling in oral traditions. Instead of translating memory in racial terms, I am interested here in a more rigorous examination of the term as an intricate mnemonic repository of cultural preservation and transmission that is resistant to the problematic identification of 'savage memory' with the wild native and the beastly, non-human, therefore, inferior, illiterate, uncivilized, paradigmatic, savage Other of the colonial world embedded in White sovereign discourse. It is because of this fundamental distinction between native/savage and conqueror/civilized that, as Mbembe points out, the colony is a zone of lawlessness (and by extension rightlessness) where the right to kill becomes the ultimate expression of sovereign control:

25 Paulin (2004).

26 Paulin (2003) declared himself a 'philo-Semite' in an article in the *London Review of Books* in January 2003 with a response which included a 133-line poem called 'On Being Dealt the Anti-Semitic Card': 'the program though / of saying Israel's critics / are *tout court* anti-Semitic / is designed daily by some schmuck / to make you shut the fuck up'. On another occasion, Paulin (in Abdel-Latif [2002]) expressed his sympathy with suicide attackers, arguing: 'I can understand how suicide bombers feel [...]. It is an expression of deep injustice and tragedy.'

27 See Lévi-Strauss (1966 [1962]).

In the conqueror's eyes, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life*, a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension. In fact, according to Arendt, what makes savages different from other human beings is less the color of their skin than the fear that they behave like a part of nature, that they treat nature as their undisputed master.²⁸

Nowhere is this confrontation between human and animal more pervasive than in the Ode to Man, the first choral interlude of *Antigone*, which Morrison renews within the play from a posthumanist (Eurocentric and masculinist) standpoint as a critique of human exceptionalism and the dominant Anthropos. And yet, whilst abstract Man is the master of thanatocracy evoked in the motif of man's inhumanity across the human and the non-human, planetary horizon, he is defeated only by death:

Ideas flow from him like water spreading.
 He knows how to snatch the bird in flight,
 Calm the wildest bear in his cave;
 The deepest fish cannot hide in the dark.
 Bulls with their horns and horses with their hooves
 All learn to take the halter, and obey.
 He owns his words and thoughts.
 They blow through him as fast as wind.
 He outwits the rain and ice
 That winter brings to freeze his bones.
 Sickness and the plague he tricks
 With herb and flower from the mountain-top.
 Only death defeats him.
 Man knows his match,
 His only master.²⁹

Besides decentring anthropocentrism, the critical shifts this mnemonic toolkit of savage memory proposes alongside *Antigone* breaks away from gendered and racist overtones whereby savage becomes now a synonym for the right of the oppressed and excluded minorities to remember their dead in necropolitical environments. Such representational constellations and methodological entanglements of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and disability in language renegotiate the ways we remember our dead in the context of necropolitical encounters and exchanges with necropower without losing sight of the structural exclusions that generated them in the first place. In this respect, savage memory is reconfigured as a mnemonic device that both archives and transmits the decolonial dispositive depriving Palestinians of their rights to remember and to mourn by reducing them to members of a surplus population,³⁰ racialized, dehumanized, and dangerous, animalized, savage others (Islam, the Muslim, the Arab). The Pal-

28 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 77–78).

29 Morrison (2003: 11–12).

30 Morrison (2003: 42).

estinian excess presence, absence, and indeed disappearance, casts their dehumanization and dispossession against what Mbembe calls the desire for apartheid, the fantasy of extermination, and the anxiety of annihilation.³¹ In the opening lines, Morrison's chorus expresses how this type of excess identity ascertains the capacity to salvage savage memory in the figure of the feared, monstrous, non-human:

CHORUS: [...] we came from dragon's teeth,
 sowed in the sand and dust,
 sprung up with nails and claws,
 and flayed them back
 from our seven gates
 in just six short days.
 They tried to burn us out,
 make all our towns a pyre;
 but they all forget
 we have come through flame before
 and we no longer fear the fire.³²

Morrison's understanding of the mechanisms of necropower on the one hand and the frames of transnational memory on the other, amplify the perplexities of representing both on stage in the context of human rights debates. By invoking claims on the 'how' of memory as a communal performative right that reiterates the ethical antinomies, polarities, and binaries inherent in the original Greek play, Morrison points to the double standards, inadequacies, and failures of both historical/national memory and the universality of human rights practices. The analogy his adaptation draws explores the ways through which a retelling of ancient western narratives gestures towards revisiting the complicated landscape of history and rights via a theatre of remembering *other* histories of systemic exclusion.

