

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

PERFORMING TRAGIC MOURNING FROM ANTIGONE TO
ASHOURA: THE WOMAN'S WAIL IN COMPARATIVE
PERSPECTIVE

by
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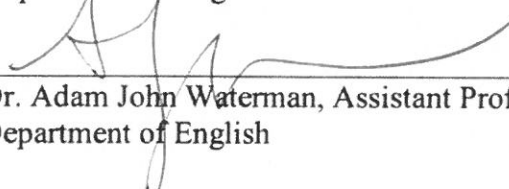
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--

Mohammad Farroukh, you are truly missed by your wife, child, and family. I saw that firsthand. Your memorial majlis was the starting point of this thesis. I hope from all my heart that you are resting in peace.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Yara Youssef Jaber for Master of Arts
Major: English Literature

Title: Performing Tragic Mourning From Antigone To Ashoura: The Woman's Wail In Comparative Perspective

Looking at cultures of performance between classical Greece and the modern-day Arab world, this thesis brings into comparative perspective female mourning and women's role in grief as represented in theater and ritual. My thesis explores the motif of female mourning and how it has been received and represented in two very different cultural contexts that nevertheless exhibit some important elements of continuity. Female mourning in Arab drama and societies and in Greek tragedy synthesizes and relates to multiples areas of recent scholarly investigation, including studies of grief and mourning, performance of gender and identity, and performance studies.

First I analyze the dramatic texts of *Antigone* by Sophocles and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* by Raeda Taha, in separate chapters, with emphasis on the gender roles and the performance of gender in mourning on the part of the heroines, Antigone and Raeda, in addition to a dissection of how their identity as women and as kin to "martyrs" is produced and perceived in the mourning process. Next, I bring a more focused and specific attention to culturally situated practices of female mourning role in the contemporary Middle East, examining Shi'a mourning rituals in Lebanon and to what extent the associated roles have evolved, suffered the imposition of patriarchal (mis)interpretation, and been amended by the women themselves.

This thesis examines two main aspects of female mourning; first, how mourning and violence inspires unity and a pursuit for justice using Judith Butler's *Prekarious Life: The Powers Of Mourning And Violence* as theoretical framework for this notion, and second, this study will be inspecting the performative aspect of female mourning between theater and society, and how performance studies (including the work of Robert Schechner and Peggy Phelan) can illuminate these phenomena. I attempt to utilize the analytical equipment offered by these approaches to further elaborate specific textual practices and cultural processes of mourning as performance.

Finally, I address the social significance of these representations, how they entail and exhibit the role of women in mourning, replacing the image of "the broken woman" with an iconic role of strength founded upon bereavement and fierce loyalty.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“If loss is known only by what remains of it, then the politics and ethics of mourning lie in the interpretation of what remains – how remains are produced and animated, how they are read and sustained.” (p. ix)

Loss: The Politics of Mourning,
Judith Butler, in Eng and Kazanjian, eds.

Upon entering the long rectangular shaped room, I looked around at the surroundings, looking for my mother who had decided to arrive here before me. I saw black and gold on either side of the walls, black and gold velvet draping with Arabic inscribed on them, and lamps with black and gold handles. As I was squinting my eyes to try to figure out the intricate Arabic writing, I was startled by a shriek. My eyes trailed on the long dark beige carpet, placed between the seated rows, to reach the source of sound that was standing on a podium situated at the far end of the room. She was dressed in black from head to toe, was holding Karim’s late brother’s picture and crying in a manner that made me fear for her wellbeing. I knew every single person in the family, but I couldn’t quite place this woman. Whilst I proceeded to awkwardly walk around to find a place to sit, my ears caught up with what the speaker was saying: she was recalling the Karbala battle and speaking about Ashoura, as what would usually happen in a Shi’a mourning majlis. As soon as my eyes spotted the vacant place on the right side of the room three rows from the front one, I hurriedly paced over, only to have the woman next to me immediately and aggressively place a box of tissues in my lap. I looked around and there was not one person not crying and wailing in the hall. The moment the head-woman’s wailing got higher and more urgent, the more the rest of the women wept. The synergy happening was incredible; back and forth they were going. She was controlling the audience and commanding their reactions the same way

an orchestra conductor would lead musicians. Then came the realization that this was not an unscripted spontaneous reaction, but she was indeed a professional. She was an orator, a performer, a person who does not have any familial or personal connections to the deceased, however, was able to trigger these extreme feelings of grief in the audience. As she continued her scene, she morphed into Zaynab mourning her brother, and in parallel, I could almost hear Sophocles' *Antigone* bursting "into a long, shattering wail" and calling down "withering curses on the heads of all who did the work"¹ as she mourns the death of her brother and the brutal way in which he was laid down to rest. And as their voices would seamlessly merge into the same mourning chant, the vision came to life in my head. Raeda Taha would appear from behind them, her father's portrait in a pendant glistening proudly, still and ever-changing in its place hanging from a velvet strap necklace around her neck. She unites with the women and at the top of her lungs she roars: "Ali is in the morgue! And has been for two years! They aren't willing to return the corpse! We are in mourning until he returns!"²

*

Following the scenes, sounds, and emotions of mourning in my anecdote, I aim to evoke continuity and explore distinctions across different times, texts, and cultures of mourning. While this exploration idea materialized in the wake of a subjective and personal experience, it raised many apt inquiries about female mourning – and what might the study of the parallel continuity in the women's realities result in - that have been untouched upon to date. Mourning is a central element of human culture, and it has been thought about and studied in a large variety of ways. Judith Butler's has been a

¹ *Antigone*, trans. Kitto, ll. 474-477. Subsequent citations are given parenthetically by line number.

² *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?*, p. 39. Subsequent citations are given parenthetically by page number.

particularly influential voice in contemporary academic discussion of mourning, by adding the questions of what is grievable and what is worth grieving to the idea of mourning. Her *Precarious Life: The Power Of Mourning And Violence* raises an important statement: “We have to ask about the conditions under which a grievable life is established and maintained, and through what logic of exclusion, what practice of effacement and denominalization” (p. 38). The practice of effacement in mourning is a crucial idea tied up with the experience of loss at the center of acts of mourning, and tackling the conditions of a “grievable loss” is a notion this study will challenge later on. An earlier landmark text that orients much academic discussion regarding the reaction to loss (even when only as a point of departure) is Sigmund Freud’s 1917 essay, “Mourning and Melancholia”. The founder of psychoanalysis defines mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (p. 164). According to Freud, the aim of mourning is to work through a certain kind of loss. When one does differently and declines the detachment from the lost individual while maintaining an identification with the loss, that means that person is grieving pathologically and developing melancholia. Developing a healthy relationship with loss, in Freud’s account, should include a detachment from the loss itself, meaning a transference into the future, or rather an acceptance of a future with the absence of the lost individual or object. Loss in this scheme is imbued with a negative connotation but is not situated within specific social or cultural contexts. Butler decisively revises Freud’s perspective in her contribution to the 2003 book, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. She intervenes in psychoanalytic discourse and “instead of imputing to loss a purely negative quality”, she apprehends it “as productive rather than pathological,

abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary” (p. ix). She proclaims that inescapable loss is overloaded with “creative and political potential.” Productive, abundant, social and militant loss immediately places mourning in a context greater than simple grief, but rather what lies after this grief, how it is portrayed and to what extent. The performances and the kinds of texts and practices treated in this thesis are a form of productive mourning and that is the perspective through which I will analyze them. While the socio-cultural themes of loss are quite significant, as Butler and Freud note, it is also equally imperative to highlight the gendered aspect as well. Women in most traditional cultures usually assume the lead, and more complex, parts in laments, mourning, and ostentatious rituals for the dead. Female mourning stands out as one of the common foundations of human culture, whether it be western or eastern society, from Antigone to the orator at the majlis I attended. However, when the words “female mourning” come into mind, the first association is the image of a broken woman, from statues like *Petite fille pleurant* (Weeping Girl 1894) by Albert Bartholomé to the cliché of weakness being connected to females, more than men. Grief is one of the rawest of human emotions, and in some contexts could be mistaken for weakness. However, when taking my anecdote at the beginning of this chapter into consideration, one might stop and think how could the orator in the majlis instill such vigor in her performance, not only to spark her own act of mourning but also that of the deceased’s family? That in and of itself gives rise to many questions regarding grief and its functions in the speech that was spoken and acted out. Did the woman orator trigger the pain through her performance so that the death could be justified or repented for? Likewise, does Antigone feel the need to express all that grief through the imagery she draws specifically for the purpose of an

audience? Or why does Raeda Taha's mourning memoir of her father, *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* focus solely on her, her mother's, and her sisters' experiences after his death rather than on his lifetime? Does female mourning entail more than wailing, crying and screaming? Does the pain and grief have to be extracted from the people through orchestrated scenes to keep the connection alive? Which prompts another central question: is it affect, or performance – or both?

Returning to Butler's ideas about mourning and the female role, in *Antigone's Claim* (2000), her assertion that Sophocles' text might facilitate a modification in feminism's affiliation to the state offers a further preliminary orientation informing this study. Butler reinterprets Antigone's legacy by presenting and claiming a groundbreaking take on the role portrayed by Sophocles and transforming it for radical feminism and sexual politics. She argues that Antigone depicts a novel shape of feminist activism and sexual agency that is received with risk. Butler also presents Antigone as a model of rebellion by exhibiting how the normative status quo hinders our ability to view and experience what political agency could be. With political agency in models of womanhood and feminist modalities in mind, the subject-constitution of these women, Antigone, Raeda, and the Shi'i woman, as figures of mourning permits me to investigate the propositions of the contemporary gendered politics of mourning in this study. The similar feminist portrayal of these grieving women's defiance in relation to their gender roles and identity in mourning leads me to an exploration of the social, cultural, and political reasons for the turn from the "passive" model of mourning and grief that women have been placed into or have represented, toward a modality of strength, perseverance, and a shattering of patriarchal gender roles. I do not argue on the

basis of a line of direct literary influence across these very diverse contexts, but rather what I wish to analyze is the role of the women portrayed in these mourning rituals in their specificity and continuity. This study will shed light on the gendered character of female mourning and how it may be viewed and analyzed as performance. In doing so, it aims to contribute to several fields including the study of grief and mourning, performance of gender and identity, and performance studies. I hope to provide insight into the transformation and evolution of the gendered role of female mourning in different contexts, as the process of social, cultural, and political connotations unfold in different parts of this examination, while returning back to key points discussed in Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers Of Mourning and Violence*, and also exploring the representation and using them in order to critique and partially undo the stereotype.