Driven by akin intersectional processes of framing racialized otherness in contemporary Irish performance, I anchor my analysis of Morrison's *Antigone* in the hybrid cultural dichotomies that derive from an intentional synergy between Greek tragedy, Irish performance, and necropower and the ways these interact with the politics of mourning,³³ memory, and race on behalf of the Palestinian cause. Henceforth, this new semiosis is articulated on overlapping memories of oppression and rightlessness. The case of *Antigone* is crucial for many reasons, no less because it is a play that foregrounds structures of necropower often negotiated in Irish drama (Tom Paulin, among others, for example, has written a version of the ancient tragedy titled *The Riot Act* (1985) as a postcolonial critique of the Troubles in Northern Ireland). I have written elsewhere and in detail about Morri-

31 Morrison (2003: 43).

32 Morrison (2003: 5).

33 See Butler (2000), Butler (2004), and Meaney (2011: 145).

son's theatre work that supersedes a social justice agenda, committing itself to a robust human rights' advocacy signified by the representation of the figure of the racialized, migrant, Muslim other in Irish drama.³⁴ It is not a single instantiation of Morrison's dramatic technique that he affords us a conflicted encounter between West and East in contemporary theatrical praxis as a denunciation of neo-liberal politics and the realities of violence and destruction.

The result is a sharp, immediate text written in a masculine vernacular that often disregards conventional politesse in favour of a raw language that approximates the brutal reality of an everyday anguish for survival in a post-war limbo. The sense of inevitable tragedy is articulated in a vocabulary structured around a spectacular self-destruction reflected in Antigone's violent, savage mind and fundamentalist body:

This pathetic, puny, shit out of you
will get what it deserves:
my hatred, my brother's hatred,
and the hatred of all the dead.
Leave me to my 'madness' then, sweet sister mine.
There is nothing that will rob me of my glorious death.³⁵

The foreboding sense of hostility, vulnerability, and mortality was taken up on stage with the use of specific aesthetic props that highlighted the technology of destruction in contemporary societies of enmity with Antigone reimagined as a young Palestinian freedom fighter and suicide bomber. Through a series of powerful visual effects reminiscent of the hegemony of visuality in modern warfare, sovereign control, and military surveillance, ancient Thebes was now transformed into modern-day Gaza, a contemporary war-torn death-world in a state of siege. The stage was dominated by a large digital screen that projected photographs of Israeli intrusions into Palestinian territory and Israeli casualties provoked by Palestinian suicide bombers illustrating the lethal confrontation between 'the logic of martyrdom' and the 'logic of survival'³⁶ epitomized by the central figure of the suicide bomber.³⁷ This visual archive of horror, resistance, terror, and sacrifice was amplified by an emphatic cacophony of military weapons of mass destruction whose deployment and use raised moral and ethical questions 'representative of the dramatic energy but ... also ... of the evanescent human spirit that is so easily crushed in times of unforgiving conflict.'³⁸ The protracted necropolitical conditions prevalent on Palestinian territory were transmitted on the Project

34 See Remoundou (2021).

35 Morrison (2003: 4).

36 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 88).

37 On the figure of Antigone as a Palestinian suicide bomber, see Festic (2003).

38 C. Morrison in N. N. [CMcB] (2003).

Arts Centre stage as a metonymic sign system for the necrotechnology of war in the era of surveillance control and cyber warfare.