My thesis begins with the two literary texts, where each of Antigone's and Raeda Taha's mourning roles are analyzed with respect to their relationships to the deceased and to the society around them, unfolding the different implications and possibilities that lie beneath. Three principal chapters follow the introduction, before the thesis concludes with some final observations. In chapter 1, "Antigone Unmans: Female Lamentation as Resistance", I start out by introducing the female mourning in Sophocles' *Antigone* and analyzing it in the literary context talking of Homeric versus classical Athenian representations of mourning, her defiance against the patriarchal scheme evident in the civic system and personified in Creon, and martyrdom. These notions will be discussed in the framework of the political, cultural and social stigma that existed in ancient Greece. I will also elucidate mourning as performance and the gender performativity in play with Antigone's character. In chapter 2, "Ali's Daughter's

Wail of Diligence and Might”, I examine the contemporary play *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* whose lead and only actress, Raeda Taha, is a comparable figure to Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for her political and cultural resonances in the play and emergence of gender identity through social pressures. Notions of martyrdom and social conformation, issues central to my reading of *Antigone*, are in play as well in Taha’s memoir. In chapter 3, “Shi’a Mourning Rituals: Existence as Rehearsal and Performance”, I focus on and analyze female mourning within a wider set of cultural discourses and practices, specifically belonging to Shi’a women in Lebanon. I discuss Shi’a mourning rituals, how they emerged, how they were altered by time and place, and more importantly, how women’s roles changed in that discussion. I feature one ethnographic case study in particular, performed in Lebanon by the anthropologist Lara Deeb. Throughout these three chapters I will discuss mourning with respect to theater and performance studies, and consequently gender performativity, as theoretical perspectives that can productively link works of drama with social ritual. I will be analyzing elements that contribute to the process of aiding a culture to understand itself through theatricality and performance, with particular reference to Peggy Phelan’s *Mourning Sex* and the work of Robert Schechner. With all of the aforementioned in place, the purpose of my thesis, which unfolds wholly in the conclusion, branches out to several crucial and urgent issues. These shine a light on the challenging and multifaceted roles women have to uphold during mourning periods, which emerge through the analysis of the texts that builds on the foundation of the recognition of the gender oppression, which is encoded in the socially imposed kinds of performativity. Using *Antigone*, Raeda Taha, and an example of a modern mourning woman and the depiction of their breaking through that role and creating political and social action

through their mourning, this thesis will show how they challenged and overcame the initially confining “responsibilities” they were held to. While also bringing to consideration how female mourning within the theoretical framework of performance studies unravels fresh perspectives on both mourning and performance. I hope to show readers a fresh outlook through the incorporation of different theoretical fields, different texts and eras, and to highlight the peculiar valour that the customary manoeuvre of female mourning unleashes.

II. ANTIGONE UNMANS: FEMALE LAMENTATION AS RESISTANCE

Antigone is one of the most prominent grieving women in all of Greek tragedy. Her bereavement stems from the fact that her brother's corpse was not given an honorable and proper burial, as a sovereign order from her uncle, after he died attacking the city with a foreign army. What I will analyze in this chapter is the female mourning role portrayed by Antigone. First, I will examine her mourning role in the literary context of the play, discussing both Homeric and classical illustrations of mourning, her defiance against the patriarchal scheme evident in both the civic system and in Creon, and martyrdom. These notions will be discussed in the framework of the political, cultural and social stigma that was present in ancient Greece. Second, I will explain mourning as performance and the gender performativity in comprehension with Antigone's character. Although Polynices' act of treachery set motion to the play, Antigone's journey of grief for her brother took the center stage. Many scholars have discussed her mourning in various contexts and backgrounds, each essay or piece positioning a certain take on Antigone.

Antigone is an ancient Greek play; part of the three Theban plays written by the playwright Sophocles. The play starts out with Antigone and Ismene, daughters of the late king Oedipus, returning to Thebes amidst a civil war between their own two brothers, Polyneicus and Eteocles. However, when they arrive they realize that both their brothers are dead. King Creon, their uncle and ruler by inheritance, decides to honor Eteocles with a proper burial as he is considered a hero, and shame Polyneices by

issuing a royal edict that he is not to be buried, as he is a traitor. Antigone challenges the royal decree and refuses to abide by Creon's law, as Polyneices is her kin and her dear brother. This resistance surfaces in her mourning, her lamentation, and her unapologetic defiance of everything Creon stands for. Sophocles, through Antigone's character, boldly draws out a feminism-centered discourse, that continues on to be used as reference in scholarly researches for many years to come. Antigone, after being refused by Creon, tries to bury Polyneices without the king's knowledge, but is subsequently caught and placed in prison. As Creon stays adamant on his decision of jailing Antigone, many people start to voice out their opposition including Creon's son Haemon, who is Antigone's fiancé, his wife, the prophet Teiresias, and the chorus. When he finally decides to release her, Antigone is found dead by suicide. Haemon, after trying to stab his father, kills himself and Creon's wife follows suit out of anguish. The king is left to wallow in his own misery, as his beloved ones are no longer around due to his wrongdoings and stubbornness.

Perhaps one of the most salient points in *Antigone* is the fact that the type of mourning that it stages was controlled, even in some instances suppressed, not only because it was directed at her "treacherous" kin, but also because of certain laws imposed by the Athenian state. Gail Holst-Warhaft, in her *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (1992), explains that "Evidence from the Byzantine period and from modern anthropologists working in Greece in this century...suggests that despite opposition from the state in antiquity, and from the church in the Christian era, women have continued to be the self-appointed mourners of the dead, composing and singing laments to express their grief and often their rage at losing their loved ones" (p. 3). This tension between feminine desire

for autonomy in mourning and the desire for control expressed by the patriarchal state is dramatically captured by Sophocles' play, as critics have long recognized. Butler in *Precarious Life* discusses the importance of mourning in the sense that, "It is not that mourning is the goal of politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence" (p. xviii). However, Hegel's discussion of *Antigone* looms large over modern criticism of the play, and I wish to consider Hegel's treatment, but in the context of my study of mourning Judith Butler's more recent revision of Hegel will be just as important. Among notable concepts central to the reception of *Antigone* is the idea of kinship and state in relation to the mourning, and what each of Antigone and Creon lend to the latter notions. Benson Honig's work *Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership, and the Politics of Exception* (2009) heavily draws on that concept, and is consequently comprehensively influenced by both Butler and Hegel, as will be shown. The drive behind Antigone's mourning is evidently juxtaposed against her uncle's mourning as Honig states: "The former (Antigone's mourning) memorialize the unique individuality of the dead, focus on the family's loss and bereavement and call for vengeance. The latter (Creon's mourning) memorializes the dead's contribution to the immortal polis and emphasizes (as in the Funeral Oration) the replaceability of those lost" (p. 5), thus seemingly making of the woman's mourning as expression only of emotional reaction rather than of political thought and reason. The Funeral Oration to which Honig alludes is the renowned speech attributed to the Athenian politician Pericles in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* as part of a public funeral for those who died in a relatively early phase of the hostilities. Containing key ideas of commemoration, valor, and honoring of the dead that have fallen in war, it articulated an ideology that valorized the act of fighting for one's country. With that in mind, readers can understand the motive behind the standpoint of

Sophocles' Creon regarding Antigone and her mourning: she represented an alternative, kin-centered ideology that the state and its representative were trying aggressively to supplant. What is to be noted here is the role the state played in matters like mourning and grief, matters that are usually considered close and personal, and that do not necessarily venture off into the governmental area, so why in *Antigone* does the subject of mourning tend to divert itself to governmentality? Butler responds to that notion by explaining the power of mourning when the object of grief is dreaded, "When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order or to invigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly" (p. 29-30). Antigone knew and acknowledged that, therefore did not believe in the notions the Funeral Oration endorsed, as Honig puts it: "She [Antigone] gives expression to the concern of democracy, especially in its imperial capacity, send soldiers to die in war while offering only a pretense of the memorialization and honor they deserve, a pathetic substitute for the real (Homeric) thing that only their families or clans, but not the democratic polis, can deliver" (p. 7). Ideas that women should be quiet and invisible were bluntly stated in the Funeral Oration, as Thucydides articulates the following: "Perhaps I should say a word or two on the duties of women to those among you who are now widowed. I can say all I have to say in a short word of advice. Your great glory is not to be inferior to what God has made you, and the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you" (p. 78). With that observation being made, it is safe to say mourning in ancient Greece was made to be delivered by the "democratic polis", a public and political, and therefore patriarchal, appropriation of familial grief. Butler in *Precarious Life* discusses the notion of solely attributing the "blame" on the state:

It is, of course, tempting to say that something called the “state,” imagined as a powerful unity, makes use of the field of governmentality to reintroduce and reinstate its own forms of sovereignty. This description doubtless misdescribes the situation, however, since governmentality designates a field of political power in which tactics and aims have become diffuse, and in which political power fails to take on a unitary and casual form. But my point is that precisely because our historical situation is marked by governmentality, and this implies, to a certain degree, a loss of sovereignty, that loss is compensated through the resurgence of sovereignty within the field of governmentality. Petty sovereigns abound, reigning in the midst of bureaucratic army institutions mobilized by aims and tactics of power they do not inaugurate or fully control. And yet such figures are delegated with the power to render unilateral decisions, accountable to no law and without any legitimate authority. The resurrected sovereignty is thus not the sovereignty of unified power under the conditions of legitimacy, the form of power that guarantees the representative status of political institutions. It is, rather, a lawless and prerogatory power, a “rogue” power par excellence. (p.56)

And with this rogue force in power, mourning became a commodity or a performance for the wartime victories and casualties, and with time women did begin to be incorporated as key figures in these forms of public ritual. The fact that performative female mourning was regulated is great evidence for its importance, and brings forth interesting speculation and interpretation.

With performative female mourning being regulated, Greek families proceeded to hire professionals. They were called the “threnon exarchoi”, who sang formal laments to attempt to turn the “Homeric” mourning into classical mourning. These professionals portrayed the classical mourning rituals, as opposed to the Homeric. This specific juxtaposition takes center stage in Honig’s piece as she attempts to pose *Antigone* as a play that studies the tensions between Homeric and classical mourning. Homeric mourning (as represented by Briseis and the other women over the body of Patroclus in *Iliad* 19) featured “extravagant, out of control behavior, including loud wailing, tearing the hair, and lacerating one’s face,” (p. 11) while classical mourning abiding by Solon’s rules for the polis, which was void of any form of excessive mourning, was limited only to theater and to professionals. This limitation gave rise to the common perception that “Athenians shed tears at the theater that they were not allowed to shed elsewhere” (p. 12). Even when the emotions were performed on stage in tragic theater, they were distorted to a “polis-centered and policed form” (p. 13), because in the audience’s time, the form of Antigone’s mourning was forbidden. In the fictional time of the play, the context of Antigone’s mourning was forbidden, in other words, the fact that she was mourning a traitor to the state was prohibited, not the mourning itself. Nevertheless, when one considers the contrast placed between the different types of mourning of Antigone and Creon, one can notice that disparity ceases to exist the moment Antigone takes control of her own “state” power. Antigone at some point acknowledged, or knew of her position as the late Oedipus’ daughter, which gives her sovereign rights just as much as Creon has. Honig addresses the political aspect of Antigone’s laments, framing her mourning as not opposing, but essentially mirroring those of her uncle’s:

Butler's Antigone may model opposition to state prerogatives but she is no anarchist. Vying with her uncle for the authority he arrogates to himself, Butler's Antigone 'approximates' Creon's 'stubborn will' and borrows his vocabulary, iteratively re-citing his sovereign discourse and power and exemplifying thereby an appropriately political relationship to state sovereignty. (p.6)

Honig's statements elaborate on Butler's work in her book, *Antigone's Claim* (2000), in which Butler asserts that although Antigone opposes her uncle in the context of conflict between state allegiance and kinship ties, alluding to Hegel's famous analysis, their actions appear to mirror each other rather than oppose each other. However, when exploring the play further, one would notice that this emotion-fueled "political" campaign appears to not only target the concept of kinship but also her brother, as an individual, independent of familial influences. As Butler mentions several times, Antigone and her actions do not represent the sanctity of kinship per se, because what she is willing to do for Polynices, she is not willing to do for every other kin, as she states:

Never, I tell you. If I had been the mother of children or if my husband died, exposed, and rotting – I'd never have taken this ordeal upon myself, never defied our people's will. What law, you ask, do I satisfy with what I say? A husband dead, here might have been another. A child by another too, if I had lost the first. But mother and father both lost in the halls of Death, no brother could ever spring to light again.
(995-1004)