By relying on the synchronic use of the screen on the theatrical stage as a device transmitting jarring images of armed conflict, Morrison's aesthetic approach conveyed another 'species of rhetoric' that renders visible a necropolitical reality that the 'privileged and merely safe'³⁹ Western audiences might prefer to ignore and forget. The exposure to these parallel visual mementos while the actors were on stage, thus, reframed a history of *rightlessness* whereby the screen acts as a recorder and repository of *savage memory*. By unveiling this ethical binary, the production's specific visual/aesthetic references managed to raise fundamental questions regarding the representational tensions of the real when our own over-exposure to images of devastation is shaped by a camera-mediated knowledge of war.⁴⁰ The repetition and replacement of one image with another effectively built a nexus of *cadres sociaux* relevant not only to the Palestinian memory but also to Ireland's past as an act of resisting mnemonic erasure. In addition, the various visualizing strategies anchored in the use of both the theatrical stage and the media screen as vehicles of *mnemotechnics* highlighted the audience's complicity as viewers and consumers of these images.

Similar to race, the question of gender in Morrison's Palestinian *Antigone* pays homage to a genealogy of Palestinian Antigones, the women freedom fighters, feminist revolutionaries, political activists, and martyrs, past and present, such as Ahd al-Tamimi, Leila Khaled, Moheba Khorsheed, Dalal Mughrabi, Wafa Idris, Ayat al-Akhras, Hanadi Tayseer Abdul Malek Jaradat, Andalib Suleyman, Fatima Mohammed Bernawi, Aisha Odeh, Rasmiyeh Odeh, Shadia Abu Ghazalah, Moheeba and Arabiya Khursheed. Antigone's act of defying Creon's word by burying her brother Polyneices is also reminiscent of the struggles of Palestinian women political prisoners and the Israeli feminist peace activists as symbols of feminist decolonial resistance whose acts aim(ed) at disrupting and dismantling necropolitical systems of colonial power and gender-based exclusions and inequalities. Morrison positions *Antigone* against such complex intersections of masculinist power represented by Creon's/Israel's sovereignty making at the same time wider claims about ethnic and cultural imaginings, supremacy, racism, patriarchy, and injustice. In this scheme, Creon's sovereign claim establishes the fundamental distinction between who must live and who must die:

Take them and chain them inside
And watch them:
they will be wheedling, conniving women

39 Sontag (2003: 3, 5).

40 Hutcheon (2006: 47).

who will try anything to escape
when they turn to face the fact of death.⁴¹

Mundus Inversus: The Ethics of the Passerby?⁴²

During the two-day symposium ‘The Theatre of War’ held at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre in January 2015, a diverse group of artists, writers, theatre practitioners, academics, and journalists from around the globe gathered on the Irish national stage to reflect on theatre in times of conflict. Following ‘The Theatre of Memory’ symposium that had taken place the previous year, participants had come to resume conversations regarding theatre’s cultural and political efficacy in responding to international warfare. The Abbey audience had the chance to listen to speakers from Ireland, U. K., Colombia, Rwanda, Burundi, Syria, and Palestine inviting them to ponder on the current challenges, cultural, political, and aesthetic, that artists face when staging drama in contemporary conflict zones. The specific call as regards contemporary drama directly dealing with unsettling historical events, past and current, examined material stages and spaces of contention across global war-zones where violence and death form integral aspects of peoples’ everyday lived experiences. In the context of ‘The Theatre of Conflict’ panel, Irish director and playwright Conall Morrison took to the podium to talk about his own experience translating his post-9/11 version of Sophocles’ *Antigone* for the Project Arts Centre stage in 2003 as a retelling of the protracted displacement of Palestinians.⁴³

Recounting his personal journey of exploring the multiple dynamics of the ancient tragedy in an attempt to shed light into the various ways classical drama can assist in providing clarity to our understanding of the intensities, intricacies, and tragedies of modern combat, Morrison began his talk with a quote from Brian Friel’s *Translations*. Citing the old schoolmaster Hugh’s declaration near the end of the play that ‘confusion is not an ignoble condition’, Morrison conveyed anew a durable resonance with transnational historical catastrophes. This confounding sense of perplexity, according to the artist, was now manifest in the struggle to represent two opposing sides against an ethics of doubt. *Antigone*’s perseverance to honour her traitor brother by burying him against Creon’s public edict forbidding the burial as unlawful, was replicating for Morrison – through Sophocles’ tragic plot – the traumatic memory of irreconcilable opposites enacted with the memory of the *Nakba* and the *Shoah* between Palestine and Israel. For the Armagh-born director whose early years coincided with the beginning of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, a period of sustained political upheavals and sectar-

41 Morrison (2003: 20).

42 See Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 184).

43 See Morrison (2015).

ian violence in Irish history, this sense of disorientation and turbulence had also been integral part of his own reality growing up in the north. In its literalism and aesthetic narrativization, the political, historical, and ethical analogy of *Antigone* as an uncanny metaphor for cultures and societies in abject turmoil – political, territorial, sectarian – seemed candidly apt. Similarly to other versions of *Antigone* by Northern Irish playwrights such as Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney, Stacey Gregg,⁴⁴ and Owen McCafferty, Morrison's translation stands largely and unavoidably informed by the legacy of concrete political and historical traumas. Nonetheless, while Morrison's relationship with political theatre and historical memory is not unaffected by his cultural and geopolitical identity, the staging of his *Antigone* was now transferred from the Irish North to Gaza enacting in archetypal form the story of the Middle East.

Because, as James Elkins argues, 'there is no such thing as just looking',⁴⁵ this essay draws, in conclusion, on the notion of the theatrical apparatus as a vision and memory machine that is conditioned by historical reality. Inherently tied to visuality, theatre etymologically encompasses the act of seeing for it derives from the ancient Greek verb *theomai* ('to see'). Expanding its semiotic derivatives to include terms such as the 'spectacle' (*thema*) and 'theory', theatre employs the visual in action by being a site of performed memory and reality. Barbara Freedman explains this in terms of the theatrical ambiguity of representation when she distinguishes between theatre and 'the historical reality to which it belongs' from understanding theatre in terms of a representation of this reality. In her theorization, theatrical representation renders a steady position of spectatorship impossible for it is predicated upon a fractured reciprocity that positions and displaces viewers at the same time.⁴⁶ This is what Morrison means when he reflects on an ethics of ontological complexity and the contestability of a political ethics of doubt as a grey area of moral reasoning of right vs. right, when he recounts how the empirical mnemonic force of a real-life traumatic event did more than just compel him to question the role theatre can play in shaping our confusion into possible graspable narratives. This became a vital point of reference in Morrison's reminiscing of the story of *Antigone*.

When Morrison was commissioned by the Storytellers Theatre Company in Dublin to translate Sophocles' *Antigone*, his reading of Sophocles' dramatic structure of 'right vs. right' reminded him of the broader political context of 'today's Middle East conflict with its tragic cycle of action and reaction feeding into global conflict.'⁴⁷

44 For a comprehensive list of the Northern Irish versions of *Antigone* and an analysis of Stacey Gregg's play *Ismene*, see Remoundou (2011).

45 Elkins (1997: 31).

46 See Freedman (1991).

47 C. Morrison in N. N. [programme note] (2003).

And the more I studied it [i. e. *Antigone*] the more I felt I was reading, in archetypal form, the play of the Middle East, of opposed moralities, of contradictory narratives, of violent intensities, of natural justice and the assertion of human rights in conflict with the codified law, the interests and identity of the state [...] I felt that the dark complexities of the Middle Eastern conflict would help me access the voltage of Sophocles' play and I thought the play in turn might help me and maybe an audience contemplate those complexities, find a pattern in that Rubik's cube of competing moralities.⁴⁸