Antigone does not merely defy the classical concept through her mourning, she also "defies the state through a powerful set of physical and linguistic acts" (Honig, p. 7). She eliminates the broken woman image, even though physically she is embodying

all forms of grief from wailing to crying to diverse forms of self-harm, she is defying the rules through her mourning, as it poses as a stance against the rules of the polis. The struggle between Antigone and Creon transcends that of a burial and a body, and in fact it represents the actual political discourse that was going on in fifth century Greece. Creon fears Antigone's impulsive screams, erratic actions, and undeniable passion, as if these pose a concrete threat to him, as he speaks of his fear of becoming unmanned by her, posing female mourning as a challenge in the face of Creon's masculine state authority:

This girl was an old hand at insolence when she overrode the edicts we made public. But once she had done it – the insolence, twice over – to glory in it, laughing, mocking us to our face with what she'd done. I am not the man, not now; she is the man if this victory goes to her and she goes free. (536-542)

Through her lamentation, Antigone challenges the masculine figure; she does so however, not merely in the context of the tragedy, but also in Greece's cultural history. Attic tragedy arose as a genre after a period in which women were banned from mourning for it was cast as loud and excessive, as Honig explains: "In the sixth century B.C.E., legislation is passed by Solon at Athens, then throughout Greece, restricting mourning and burial practices. Over 150 years before Sophocles wrote *Antigone*, Solon's polis-forming legislation called for restraining what Plutarch calls the 'disorderly and unbridled quality' of women's grief [21.5], as well as the 'breast beating and lamentation at burials.'" (p. 10). Honig's source is Plutarch's *Life of Solon*. Plutarch provides further detail about the Athenian lawmaker and poet's regulation: "He also subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a

law which did away with disorder and licence ... Laceration of the flesh by mourners, and the use of set lamentations, and the bewailing of any one at the funeral ceremonies of another, he forbade ... Most of these practices are also forbidden by our laws, but ours contain the additional proviso that such offenders shall be punished by the board of censors for women, because they indulge in unmanly and effeminate extravagances of sorrow when they mourn" [21.4-21.5]. So, the idea that performative female mourning opposed the state very much existed before *Antigone* was written. When Antigone mourns she not only mourns her brother, but she represents an opposition to both the state of Creon and the legal norms of Greece, especially with the legislation branding female mourning as disorderly, as Creon accuses her in the former quote of "overriding the edicts made public".

With that powerful image being drawn, an emphasis and pressure is placed on Antigone, as the woman of the "martyr", to help keep Polynices' reputation unsoiled by performing an actual proper burial. The notion of martyrdom is prevalent in any context where war and persecutions exists, and while Polynices isn't technically a martyr in the sense that he wasn't glorified by the state, he was glorified by his sister. Antigone provided her brother the status of martyr that the state utterly denied him of. She, in fact, makes a martyr of herself, and by doing so in his behalf he seems to possess the status too. Antigone elevated Polynices to this position through her dedication to his cause and his after-life rest:

I will bury him myself. And even if I die in the act, the death will be a glory. I will lie with the one I love and loved by him – an outrage scared to the gods! I have longer to please the dead than please the

living here: in the kingdom down below I'll lie forever. (85-90)

Butler discusses this by addressing Hegel's interpretation of Antigone serving her brother so religiously, "For Hegel, however, Antigone passes away as the power of the feminine and becomes redefined as the power of the mother, one whose sole task within the travels of Spirit is to produce a son for the purposes of the state, a son who leaves the family in order to become a warring citizen" (p. 12). To Hegel, Antigone serves as a pathway for this "son"; from her womb to the world, accumulating nothing more than that, fulfilling the ancient claims that women are only saved when they are child-bearing. Butler critiques Hegel's point of view that realizes Antigone's role only through her brother, "Antigone finds no place within citizenship for Hegel because she is not capable of offering or receiving recognition within the ethical order. The only kind of recognition she can enjoy ... is of and by her brother" (p. 13). Butler and Hegel's theoretical stance on Antigone's social/political exclusion prompts the question of what is the extent to which Antigone is there, existing in grief and mourning, merely for her brother, and not to assert any sort of political stance against the state. The notion of martyrdom conditions the importance given to the deceased on the account of the living, specifically speaking of the living female family members. The female mourning is transferred from the sphere of personal grief, to a public space of "showing" due to whatever social or political position the deceased person had, that was portrayed when Antigone was not allowed to bury and mourn her brother (consequently being obligated to reposition her grief) due to the position of the traitor he was placed in. The reason for that transference is the aspect of martyrdom in death, in which mourning turns into a social and political matter rather than simply personal, and through that image Sophocles provides the stark depiction of the gendered role of mourning into which

women are confined by ritual and political convention. Butler also reinforces the aspect of politics and sovereignty in Antigone's act as she states, "Antigone risking death herself by burying her brother against the edict of Creon, exemplified the political risks in defying the ban against grief during times of increased sovereign power and hegemonic national unity. What are the cultural barriers against which we struggle when we try to find out about the losses that we are asked not to mourn, when we attempt to name, and so to bring under the rubric of the "human"...? Similarly, the cultural barriers that feminism must negotiate have to take place with the reference to the operation of power and the persistence of vulnerability" (p. 45-46). With the operation of power and most importantly the "show" of it through the act, Antigone's mourning becomes part of the domain of performance, for reasons other than simply being a play that was staged on a theater. What I am signifying through this notion is the need to distinguish between the dramatic text as a performance script and the dimension of social performativity represented within and what political connotations that may hold. When this "show" is enforced in a play like Antigone, it raises questions regarding the play's meta-theatrical force, and its relationship to the concept of social performativity.

Sophocles was an innovative playwright and focused very much on the performance aspect of his plays. In his time, tragedies only contained two actors, however, he added a third one to the play's format and was among the pioneers to use painted scenery on stage. The employment of three actors that play different roles using different masks was a key development in theater history, as complex plots became more feasible to execute on stage. Sophocles sought to create the audience-actor

relationship as he maintained the format of the chorus in nearly all his plays, and when on stage he managed to create a closer relationship with the audience by making the chorus both characters and reviewers of the events of the plays. He also pushed his plays further than the tragedy genre, he wanted the audience to be commentators, and engage with the themes present in the plays. Themes transcending the theatrical leitmotifs, and moving to different spectrums, as Schechner (2002) states: “In performance studies, performativity points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality, including gender and race, the restored behavior quality of performances, and the complex relationship of performance practice to performance theory” (p. 110). J. L. Austin in his book *How To Do Things With Words* defines the term “performative” as indicating “that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action³. The uttering of the words is, indeed a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act” (p.7). And when looking into Antigone’s monologues, the performativity of the trauma she portrays is evident, as most of the play’s climaxes and “incidents” are her declarations and utterances that enable the story to move forward. For example, when she says to Ismene, “I will bury him myself . . . I will lie with the one I love” (85-87), she immediately places the flow of events into action through performativity. We don’t particularly read the scene where Antigone is physically burying Polynices, but we read about it later coming from the Senate: “The body someone’s just buried it, then run off .. sprinkled some dry dust on the flesh, given it proper rites” (277-279). The action has achieved its performative aspect when it was uttered by the characters, and even so, still wouldn’t have gotten absolute confirmation

³ Austin means cases like saying “I apologize”, where the verbal utterance effects (or is) the action. A case of Antigone saying “I mourn” or “I honor” is closer to Austin’s definition of performative, the sense of performative that certain expected actions are performed and that they shape identity in a social context.

of being performed by Antigone until she utters it later on, “I did it. I don’t deny a thing” (492).

Linguistic performativity plays a huge role in this play, since many of the actions fulfill their meaning and get “performed” through being uttered by the actor/actress him/herself or by a messenger of the action (senate or chorus). Literary/theatrical tragedy is made of speech, so its language can be thought of as especially performative. In the tragedy genre of performance, one of the most prevalent and significant themes of performativity is trauma. It is shown abundantly either by Antigone herself through her mourning and monologues or through other characters that have witnessed it through her, as when the senate caught her in the act of burying her brother, “And she cried out a sharp, piercing cry, like a bird come back to an empty nest peering into its bed, and all the babies ... Just so, when she sees the corpse bare she bursts into a long, shattering wail” (471-475). The idea of trauma in mourning as a significant aspect of the play lends *Antigone* to the realm of performance studies, in many ways. In one sense, one of the signs of trauma on the human mind, which is that events cannot be remembered in rationalized way is connected to the fragmented form of the drama that attempts to register this trauma. In another sense, trauma is an idea that was hugely analyzed by performance scholars. Peggy Phelan, a performance studies scholar who explores the idea of trauma, argues that: “To say that trauma must be relived or re-enacted in order to be “surmounted,” assumes that trauma is or was a lived event. But trauma is an event of unliving. The unliving event becomes traumatic precisely because it is empty; trauma reveals the intangible center of breath itself. As an event of unliving, trauma is a performance in and above the real” (p.60). The feelings

induced as trauma occur due to loss or death, are “untouchable” and “cannot be represented by the symbolic” (p. 5). The object of our affection is not there anymore, is not living or existing, so therefore we feel trauma after we feel the loss, not instantly after the death. One way I would think about it would be the subsequent simple example: a woman who has lost her husband will not feel the trauma during the mourning period while she is surrounded by family and friends, but will feel the trauma when she wakes up one morning and does not smell the coffee her husband usually makes, or does not see the novel and glasses on the bed left from his late night reading sessions. Phelan addresses the meaning more elaborately in an experiment conducted by Freud and Breuer with a patient. She goes on to explain that throughout the experiment, their progress was “obstructed for some time because a recollection refused to emerge” (p.60). The patient had recently suffered the loss of her father and was she was getting treatment by hypnosis, however what stalled the progress was the fact that the patient lost consciousness every time she visited her relative’s house. The problem was that when she opened the door to the house, she looked at her reflection in a mirror hanging opposite to the door, but saw her father’s death head; the trauma of seeing her loss again caused her body to fall to unconsciousness. When the patient narrated what had happened to Breuer, a transference occurred. This is how Phelan attributes trauma to being an unliving event, “The act of narrating allows her to interpret the trauma of the unliving event for the first time – and the interpretation created the cure.” (p.61). What I wish to highlight in this example is the narration and the storytelling of the trauma; the patient was able to distinguish between the reflection in the mirror, which had caused her to faint, and the “safe” hallucination with Breuer later on. What relieved her and reminded her that her trauma is in the past is the retelling of the event: the safe

hallucination. Performance in tragedy and female mourning follows the mechanism of safe hallucinations: Antigone's retelling of her grief, her story and her portrayal of her brother's aches, even reliving the rest of her family's anguishes, as if they were her reality:

There – at last you've touched it, the worst pain the worst anguish!
Raking up the grief for father three times over, for all the doom that's
struck us down, the brilliant house of Laius. O mother, your marriage-
bed the coiling horrors, the coupling there – you with your own son, my
father – doomstruck mother! Such, such were my parents, and I their
wretched child. I go to them now, cursed, unwed, to share their home –
I am a stranger! O dear brother, doomed in your marriage – your
marriage murders mine, your dying drags me down to death alive! (947-
958)

The performative narration Phelan speaks of can be also placed in parallel to the lamentation practiced in Antigone's mourning, since lamentation can be viewed as a form of tale as Standhartinger (2010) states: "Laments for the dead are made up to a great extent of fixed forms and imagery, handed down over centuries from lament song to lament song. They constitute the repertoire from which mourners can draw" (570). Mourners, that is, use the deaths and transform them into stories that are to be told, thus creating a reproduced version similar to the patient's account. The idea of reproducibility of death on a stage, through mourning recitations, regurgitated the concept of life, and placed trauma as an unliving event.

Another performative aspect of Antigone comes into place with the social constructions of gender. She manages to obstruct these social constructions through her

mourning and oppositional stance towards the state and, more specifically, Creon; that obstruction is the modality in which she expresses her gender. Richard Schechner, a theater director and performance theorist, attributes a whole chapter to the topic titled “Performativity” in his book, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2002), where he examines how gender is performative: “The ‘performative inquiry’ includes but also seeks beyond changes wrought by social action. The performative inquiry asks, what constitutes individual identity and social reality; are these constructed or given; and if constructed, out of what?” (p. 130). The performative inquiry offered here gives us a way to engage in a discourse that attends to important instances in *Antigone* that emerge through the creative and expressive mourning that highlights both Antigone’s gender performance and how it breaks the construction of gender. In *Antigone*, the construction of a sexist gendered discourse is made possible by two things, Greece’s legislations towards women and Creon. In addition to the rules placed by Solon regarding female mourning, mentioned early on in this chapter, certain rules were placed regarding kinship and state as well which aided in the construction of gender. According to Griffith (1998) in his article “The King and the Eye”, political life in ancient Greece postulated certain roles in society that were attributed to the “son” and the “citizen”:

Within a single *oikos*, the father remains in charge year in and year out, physically, legally, religiously and morally . . . The democratic principles of rotation of authority, scrutiny of officials before and after their tenure of office, equal votes and freedom of speech, have no place in a well-run patriarchal household. (p. 68).

As children of a certain household, complete subjugation to an untouchable patriarchal authority was demanded, but in the context of civic life “the democratic ethos expected

a citizen *to both rule and be ruled*" (Miller (2014), 166). Nonetheless, Creon appears to speak to such a law when he gives a speech about Antigone breaking the law and disobeying the edicts that were made public, but then contradicts and forms discrepancies in his own stance by his actions and his fulfilling of the father role with Haemon: "That's how you ought to feel within your heart, subordinate to your father's will in every way" (713-714). Creon abuses both his father and king role, and the benefits to cater to his own ideology and belief system, which reconstructs gender to his own conviction. His regular degrading of Antigone and Haemon using, respectively the citizen law and the son law, results not only in the appearance of Creon's gendered language, but also in his hunger for power on all things. He seems to have fixed gender ideas that Antigone's behavior threatens, that he tries to re-impose these on Antigone, Haemon, and indeed himself. His masculine power is jeopardized by Antigone, as is evident in his speech "I am not the man, not now; she is the man if this victory goes to her and she goes free" (541-542). He believes his power is susceptible to a female, not only because she threatens his position of power as a king (the citizen law), but also his power as a father by affecting his domineering relationship with his son (the son law). Antigone, however, through her mourning and her defiant standpoints, reconstructs the gender identities formulated by Creon. Butler in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988) states that, "That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed ... Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed." (p. 527-528). The gender reality set into action by the rules in ancient Greece and Creon were only

sustained because there was an audience replying and imitating them. Even by some literary critics such as Mueller (2011) describe Antigone's manner as "masculine in tenor" (p. 412), which further endorses the restricted gender performativity rhetoric. But when reading and analyzing *Antigone* from another perspective, one can see her refusal to perform the narrow constructed role and act differently shows how the performative character of gender is the precondition for change. Through acting on her mourning and burying her brother, she surpasses the limited social constructions placed for her gender. She neither conforms to the predefined characteristics attributed to the female gender nor celebrates any sort of masculinity. She celebrates the fact that she has committed the action right according to her own logic and embraces her fate in the process. Antigone constantly shows that she is proud of her deed, and does not attempt to hide or belittle them in any way:

Then why delay? Your moralizing repels me, every word you say – pray god it always will. So naturally all I say repels you too. Enough. Give me glory! What greater glory could I win than to give my own brother decent burial? These citizens here all agree, they would praise me too if their lips weren't locked in fear ... Not ashamed for a moment, not to honor my brother, my own flesh and blood (557-574).

With Antigone's pride being illustrated in such a palpable fashion, female mourning in Arab dramas, albeit in different ways, can also be subject to question; does the next heroine depict her pride in grief with all its "glory" as does Antigone, or is it, by contrast, not so simply asserted? In the next chapter, we observe and analyze the duality of female mourning in another reality, and if it releases the same subversive emotional energies,

has the same ritual conduct, diverts itself to a political agenda, or is it a mere dramatic lamentation deduced from grief over the passing of loved one?

III. ALI'S DAUGHTER'S WAIL OF DILIGENCE AND MIGHT

“Never explicitly invoked as such, a uniquely Palestinian Antigone nevertheless appeared here, with similar promises to invert the paralyzed Arab patriarchy.”

Where can I Find Someone Like You by Raeda Taha (review)
Rayya El Zein

“The theme of this story is this family in particular, it starts from the daring risks taken by Sahila, the martyr's sister, who was considered illiterate. Her personal tragedy was compared to a Greek tragedy, so she was called the Palestinian Antigone. Sahila had sworn that she wouldn't sleep under a cover no matter how cold it got, until the day came when her brother's corpse was returned back from the frost of the Israeli morgue refrigerators.”

Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?
Raeda Taha

Mourning is a customary ritual that happens during and after the burial of the deceased. However, there also lies a concrete distinction between mourning as a habitual ritual and grief as something personal, an affect that may develop discontinuity with social events. Varying from one culture to another, rituals usually share psychological-emotional mechanisms that are intended to support friends and kin to overcome their loss and deal with the death. The members of the city-state of Athens exercised this psychological-emotional mechanism through performance, so Arabs have done and continue do. The justification of my shift in concern here to a play about contemporary Palestine lies in identifying two kinds of continuity between classical Greece and contemporary Arab culture: performance as part of politicized mourning and emphasis on ritually-proper burial. Furthermore, I address the underlying themes in both texts regarding the concept of martyr's kin and the social conformation that proceeds it. In *Mourning Palestine*, Khalil and Abu Rabia (2012) address mourning

rituals in Islamic practices, “People observe a three-day mourning period when someone dies. This starts on the first day, when they bury the dead, up until the passing of the fortieth day after the death. People try to bury the body on the same day that the person dies, by which they honor the deceased according to Islamic doctrine” (p. 6). But part of the complexity of Taha’s text is that mourning occurs on both private and political levels. The Palestinian conflict was, and remains, one of the most tragic displacements of a country in the Middle East. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were scattered all over the world, and the ones left were either massacred or are living under siege or conditions of Israeli apartheid. In academic and popular culture, Western discourses typically portray Palestine through the dominant descriptions of the war and people in distress portrayed in the media. Yet this perception threatens to suppress other important and noteworthy stories of daily human experience. Among those rarely noticed are the women behind the men; the wives, daughters, sisters of the Palestinian men involved in the conflict. Lotte Buch Segal in her book *No Place for Grief* (2016) states that, “In Palestine, being related to a detainee serving a sentence for participation in resistance activities against Israel is a source of pride, and the wives of detainees are expected to sustain these relationships steadfastly, no matter the effects on the marriage or family” (p. 3). Countering the media’s influence and certain academic studies’ arguments, Buch Segal takes a different approach and presents the lives, and the conflicting emotions, of the families of both prisoners and martyrs through a detailed ethnographic analysis. *No Place for Grief* probes us to consider what it means to grieve when what is grieved for does not lend itself to a discourse of loss and mourning. Similarly in *Precarious Life*, Butler tackles the concept of mourning something that is not considered a “loss” in its definitive sense, and relates it to *Antigone*’s context:

“There will be no public act of grieving (said Creon in *Antigone*). If there is a ‘discourse,’ it is a silent and melancholic one in which there have been no lives, and no losses; there has been no sundering of that commonality. None of this takes place on the order of the event, none of this takes place, in the silence of the newspaper there was no events, no loss, and this failure of recognition is mandated through an identification with those who identify with the perpetrators of that violence” (p. 36). In Raeda Taha’s case, martyrdom is the influence, as the category of the martyr complicates mourning as mourning for pure loss, and that in and of itself also entails different ways of performing that mourning. Buch Segal in her book resists the idea of politically-influenced mourning expressions; she claims that narrative styled laments and performance of bodily movements are not enough to portray the distress suffered by the women related to the martyrs. Through the Palestinian women she includes in her ethnography, Luma, Yara, Muna, and Amina, she portrays what it is like to be a female member of the family of the martyr or the prisoner; how the mourning becomes politicized due to the circumstances of the death or the detention. As she states, “A husband’s absence also implies that what is left of the captive conjugate is an empty shell whose meaning in the life of the detainee’s wife is further eclipsed by her role as both the national symbol of the Palestinian mother and the tangible mother of the detainee’s children” (p. 173). The women in Segal’s ethnography allowed her to view and study another perspective of female mourning which included an investigation into their personal lives, taking into consideration psychological distress, social obligation, and even at time their intimate relationships. Segal states that, “His (the martyr) death finalizes his life and turns him into a martyr, a transformation that allows him to take on a different presence in the social world” (p. 53), and consequently transfers that

“different presence” onto his family. That new order of place reaffirms the concept of politicized and social mourning for Palestinian women, rather than personal grief, turning her into the woman that only verifies her womanhood through the martyr and not for herself. Segal discusses this notion, in her discursive voice, on an occasion where one of the women she was interviewing asserted that:

Public appearance and social control were recurring topics of conversation among my interlocutors, both with each other and with me, whenever we spoke of their lives after their husbands had been detained. People in the village, as well as the women’s close and distant relatives, kept an eye on them. As my interlocutor Mervat said during a conversation I had with her and another interlocutor, Weeam, next to the heater in Weeam’s living room: “It is as if, when her husband is in prison, a woman has to kill herself and she must put herself in the prison too. And at the same time, my husband is saying, if I tell him how I feel, about my sadness, why are you crying, you must be proud of me, that I am in prison.” Weeam added that her husband was always calling the house from the prison to see if she was at home or out of the house. If she was out, he would say, “Where are you,” “Where have you been,” “Why are you going out,” “Who are you with,” and “What are you wearing?” No matter whom she was with or where she went, there would always be someone who claimed to have seen her in the company of someone improper, wearing something inappropriate. “After my husband was detained I stopped being a woman; now I am just a mother,” she said. (p.73)

Grief and mourning in Palestine is a more complicated topic and the notion is expressed in a great many ways, in many works of art and art forms, both Middle Eastern and Western, that include songs like *Freedom For Palestine* by the British group OneWorld, *Palestine Will Be Free* by Swedish singer Maher Zain (of Lebanese origins), and *Tears*

Over Palestine by Canadian Raffoul; films including *Hanna K.* (1983), *Paradise Now* (2005), and *Lemon Tree* (2008). One prominent work of theater, *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* captures uniquely a woman's voice and experience. *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* is a play written by Raeda Taha and directed by Lina Abyad, and deals with female mourning in a way that recalls several dimensions of *Antigone*. Taha's rendering of her grief is shown through the narrative style of the short interludes or flashbacks, while maintaining the one-woman theatrical performance. Among critics it has earned the designation "the Palestinian Antigone".⁴