From distant war as it is reported and represented in the news to 'the enactment of its phantasmatic structure'⁴⁹ on the familiar proximity of the stage, Morrison's *Antigone* heavily relied on images of 'the invaders' army'⁵⁰ that unavoidably communicated a concrete ethicopolitical commentary. In so doing, the complex web of alliances that underpin the historical conflict between Jews and Muslims conflated with that between Catholics and Protestants was once more brought to memory: In Northern Ireland the star of David has been adopted by pro-British Loyalists while in Belfast Irish Republicans fly the Palestinian flag as a sign of solidarity and resistance against the British rule of Ireland. Likewise, the program note of the *Antigone* production featured Michael Longley's poem 'Ceasefire' which had been published in *The Irish Times* when the RIA announced their original ceasefire in the summer of 1994. The poem symbolically appropriates one of the last scenes in Homer's *The Iliad* bringing into sharp focus the return of the unburied enemy corpse of Hector.⁵¹

If Augusto Boal's argument that theatre is the art of looking at ourselves sounds relevant here, it is precisely because it brings to any discussion on theatre, inextricably linked as it is from its Aristotelean inception to looking and to ways of seeing, the notion of the image and of affect (Aristotle's *eleos/pity* and *phobos/fear*): In his *Rainbow of Desire*, Boal theorizes on a kind of theatre making, he coins 'Image theatre' that relies heavily on visual realism by applying the use of still images from everyday life in order to explore in depth emotions, culture, and society; employing photography as an affective tableau, 'Image theatre' actors' bodies act as media of decoding feelings and attitudes engaging at the same time the audience's interpretations who are called upon sharing their ways of looking at both the image and the performances.⁵² This is an example of how the theatrical space theorizes on the visual force of memory, of being reminded as actors, readers, or audience members of ourselves and of others, as in Conall Morrison's production of *Antigone* with the Middle East's others, Palestinians and Jews.

48 Morrison (2015: 11:45–12:15, 12:28–12:44).

49 Butler (1992: 3).

50 Morrison (2003: 1).

51 The poem can be found in Longley (1995: 39).

52 See Boal (1995).

Attending to more nuanced renegotiations of the memory work that surpass the complexities of time, space, as well as ‘terminological and conceptual differentiations’, this chapter has drawn on both the genealogy and the historiography of memory in contemporary Irish drama through the prism of necropower. This practice, establishes a framework that eschews an inward, individual, or collective confrontation with Ireland’s violent past giving way instead to an outward, far-reaching, collective gaze towards the political tribulations of the Middle East in recent history.

In May 2013 Sophocles’ *Antigone* was brought to Stormont, the Parliament Buildings in Belfast where the government in Northern Ireland seats. Inspired once more by the ancient Greek play and its astute dramatization of the clash between civic and natural law, this was not the first time *Antigone*’s myth was revisited in Ireland. On the one hand, the occasion marked the interdisciplinary colloquium titled ‘*Antigone: Law against Justice?*’ organized by Attorney General in Northern Ireland John Larkin and the School of Law at the University of Ulster. Attended by members of the judiciary, lawyers, academics, officials, artists, journalists, and writers, the event featured a keynote lecture by George Steiner whose emblematic critical study in *Antigones* (1984) traces, among other contexts, the play’s endurance within the normative frames of a ‘secular, legalistic humanism’⁵³ enacted against the body politic. The drama’s preoccupation with law, justice, and ethical action, thus, aptly reflected in the colloquium’s aim to create a public forum of debate, was followed by readings and performances from Morrison’s *Antigone*. In a post-Troubles environment, the gathering echoed the mnemonic practices mobilized in the synergy between theatre and affirmative politics as vehicles of justice, redress, and reconciliation.