On May 8, 1972, four Palestinians hijacked Sabena Flight 571 demanding that the Israeli government release 315 Palestinian prisoners. In the end, two of the hijackers were killed, two captured. Among the dead was the leader of the group, Ali Taha, who left behind a wife and four daughters. The eldest, Raeda, was seven in 1972. The play is an autobiographic synopsis of what life is like after Taha's father gets killed on the hijacking operation, and how she dealt with the mourning and grief. Khalil and Abu Rabia address the mourning patterns of Palestinians in their study, summarizing the centrality of mourning as follows: "Palestinians express their sorrow for deceased relatives in a collective manner. They consider the deceased person to be a loss to their entire community, for death not only disrupts routine but also has an impact on social cohesion, disturbing the social equilibrium" (p. 1). Taha depicts this clearly and loudly in the play, personalizing the sociologists' generalization, not functioning as a kind of a source but rather a connection made independently of each other, through several anecdotes and instances she talks about. The performance gathered significant acclaim

⁴ See the epigraph of this chapter

which included an article from the *New York Times* to local reviews in countries it premiered in.⁵ One of the reviews, Zein (2016), states the following: “*Where Can I Find Someone Like You, Ali?* is a powerful deconstruction of the impressions, nostalgia, and romance about a particularly fraught period of Palestinian history, as well as a riveting work of storytelling. Interrogating the political legacy of the martyr Ali Taha, his daughter offers a poignant testament to the lives of women lived in the shadow of the *shaheed* (martyr)” (p. 291). Taha, like Antigone, did not get a chance to bury a male figure in her family, the martyr, and according to Islamic doctrine had a special burial Khalil and Abu Rabia explain: “The only exception is a martyr, whose body should not be washed at all and who is buried in the clothes that he was killed in” (p. 6). What I wish to explore in comparing Taha’s figure to Antigone’s as mourning figures is the notion that the female is often drawn as nothing more than kin, the martyr’s wife, daughter, or sister, thus being placed in a role that she never asked for, or even limiting the discourse to only that. Both Palestinian and Athenian cultures represent but also protest the imposition of a narrow identity and role upon mourning women, especially as kin of dead fighters. Whether in Arab female mourning or Greek tragedies, women have been believed to be the leading actors of such rituals, even when being ascribed such a position may not be what these women asked for. “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one”—the well-known quote by Simone du Beauvoir can be applied to the mourning figures of Antigone and Taha. The gender role attributed to both, became

⁵ Representative press notices and reviews include: *In One-Woman Show, Arafat Protégée Offers Personal Take on Conflict* by Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad was published in *The New York Times* on March 22, 2015; *Where can I Find Someone Like You* by Raeda Taha (review) by Rayya El Zein (2016) was published in the *Theatre Journal* in 2016; *Review: ‘Where Can I Find Someone Like You, Ali?’ in Collaboration with Sundance Institute Theatre Program at The Kennedy Center* by Robert Micheal Oliver was published in the DC Metro Theater Arts online blog on March 24, 2017; and *‘Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?’ Play by Raeda Taha* was published on Beirut.com online directory in 2015.

of them, which constrains the subject and adds rigid definitions to what is to be expected from the female in that time of grief. Especially in Muslim communities, where the female is supposed to be portraying the image of the grieving woman, but at the same time must be properly dressed for the occasion, saying the appropriate things, wailing when she is needed to and crying softly into her piece of tissue when she is needed to.

Taha through her memoir of her late father, sheds light on what the reality of the martyr's family, specifically the females of the family, is like. Her story begins with a grim revelation, as the daughter of the martyr Ali Taha is raped. She recalls the incident and proceeds to blame her father for the incident. She believes she got raped because he decided to go on the mission to save Palestine. For her, martyrdom was not justifiable, the Palestinian cause was not good enough of a reason for a father to leave his family. In one part of her monologue, she states:

Regardless of all the affection and care we were receiving as the daughters of the martyr, something inside me broke. I hated my father Ali. How can something like this happen to me? I started dreaming every night that Ali was beating that bastard, and not someone else. What frightened me the most is the fact that the martyr's daughter can be subjected to a such a violent and disgusting occurrence, without any consequences or punishment. For the first time in my life, I truly felt like an orphan. (p. 14)

The figure socially recognized as the tragic hero in this case was anything but a hero to Taha, because he served a cause before serving his family. To Taha, martyrdom was abandonment, and not gallant in the least. She expresses that when she recalls a memory

from her childhood as she enters her principal's office in her school in Bourj al-Barajne in the suburbs of Beirut:

I went into my principle's office, I put the newspaper on his desk and I asked, "Mr. Hassan, what does a martyr hero mean?" He replied, "A martyr means an individual who dies for the thing he loves the most, meaning he died for Palestine." I then replied, "Oh, I get it. That means he loves Palestine more than he loves me. So, does a martyr come back?" In that instant, he opened the newspaper, he hugged us and started sobbing. (p. 20)

The sobbing here was not initiated by a female, but it is the male principal that is mourning here, after he hears young Taha declaring a strong statement unveiling that her father chose to die for a cause, rather than go back home to his family. The principal's sobbing declared an inner grief that the Palestinian society has, a grief that is not specifically marked by gender. He cried over the children left to fend without a father, he cries for the other children in his school that have faced or will face the same dilemma. He weeps because he cannot explain a cruel reality to a child, who bluntly and logically so, states that a country's love trumps a fatherly love. His tears show that the country and martyrdom are the real children of the Palestinian men. Comprehensively, this depicts how martyrdom is a weighted concept in that society, and how it is held above all else, like the most esteemed of things. Taha also portrays a specific type of mourning here, one that goes along the same lines of mourning that Antigone goes through. Taha, here, through blaming her father, does not believe in dying for any political or national movement, Antigone also wanted space for personal and familial mourning instead of a "politicization" of the dead fighter. Taha reinforces her role as the martyr's daughter, the role that was imposed on the whole family. The image she

depicts when she expresses her astonishment, as to how can this happen to her, suggests that the power the society handed over to her, as the martyr's daughter, was untouchable, when in fact, it wasn't. Martyrdom was a myth to Taha; it did not allow her to mourn her late father as any normal family would. When one is given that much power and importance, that individual is pushed to create an imaginary shield, hence, when this shield is broken, every preconceived thought and belief is shattered. The moment Taha got raped her shield got broken, not only because of the gruesome act which she was subjected to, but because the bubble that was formed by the society's perception of martyrdom, broke:

He left a young twenty-seven-year-old woman and four girls. The eldest is me and the youngest is eight months old. Without any family, without any relatives. Everyone was in Palestine, and we were in Beirut, strangers left alone. On the day where I felt most violated and insulted, he wasn't there for me. (p. 17)

Her mourning transcends the fact that she was grieving over him, and moves over into the territory of mourning herself, mourning the role she was given and the role that was imposed upon her: "One day, I woke up from sleep devastated, and I decided that today is my funeral!" (p. 17). Taha here steps into the territory of personal grief and steps out of the territory of obligated social mourning, as does Antigone with her situation of living death that she frequently evokes in her monologues:

"Courage! Live your life. I gave myself to death, long ago, so I might serve the dead." (630-631)

"There – at last you've touched it, the worst pain the worst anguish!
Raking up the grief for father three times over ... Such, such were my

parents, and I their wretched child. I go to them now, cursed, unwed, to share their home – I am a stranger! O dear brother ... your dying drags me down to death alive.” (947-58)

The situation of living death is not the only mirroring aspect between *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* as the concept of trauma and its connection resurfaces with the fragmented form of the drama. The jumping between the unchronological scenes, and the sudden flashbacks and flash-forwards present the drama as fragmented rather than continuous objective memory, which, in turn, reflect signs of trauma that are coupled with the concepts of martyrdom in *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* Female mourning is further complicated and constrained by the expectations set within the martyr’s family. Another continual theme would be that the persona of the deceased in both *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* seems to delve itself into the realm of the unreal, due to the absence of the burial. Antigone’s brother and Raeda’s father both died in wartimes, and to their adversaries they are both part of a rival cause, they were not targeted for their own action, but rather for them representing a larger cause. In *Precarious Life*, Butler states that: “If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never “were,” and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness” (p. 33). Polynices was considered a traitor to the Creon’s rule, and Ali Taha, a terrorist to the Israeli occupation regime, similar to Butler’s analysis regarding Iraqi, Afghan, and Palestinian lives – basically anyone opposing the United States – and how their whole being was not considered “real”, thus not worthy of a burial, however still holding

weight due to them being symbols of a larger fear, a threat to the opposing side. This notion holds weight in both the ancient Greek and the contemporary Palestinian plays. Another duality present in both plays is the male perspective and take on the female mourning; Taha specifically deals with that when talking about her mother and her experiences during the mourning period. Her mother was twenty-seven when Ali Taha died, so she was exposed to a form of degradation. “No my love, No Nidal’s mother. Not red nail polish! You are a martyr’s wife now” (p. 20).⁶ This form of intimidation was made by people that were surrounding the family. Taha mentions that these people were not family or even friends, but individuals who supported the cause Ali Taha died for, and thus felt entitled to make remarks as to how the family of the martyr should act and carry themselves in light of the tragedy. The mother was also preyed on by the men who were previously Ali’s close friends. During the play, Taha speaks of an incident that happened to her mother using her voice:

When the house started to get empty, a couple of men were still there under the false pretense of being there for me in the time of my grief. I was numb taking one pill after the other, one pill after the other. He approached me in a loud confident voice: “Palestine needs of us sacrifice and patience. Jaffa cannot be free without armed struggle, but still I cannot decide whether the color of your eyes is a shade of green or hazel? And your hair, is that color natural? I have never seen olive colored skin as beautiful and smooth as yours. This life must continue, the march is long, but a young woman as stunning as you should move on with her life. Anything you dream of at night, I will grant it for you in the day. Revolution requires blood, and the little girls I will hold them in my eyes.” And his eyes stared on at my breasts. (p. 27)

⁶ “Nidal’s mother”: Mothers in Arab and Middle Eastern societies are usually referred to by “Mother of” proceeded by the name of their eldest son or daughter, if the mother only has girls.

Even though the quote is a conscious critique of the situation she was placed in, it depicts the female as the object of a male gaze, even in tragic circumstances where usually such behavior is considered unethical. The fact that Taha's mother was subject to such harassment only weeks after her husband passed away depicts how the patriarchy is present and dominant, it shows how women are belittled and disrespected even at their times of grief. The interplay the man uses in his speech of jumping from phrases of patriotism and nationalism to inappropriate lyrical flirtation depicts a worrisome narrative of how men, in that society particularly, do not draw any boundaries regarding their desire, even if in such a situation. The male gaze becomes so ubiquitous and transparent that it surfaces in such delicate situations, the male gaze becomes a truly patriarchal gaze in light of this specific female mourning instance. In *Antigone*, Creon uses this sort of sexist language as well:

Anarchy – show me a greater crime in all the earth! She, she destroys cities, rips up houses, breaks the ranks of spearmen into headlong rout ... Never let some woman triumph over us. Better to fall from power, if fall we must, at the hands of a man – never be rated inferior to a woman, never. (751-761)

Here in that specific instance, Taha's mother does not portray the strength of the grieving woman, and does not embody its characteristics, she succumbs to society's pressure and remains idle and true to the oppressed image of the "martyr's woman". Contrary to later on in the play where Taha's mother undergoes an evolution of role, and portrays a different attitude towards the mourning. She no longer was the grieving broken woman:

Ali is in the morgue and has been for two years, they aren't willing to return the corpse." The news hit me like lightning, and suddenly I screeched. I started to dream of him at night, whispering to me: "Fathiyye, I am cold... Fathiyye get me out of here... So you, the girls, and I can go back to Jerusalem. Come on, let's go back home so we could pick the figs from the fig tree! Get me out of here, get me out of here! (p. 39)

After that instant, Fathiyye poses a change, in her mourning, in her attitude towards her society and in her stance regarding her husband's death and the causes behind it. Nonetheless, an emphasis on returning the body stays intact as Khalil and Abu Rabia explain the importance of the corpse, "The dead body of a Palestinian becomes a medium for maintaining various societal, religious, institutional and political structures and systems, thus imbuing the body with social and political significance" (p. 14), however, the idea behind the death was rejected by Fathiyye. She no longer accepted martyrdom and extreme self-sacrificing nationalism, that was idolized and considered the utmost honor in her society:

Years later, my mom and I were sitting in an hour of refection and she told me: "I wish you father sold radish for a living, and wasn't a fighter." I was utterly surprised so I told her: "Where have all the heroic stories you used to tell us about gone? Supposedly these were your words: Your father was a hero, this isn't the first operation he participates in. Your father organized all Palestinian operations, your father was the Arab Nationalist movement. Your father was the most important individual in the business of forged passports. When your father used to disappear, even I wouldn't recognize him. (p. 23)

Taha's mother wishes her husband's profession was not what it had been, in other words, she rejects the idea of nationalism and the honor that is enlisted with martyrdom. For her, having her husband and the father of her children near her is more important than the country's cause he was fighting for and eventually died for, regardless if it meant that the honor and praise for the family's name would no longer be. An ideological conflict between kinship and politics is made visible here by the representation of a politicized form of female mourning, which is precisely the fundamental conflict running throughout *Antigone*. Although two diverse imageries from different paradigms, Antigone and Taha unite in the same female mourning paradigm. They both refuse to undertake the gender role given to the women of the deceased, and in turn, they shape it and morph it into a position of power, strength and reaffirmation of life. Their attitudes towards death and tragedy change from the idolization of the deceased to a confirmation of their existence. They both extended the titles of "the martyr's daughter/sister" that serve to only limit their position and their role, and contributed to changing the rules and borrowing the heroic roles given to the deceased.

When it comes to the type of female mourning I have analyzed in the previous chapters, a common denominator would be the assertion Antigone and Raeda Taha portrayed in their mourning styles. The rituals or memoirs they engaged in did not seek to merely pay respects to the deceased, but it held a certain political message. Antigone represented the woman standing against the state, and drew up many political conversations, which I have discussed in parallel to Butler's ideas in *Antigone's Claim* and *Precarious Life*. In *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* the circumstances

that surrounded Raeda Taha's father's death were indelibly politicized, and Taha continues the discussion regarding that by going into the politics of mourning and how her surrounding and atmosphere was affected by the politics that were imposed on them as the women of the family. Her mourning was influenced by performance that was embedded in her political surroundings, being the daughter of an important political figure, thus being held responsible for her behavior. A certain type of acting was required of Taha and her family, connecting to Dwight Conquergood's theory in the *Politics of Performance* plane of analysis, the theory that positioned his work within a larger framework in the multidisciplinary field of performance studies. Many scholars testify to how "deep and thoroughly multiple currents in the field were anticipated, and are still contextualized, by the depth and breadth of [Conquergood's] work" (Hamera, 805). With his work aiming to operate largely outside the conformist trajectories of academic discourse, his core contributions to the field cease to tie themselves to the performance studies field only, and evolve beyond that. Hamera concurs to that, in stating that his work "crossed multiple disciplinary boundaries and included literary and cultural studies, communication and rhetorical studies, folklore, performance and theater studies both broadly and narrowly constructed, anthropology, urban studies and urban policy" (p. 805). Keeping in mind the role Raeda wished to portray throughout the play and how her identity morphed all along the story in coordination with what was happening, Conquergood believes that "identity is more like a performance in process than a postulate, premise, or originary principle" (p. 185). This specific theory is heavily influenced by Victor Turner's work which he believed opened up "space in ethnography for performance, to move the field away from preoccupations with universal system, structure, form and towards practices, people, and performances" (p. 187).

Conquergood adds to Turner's theory that the discourse of drama and performance gave a means of viewing people as actors who innovatively "play, improvise, interpret, and re-present roles and scripts" (p.187). Taha does that, not only through transforming her story of mourning to a one woman theatrical production, but also in how she portrays her grief through the narrative style of the short stories or flashbacks throughout *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* Mourning becomes performance when it takes on a social and political take rather than a personal one. The conceptual lens of performance is deeply grounded in Taha's mourning of her father the martyr and her assertion of womanhood – that was compromised at certain points – through the creative and eloquent expression of life and her struggle to find meaning in the death that rocked her family. These are the characteristics of the performance-sensitive research Turner conducted with emphasis on "social drama and cultural performance" (p. 187).

Conquergood's influences in the area of *Politics of Performance* greatly suggests his breaking of the said boundaries in the previous paragraph, as to connect the performance studies to dialogues and dissertations outside the theater. In *Politics of Performance*, Conquergood asks these following questions: "What is the relationship between performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination?"

In light of the close reading of Taha's *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* presented in this chapter, I would like to propose some concrete answers to these

questions. The answers in turn help prepare for the wider cultural contexts in which mourning and performance are analyzed in the next and final chapter:

1. What is the relationship between performance and power?

Raeda Taha induces power through the performance she portrays in her mourning. Through everything that happened to her and her family, she depicted resilience and defiance in every situation. The monologue in and of itself, as an expression of her tragic experience, is considered power.

2. How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology?

The idea behind *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* is not merely a story of death, mourning, and martyrdom, it seeks to challenge the ideology of idolization of the martyr. Taha does so in many instances where she contemplates the fact that all the fame and power that comes with having a martyr in the family, is worth it or not. Ideologies and beliefs in the Palestinian society are clearly critiqued throughout the play especially in instances where her mother is required to behave in a certain way.

3. How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony/ accommodate and contest domination?

In the instance where Raeda tells the story of how her mother was verbally harassed by the men that were considered her father's friend in his own funeral. Retelling the incident of the sexual objectification through the performance resisted the hegemony that was very much abundant in their time and social

circle as Taha states. Nevertheless, she reproduced the hegemony through the actual reproduction of the occurrence, and her affirmation that this sort of behavior is very much prevalent as the “women of the martyr” are preyed upon, seen as fragile, and in need of constant help.

One can begin to perceive in how these dramatic specifics answer to dynamics in Palestinian society in a comparable manner. The theatrical elements of performativity as described by Conquergood, as presented in this question-and-answer format, complement factors and occurrences in Taha’s play in an almost identical manner. Each question draws attention to these dynamics as analyzed through the more chronological and thematic treatment of the play in the previous sections of this chapter. Another key perception is the similarity in how the ideas formulated apply to *Antigone* as well, supporting the value of a comparative reading even where the textual connection is superficially faint. Starting with its tackling of the relationship between performance and power, the monologue Taha performs is almost parallel to Antigone’s in its notions of the politics of female mourning and the stance the heroines take. The inquiry that further probes into how performance reproduces, enables, sustains, challenges, subverts, critiques, and naturalizes ideology, as well, can be related to Antigone’s discourse in how her whole performance and actions have stood as a challenge to Creon’s patriarchal rule, and the following question, that takes into consideration a double view of performance with regards to resisting hegemony and accommodating domination, can also be a follow up for this question of performance reproducibility in the logic of contestation. These answers and connections bridge performativity and performance with female mourning in both Taha and Antigone’s accounts. This bridging can also be

extended: these ideas about the performativity of female mourning have a relevance beyond the scope of formal theater itself, within cultural and social practices that widen the contexts, structures, and interpretative potential of the questions.

IV. SHI'A MOURNING RITUALS: EXISTENCE AS REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

They were all gathered on the balcony with their faces painted perfectly to achieve the mural of a “natural” look. If one were to look at them from afar, they all looked like each other in some way, their garments were all-black and each one of them had their manes perfectly flowing. The loud hum of their voices as they chattered on the eleventh floor tempered with what could be heard from the honking sounds and buzz of Beirut down below. Huddled in a group smoking their cigarettes their loud cheery noises were suddenly cut short by a small girl, also dressed in all black: “Mama, they’ve started!” The once smiling faces turned serious the moment all the women sat on the couches. The lighting was dimmed and the salon suddenly resembled a scene from a play, with props approximating the battle scene from Karbala, and precipitously her voice pierced through the room as the chant commenced. Once the tears started flowing, a harmonious picture was painted. The women nodded together, teared up together, and smiled together, as the speaker went through the story of the massacre of Imam Hussayn and his family. It was both surreal and organic to witness the interchangeability of the dynamics of the balcony to the dynamics in this room. The housewives of upper and upper-middle classes of Beirut, turned into seven Antigones right in the heart of Jnah, an affluent mostly-Shi’a neighborhood in the capital, only to turn back once the performance ended.

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Female mourning is not only a subject of interest in theatrical and literary studies, but also in cultural studies and anthropology. Lebanon is an example of a

country where politics, culture, and religious are complexly fused together, in the sense where the three become inseparable in certain instances. A community where this triad is strongly present is Lebanon's Shi'a community, and in this chapter I will look at how the narrative of female mourning conditions social performance in ways related to, but obviously, distinct from the two theatrical texts discussed in the previous chapters. I will take into account the culturally situated practices of female mourning in the contemporary Middle East, focusing on Shi'a mourning rituals in Lebanon. Starting off with developing on the analogy made in the previous chapter between *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* as a pairing of theatrical texts, one of them an ancient narrative of feminine mourning and the other a contemporary adaptation that both unlock an inherent liberatory power in its representation of mourning, and the condition of Ashoura commemoration in Lebanon: again, a set of practices that refers to an ancient and traditional narrative that in a specific geo-cultural context is being transformed into renewed forms and modes that potentially contain anti-oppressive and women-empowering elements. I will be using modern performance studies, gender studies, and ethnography to validate and give analytic depth to the specific analysis of Ashoura in a way that theatrical readings has prepared for, and then the handling of the theory. Concluding with the discussion of contemporary Lebanese Ashoura in relation to important elements of performance and gender studies. Although the distance between contexts is relatively far, the purpose of constructing such a hybrid argument is depicting the shift from the critical representation contained in drama to a critique of broader cultural practices within a specific community and context. This turn from literary texts to social performativity nevertheless keeps in view three diverse types of continuity: that of literary genre, as disclosed by the juxtaposition of the following

theatrical texts against each other, *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali*; of the intersection of gender role, and performativity; and of provenance, through the intersection of the literary texts of both the plays and the documentations of the actual modern-day cultural experiences of female Shi'a mourning. The political undertones of Antigone's wail can still be heard and are still relevant in the cultural space of Ashoura, as well as in the theater of Taha.

The idea of a modern-day majalis emerges from Ashoura. The day of Ashoura falls on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, and it commemorates a day of mourning of Imam Hussayn ibn Ali and his family who were slaughtered in the Battle of Karbala for power and for the leadership of the Muslim community. As Prophet Muhammad's grandson and direct descendant, Imam Hussayn insisted on his leadership role of the Muslim community, however, when trouble arose with Yazid, another claimer to the throne, he, along with a group of his supporters, fled Medina to take refuge in Mecca. Pinault (1999) recounts the events as follows:

Within a short time the Imam's group was intercepted in the desert by the Umayyad forces at an isolated site known as Karabala, on the south bank of the Euphrates. Here at Katbala, from the second to the tenth day of the month of Muharram, in the year 61 of the Hijrah (A.D. 680), Husayn's entourage was besieged, harried by enemy archers, suffering torments of thirst, prevented by the Umayyad horsemen from reaching the water of the Euphrates. Ubaydallah's soldiers called on Husayn to surrender and acknowledge the sovereignty of the caliph Yazid Husayn refused. (p. 287).