There is an undeniably robust archive of writing and political activism in support of the Palestinian cause that is molded around various colonial histories of sovereign violence. Similarly, the connection between *Antigone* and the Palestinian struggle has often drawn attention to issues of rightlessness, feminist resistance, and human dignity that resonates with victims and experiences of oppressive regimes in the Middle East staged in refugee camps and theatres of the Arab world.⁵⁴ In Ireland, cultural platforms such as PalFest and academic events such as the 2007 panel discussion organized by the Irish Society for Theatre Research highlighted the challenges of producing a collaborative theatre project with Northern Irish, Jewish, and Palestinian theatre makers based on the 1972 *Bloody Sunday* massacre and the bombings in Palestine and Israel. Other examples of an engagement with Palestinian rightlessness in Irish drama include plays by Han-

53 Steiner (1984: 190).

54 For Arab circulations of *Antigone*, see Remoundou (2017), Selaiha (2011), and Ziter (2011).

nah Khalil and Rosemary Jenkinson.⁵⁵ In 2016, Mutaz Abu Saleh staged his play *New Middle East* at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin as part of the Abbey Theatre's 'Waking the Nation' repertoire commemorating the Centenary of Ireland's Easter Rising.

In 2002, *Antigone* was staged at the American University in Cairo directed by Frank Bradley and set in 21st Palestine while in 2007, the dramatic poem for three voices 'Antigone in Ramallah, Antigone in Beirut' called for peace and reconciliation. The German-Palestinian production 'Antigone 2010' by students at the Drama Academy in Ramallah and the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen staged the play in Arabic and German in a joint initiative by Al-Kasaba Theatre in the West Bank and Folkwang University. A year later, French-Egyptian writer, director, and actor Adel Hakim staged his Arab *Antigone* with the National Palestinian Theatre, while philosophers Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, and filmmaker Udi Aloni participated in the panel discussion titled 'If Antigone was a refugee' in New York organized by Jenin Freedom Theatre. Set in an Israeli prison cell, a 2013 production of Athol Fugard's anti-apartheid drama *The Island* (first staged in 1973 Cape Town) was staged in Jenin's Refugee Camp in the West Bank by Jenin Freedom Theatre and toured Brazil, USA, India, and Europe. In July 2021, the event 'Antigone for Palestine' presented during the NAF (Nur-archeofestival) Festival in Italy brought together theatre and the poetry of Najwan Darwish. Recent interventions in feminist criticism assess Antigone's ethical currency as a metaphor for the Palestinian struggle for freedom in works such as Anna di Giusto's *Antigone in Palestine: Luisa Morgantini and the Defense of the Oppressed* where she examines the Italian Women in Black Movement and the pro-Palestinian activism of Morgantini and in Chiara De Cesari's work on memory, populism and decolonial activism in Palestinian politics. In the poetic sequence 'Antigone 4', 'Antigone 11', and 'antigone. velocity. salt', queer Palestinian-American Fargo Tbakhi affirms the necropolitical noise gender violence affords for 'un-grievable' bodies and queer 'resisters' 'of linearity' across border fences and tunnels in Gaza: 'we'll make a earthquake when we fall. / they can kill us all, antigone, but then we'll be dirt dreams.' According to an article for *The Palestine Post* published on 13 January 1947, the earliest post-WWII production of *Antigone* in Tel Aviv a year before the Nakba was based on Jean Anouilh's adaptation of the tragedy translated in Hebrew.⁵⁶

Seeking to renegotiate the practice, embodiment, and performance of savage memory, technologies of necropower, and decolonial resistance, this analysis lays bare genealogies of *modi memorandi* across histories of necropolitical oppression and erasure that make Antigone a symbol of the Palestinian struggle. In this light,

55 Remoundou (2021: 246).

56 See N. N. [F. D.] (1947).

Morrison's *Antigone* examines alternative trajectories of resistance, remembering, writing, and righting in theatre as a fluid mnemonic apparatus of affirmative politics by recollecting narratives that are otherwise difficult to grasp, forget, and represent precisely because they reimagine *bios* and its precarity in *other* contemporary necropolitical landscapes.

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