Among the people that fled with Imam Hussayn was his sister, Zaynab, who held the first mourning majlis in imprisonment in the caliph Yazid's palace. Zaynab led a modest life and although her husband Abdullah ibn Ja'far was a wealthy man, they donated most of their riches to charity. She was said to have been a leading role model in women's life even while she was alive. Bilgrami (1986) states that Zaynab conducted assemblies for other women to help them study the Quran and gain more knowledge about their religion. According to one of her biographies, *The Victory of Truth*, she empowered other women by leaving space for discussion and contemplation, rather than blindly advocating for the religion with no provision of background knowledge and basis. When distress surfaced with her brother, she made the decision to support him and flee with him. During the battle, Zaynab was among the women who were captured immediately and were forced to watch the massacre. Ever since the day of the Battle of Karbala, she performed a mourning ritual on the tenth day of Muharram, now known as Ashoura, every year for as long as she lived. What is interesting about the battle of Karbala is the weight and importance given to the female figures that played important socio-religious and political parts in the historical such as Zaynab and Hind, the wife of the Umayyad caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, who herself ordered the killing of Imam Hussayn. When the caliph decided to free the women, after being impressed by Zaynab's defiance and stance against oppression, she was the individual who took leadership of the group. So for Shi'a women she was the epitome of what Karbala's massacre taught them: family and strength. It was a great honor for a woman to portray both these ideals in this community.

The history of Islam, the second most followed religion in the world, is complex, diverse, and involves the many different contexts in which Muslims have lived.

Stepping into that realm that is defined by cultural traditions, socio-economic factors, political configurations, and of course history, for early Muslims, one of the most pivotal problems, among all the different factors, was authority and leadership, after the Prophet passed away. Taking that part of history into account, the martyrdom of Hussayn was received as a great injustice by all, but especially to the Shi'a community was a colossal tragedy. When we speak of tragedy, we immediately contemplate on what feelings it brings forth. Especially in the case of the murder of Imam Hussayn, the injustice caused to his people could only be healed with retribution. Then, the tragedy here yields a moral order, even if indirectly, because it seeks to exorcise the negative feelings developed by the tragedy itself through the fulfilling of justice. Aristotle speaks of a similar exorcism, in which the actions in a tragedy through scenes of pity and fear bring about the "catharsis" of these emotions. Therefore, due to the allowance and normalization of this "catharsis" during the month after Imam Hussayn was killed, Ashoura is now one of the most well-known tragedies in Shi'a Islam, As tragedy is in literature the sorrowful events that occur to the heroic figure, the massacred and heroic Imam Hussayn ibn Ali and his family are still to this present day venerated on the day of Ashoura through lamentation and oration. Although it is mainly adopted by Shi'a communities, the grieving month of Ashoura is not limited to a certain sect, as Imam Ali was Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law: "Shia and non-Shia alike agree on the broad outline of the historical events commemorated in the annual liturgies of Muharram" (Pinault, p. 286). The majalis exercised to this day adopt the same flow and form of "honoring the dead" as did Zaynab in Ashoura, and accordingly Shi'a women

were believed to have the “Sitt Zaynab flair”⁷ in majalis practices in our present day, merely because of their gender, and were recruited to be orators at the majlis because of so. Women were cast into a certain gender identity due to historical occurrences based on oral tradition, that may or may not be accurate. Halevi (2004) prods into that ambiguity as she states:

In the light of considerations of this sort, scholars of Islam have questioned the reliability of the oral tradition and consequently its worth as a source for historical inquiry. Two distinct approaches have emerged. The first, developed by skeptical-empiricists argues 'that the components of the Islamic tradition are secondary constructions, the history of which we are not invited to pursue: they simply have to be discarded'. The second approach, of skeptical-subjectivists, presents history not as a science (based exclusively on verifiable events), but as a 'gamble on probabilities' the object of which is to select judiciously 'those reports that seemed most reliable' due to their apparent lack of bias. (p. 9)

Based on the two approaches that Halevi mentions, oral tradition in Islam can be interpreted in a different way than what is prevalent, and with an opportunity for interpretation in place, a detachment from the rigid gender roles, that seem to only target women, can transpire. The approaches can also be advanced and challenged further to adopt a focus on the “final destination” of the oral traditions that prompted female mourning and the current socio-cultural and political functions of it, rather than the origin. Another notion Halevi tackles is the socio-cultural reactions of the state to

⁷ Referred to Shi'a women as they are considered descendants of Sitt Zaynab, who pioneered the majalis and was the ultimate role model to the community. Every time a woman was recruited to be a speaker in a majlis, she was compared to her.

female mourning, which one cannot help but notice that they recall similar tensions and political intervention in the history of ancient Athens:

In the new Islamic order, traditional acts of mourning such as crying out loudly, throwing dust on one's head, and tearing of one's hair appeared abhorrent, and were proscribed. 'An invocation of woe and destruction' seemed tantamount to obscenity. 'The plaintive groan and the snort', claimed Muslim pietists, 'came from the devil'. By wailing, they admonished, women risked exposing Muslims' homes to evil... In their rationale, wailing comprised an act of complaining against the judgement of God, a manner of rebelling with exasperation against His decree. (p. 13)

With that being noted, one might ask: Why would Islamic pietists find a woman's laments belligerent and offensive? With a closer reading of books of oral traditions, compiled mostly by male scribes, can a connection be drawn to the gender role attributed to female mourning? A sense of similar dynamic in which political authorities appear to fear something destabilizing in female mourning emerges, similar to *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Some Like You Ali?* as a pairing of theatrical texts. Even though different in nature as one is an ancient narrative of feminine mourning and the other a contemporary adaptation, when placed in homology with the condition of Ashoura commemoration in Lebanon, also an ancient and traditional narrative, they both unravel an intrinsic power in the representation of female mourning. Even when women are denoted in Shi'a mourning rituals, they have only been portrayed with relation to the anguish and distress of their male kin and how their lives become difficult and unbearable only due to the absence of the men, a circumstance strongly consonant with other texts discussed in this study. The discussion surrounding the theatrical texts in the

previous chapters revolved around and concluded with the emancipation of society's shackles through the power emitted by female mourning, and keeping Antigone's monologues and Taha's one-woman play in mind, Ashoura commemoration will also be altered to become a reintroduced set of anti-oppressive and women-empowering practices.

Mourning majalis are practiced all over the world and do not pertain to one country alone. The cultural significance of Shi'a female mourning specifically in Lebanon, however, carries quite a weight due to political and cultural effects. Deeb (2005) in her article comments on the evolution of Ashoura and mourning: "In Lebanon, Ashura commemorations have undergone a transformation in recent decades, from a ritual focused on mourning to one highlighting Islamic activism. This transformation accompanied the Lebanese Shi'i Islamic mobilization that began in the late 1960s. Motivated in part by the marginalized position of many Shi'is in the Lebanese nation-state, this movement involved multiple strains and was continually catalyzed by a series of events, most notably the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon that ended in May 2000" (p. 123). The mourning and the majalis ceased to be merely practices carried out to commemorate the Imam, they have turned into shouts of dominance and an assertion of existence, reminding us of Antigone's defiance of the state through her earth-shattering set of physical and verbal acts, and Taha's one-woman march on the oppressive politics of mourning in a Palestinian family that seemed to target the females only. Conquergood in *Rethinking Ethnography* (1991) addresses this kind of dynamic in general terms: "Particularly for ... marginalized people ... cultural performance becomes the venue for 'public discussion' of vital issues central to their communities, as well as an arena for gaining visibility and staging their identity" (p.

189). Deeb's reference to the "Lebanese Shi'i Islamic mobilization" covers a series of movements and conflicts that began with Sayyid Musa al-Sadr in the 1960s and sustained after his disappearance under the leadership of political party Haraket Amal. With all the political strife, a new cultural phenomenon was born. As October nears, certain neighborhoods in Lebanon witness masses dressed in black, as a prop of sadness over the month, and banners are placed up to identify the holiness of the month, and staying true to the "culture performance and public discussion" Conquergood speaks of. This is not technically referring that Ashoura is a play, but there are certain elements that give rise to the dramatic essence to it: the melodramatic dialogue reenacted, the elements of exaggeration, the passion play, and poetry reading during the parades. Ashoura is an ancient plotline with a tragic outcome; it follows the structure of a narrative in which it has a beginning, a climax, and an end. Theatrical techniques, which mirror those used in dramas in terms of props, following a script, acting out ancient roles, are used in the Ashoura procession rituals and the passion play. The methods used expressly stimulate and stir the spectators' feelings and emotions through the embellishment, and perhaps amplification, of what the people at Karbala actually endured. Ashoura's ceremonial and dramatic elements operate in an organized spectrum on an interrelated basis, because without the ceremonial feature of the ritual, the theatrical and dramatic features would be less effective, and vice versa. The two facets are equally important to complete the performance and deliver its intended effect. Taking into account the evolution of Ashoura from historic orators mediating the conversations and telling the story to a written narrative report of the death of Imam Hussayn. Once this "script" was in hand, a more visual approach was to be taken. And so, the rites of remembrance starting developing from small groups of people huddled

around an orator to public mourning marches containing thousands of people - or a small get-together in a friend's home as in the anecdote at the start of this chapter; a spectacle meant to perform what they were feeling. All the demonstrations of passion, including the crying, chest-pounding, theatrical illustrations of the Karbala battle, all play a vigorous role in upholding the performance. This recital puts an amplified spotlight on the Shi'a identity, the Sitt Zaynab flair, and the collective memory of the people. What is especially interesting in this is the newly emergent female role in this culture drama. This theatrical ritual epitomizes lamentation and grief for the deceased, but also for depicts an instigating power that female mourning exudes, with the spirited standpoints used as means to put into motion the shakedown of the normative and patriarchal socio-political scope. Previously, females were not welcomed to exercise this sort of performance activism outside the majalis, for it was considered an obligation that was due and would end there, which was odd considering the first ever majlis to be performed was by a female. Recently however, many women have been actively playing out roles they formerly were kept from. As Imam Hussayn was an "idealized role model of piety" (p. 123) for Shi'a men, and Zaynab portrayed that for the women as well. Thus, the concept of mourning for Shi'a women ceased to be just for the occasion, whether it be death or Ashoura remembrance, it has been transformed to a platform that translates the importance of shifting roles in the culture more generally and how they affirm it. Deeb views this sort of affirmation as activism: "As Ashura is applied to contemporary life, pious Shi'i women's emulation of Zaynab as an activist rather than a passive mourner is especially significant, because it is reflected in a major shift in the levels of women's public participation in this particular community in Lebanon" (p. 123). Another example of the newly emerged female role is portrayed by

D'souza (2014) in her book, *Partners of Zaynab: A Gendered Perspective of Shia Muslim Faith*, where she claims that women are not simple followers of men's religious ideologies and practices, but are rather functional in fashioning their own comprehension of Shi'a religious piety that is expressed through their own demarcated mourning ritual performances. D'souza also states that these type of rituals yield to an "exclusive space" for women to exercise "autonomy, leadership, and authority within their community."

The exclusive spaces of the mourning rituals were viewed by women as a chance to perform a lecture, a chance to teach the young women attending (majalis are usually gender separated), a chance to truly decipher Zaynab's role. The mourning became a way to open young souls to what women in their culture are representing and how they should serve as role models, resembling the Shi'a women's "descendent" and gender identity. Butler's (1990) argument in *Gender Trouble*, claims that gender identity is not inherent essence, but is constructed through repetitive acts of performance of gender, "which are internally discontinuous ... [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief". Butler here provides the notion infrastructure of expanding performance from specific theatrical texts (like *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* and *Antigone*) to the social concept of performativity (the social and cultural aspects of Sitt Zaynab's historical mourning role in the Shi'a community). Butler refuses the idea of an "inner core or essence", and claims that acts are not performed by the subject at hand, but they performatively establish a subject that is the

result of the discussion rather than the trigger: “that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (p. 136). Butler reinforced the idea that there is no agent that intentionally and consciously performs its gender, because the gendered body is undividable from the acts that comprise it. Building upon Butler’s framework, one can pose specific questions that explore the performative nature of Shi’a female mourning: Do these women innately have the “Sitt Zaynab flair” or is their society forcing this status upon them and, consequently are fitted and molded into having it, resulting in a sort of performance? Sitt Zaynab’s flair encodes a kind of gendered performance that carries a historical and cultural memory and function but is also constraining, creating an inflexible dimension of the role and a definition of mourning behavior along with a social expectation to conform. Butler also argues that “the act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that’s been going on before one arrived on the scene”. The performers or participants in this case are the women acting out Zaynab’s persona in their mourning practices, the effect created seeks the purpose of reminding the audience of the tragedy, thus instigating the feelings of grief. However, the formulation in Butler’s statement, “an act that’s been going on before one arrived on the scene,” is crucial to the logic I am attempting to uncover; these women did not create this act, they were obligated into it under the reason that it was Zaynab’s purpose and role in the Karbala battle, and in the sense that she is the ideal role model to Shi’a women. In the mourning majalis, women that are not crying or participating are shamed, that is precisely why the quality of the female performer recruited is valued in order to incite these feelings in the audience. This process brings upon a generation of women that have witnessed the repeated act and are expected to fall in the steps of it. The female mourner is interpellated into the

heroic role that society molded for her, because of an old tale interpreted and handed down by generations of “male scriptors” (Halevi p. 12). That’s how the idea of performance (of theatrical nature) extends into a social concept of performativity; the performance, which is when women are made to adopt a mourning role created by a script, encompasses into a social concept of performativity in how, with time, women molded that role to suit themselves and their own interpretative versions of Sitt Zaynab role. Part of the gender role is reproducing gender performance either by example or teaching. Deeb questions a woman during one of the mourning rituals and her take on the matter was the following:

Before they would present Sayyida Zaynab as crying, screaming, wailing, but, no, Zaynab set the stage . . . for revolution against tyranny. She didn’t mourn Husayn but thought how to save the rest and how to keep his message going. She was imprisoned, and yet she stood up with all confidence and spoke her point of view instead of feeling defeated. This changed our lives, we are now ashamed to feel weak, or to feel sorrow. Whenever we are faced with a problem, we remember the words, and feel shamed if we complain. No, we instead feel strong and deal with it and move on. (p. 127)

These women reversed the expected gender role; they defeated the perception that was set by this historical character into another portrayal that was also inspired by the same historical character, except this time the women did that and were not handed any rules. The re-appropriation of a central cultural figure for a new context and history was happening, and still is. All bodies are considered to be gendered from the start of their social presence or manifestation in society, however, in this specific case the Shi’a women used the same social presence that situated them in a certain rigid gender role

and morphed it into a more updated one, as per Butler's claim in *Gender Trouble*:

A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (p. 33)

Even when deconstructing Zaynab's role, she most definitely appears as the "protagonist par excellence" who had her mother's fortitude and her father's fervent tongue bequeathed upon her, as Deeb and Chelkowski talked about. The interpretation of Zaynab's behavior altered when these women started taking the podium and performing, orating, and lecturing in these majalis, performing a set of repeated acts. Mourning rituals turned into classrooms, they turned into workshops, into therapy sessions, the grief was renovated by these Shi'a women into a bigger notion with cultural impact. The grief was not erased from this formula; however, Zaynab's elucidation of tears was changed. Her reason to hold that majlis after the Imam was massacred ceased to be merely for mourning purposes, it was still important to mourn him, but her motive was to inspire other women to be able to hold that role, and teach the upcoming generations what had happened and what can be done to learn from the Imam's deeds. Deeb states that "This reinterpretation has had major ramifications for the lives and community participation of pious Shi'i women, allotting to them a responsibility for public welfare parallel to that of men" (p. 127). The participation of these women became increasingly noticeable when they were being seen in the public demonstrations and "masirat,"⁸ as opposed to previously only being present in private

⁸ Arabic word for public marches that usually happen in Ashoura. These marches are a more publicized version of a majlis.

majalis limited to women only. In the public marches, the women and the girls would be dressed in the long black robes and head veils, organized in age, led by a leader who is usually the woman chanting the elegies. Photographs of martyrs or sometimes a deceased family member were held by the women with flowered wreaths, serving as “an apt symbolic representation of the reverberations of Zaynab’s example in the lives of pious women” (p. 129). What was also particularly striking was that the women were not crying, on the other hand, they were mourning through their chants and their words, which resonates with what Sayyid Muhammad Hussayn Fadlullah, who was a prominent Shi’a Sheikh, stated (translated by Deeb): “Too much crying leads to personalities who cry - the Shi’a will become equated with crying, the Shi’a will take on crying as a cultural trait, and this is not a good thing, it is wrong. Emotions are necessary, but they should be understood as a way of arriving at learning the lesson of Hussayn. The heart should be used to reach the head, not as an endpoint in and of itself” (p. 130). The act of mourning hence did not equate to crying, the women represented grief and emotions in another light, they utilized this type of mourning to reach the heads’ of the people, not just their hearts, which strikes a similar rhetorical and communal tone with both *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* The mourning serves more than just grief, but also a larger purpose of translating a certain message that Antigone and Taha wanted to reach people. Here, another discourse around female Shi’a mourning emerges, one that does not solely depend on the flagellation or the excessive crying and wailing, on the contrary it represents the interpreted message of freedom and insightfulness, as Deeb states, “When the myths were stripped away and only the authentic historical record remained, the liberatory message of Ashura was highlighted” (p. 131). As I mentioned previously, the whole

event ceases to be in the honor of the “halo of the martyr”, it takes a step beyond that and forms another theme.

Deeb, in her ethnographic study, met with Hajjeh Fatima who was a practicing female mourner in the majalis. When asked by Deeb about her interpretation of the mourning rituals, her answer was the following:

They [the *majalis*] remind us also that there is always something called the oppressor and something called the oppressed. And this history always repeats itself, throughout all the eras, there was never a time when there wasn't an oppressor and people who were oppressed ... So the remembrance of Ashura reminds us of this always, so that we will never forget ... that people should always have the spirit of revolution against oppression, in all its faces, no matter what its identity ... Oppression doesn't have a specific identity, it is general, it exists all over the world, in all the confessions, in all the religions, it is not limited. People should have this spirit of revolution against oppression because time repeats itself, history repeats itself, and in every age, there is injustice. (p. 132)

Focusing on one sentence that resonates with the theoretical framework I am proposing, “oppression doesn't have a specific identity”, meaning oppression is not only a tyrant, it also might be a gender role, or a patriarchal society, or a woman being limited to certain conversations and places which aligns with Butler's theory of gender performativity. The oppression that these mourning rituals depict can be attributed to anything, and so the shift in the meaning of Ashoura from a month where Shi'a mourning rituals were born to the revolution against oppression suggests a parallel shift in perception of this cultural phenomenon, and hence shifted the characteristic attributed

to female mourning. Mourning rituals modeled after the massacre do not only represent the Imam, but they also represent every single individual that has been subjected to injustice, and having the females take a lead on this claim has been revolutionary for this specific community and the changes it entailed in its culture. The latter notion also poses a connection to the plays in the sense that *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* have also been interpreted in generalized and individualized terms.

The role of the Shi'a female mourner has transcended all expectations, from a model in which women were not even allowed to be in the public demonstrations, to the point where women are now leading majalis and chanting along to the song of fighting and strength. How two topics like mourning and feminism activism surpass each other and merge into each other is distinguished here, but only if we allow it to be as Butler states in *Precarious Life*: "Indeed, and international coalition of feminist activists and thinkers – a coalition that affirms the thinking of activists and the activism of thinkers and refuses to put them into distinctive categories that deny the actual complexity of the lives in question – will have to accept the array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency that bring us into activism" (p. 48). With us reaching out into feminism activism and allowing those field to merge, we can thus move into highlighting the specific gender role as crucial to the topic of female mourning in the Arab world, for several reasons; first, one of the most talked about and most practiced form of stylized mourning is Shi'a mourning; second, emphasizing the culture specificity in Lebanon projects intriguing topics since the phenomenon of Shi'a mourning has been a controversial, yet captivating, notion that has grasped many scholars and ethnographers' attention due to its uniqueness and

specificity. One might think this cultural sensation is limited only to Shi'a dominated areas like the suburbs of Beirut or South Lebanon, but even in the cosmopolitan English-language universities in Lebanon like the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University, many make the effort to wear black during Ashoura to show respect to the cause. This spread and growth of cultural awareness designates a wider public exposure to this type of mourning. Deeb talks about how Lebanese women integrated conversations about mourning rituals and details pertaining to Ashoura talks in their daily lives: "For example, sitting on the balcony one afternoon, Aziza and her neighbor discussed at length whether it could be corroborated that - as the reciter of a *majlis* the day before had depicted - Hussayn had indeed given his young daughter Ruqayya a cup before his death, telling her that it would turn black inside if he were killed. Some of these conversations were sparked by a listener's skepticism toward a specific reciter, others triggered by discord between the version of an episode recited in a *majlis* just attended and the version broadcast over the radio in the car on the way home" (p. 133). The personas of Hussayn and Zaynab were infused in the Shi'a culture and in everyday lives of the men and the women; it was as if the tragedy was a constant denominator, but instead of extracting the grief all the time, they extracted the lessons and the spirit of liberation against oppression that the story of Karbala held. Stressing particularly the women here who, letting go of the passive role of the mother/ daughter/ sister/ wife of the martyr, are instead, according to Deeb, "utilizing the salient example of Zaynab as an outspoken, strong, and compassionate activist to push the boundaries of what is acceptable and expectable for pious Lebanese Shi'i women" (p. 136). Female mourning in Shi'a mourning rituals encompasses the grief, the tragedy, and the martyrdom, but does not solely include them. The spirit of the mourning instilled by

Zaynab in Shi'a women is not merely a list of crying and wailing styles to incorporate and words to say. It is not merely passive mourning, on the contrary, Shi'a women have untied their submissive shackles and have embodied the feminist historical legacy of Zaynab. They have transformed female mourning into an inspiring bellowing sound rippling through and bringing about cultural, political and social change. Taking into consideration the palpable female roots in the majlis, we can question whether it would still endure and exist if women had not seen and responded to the events of Karbala. In other words, if women were not in the original group that traveled with Hussayn, would the tragedy of Karbala have been eternalized through other practices or, perhaps, would it have faded from recollection altogether? What is uneducatedly considered to be "backwardness" from this marginalized sect in the country turns out to be a performative tool like no other. Imam Hussayn was massacred and his cause lives on, only because Sitt Zaynab made him immortal through her stellar performance.

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Em Abbas sat in her accustomed chair on the porch in Qanarit, my southern Lebanon hometown. She adjusted her glasses and squinted her eyes at me. She was my father's seventy-year-old aunt who has never missed a majlis in the town. She is usually the go-to woman for the village's majalis preparation and logistics. Her veil pinched down under her chin, not only covering her hair but her broad shoulders and chest, as per Shi'a fashion. She wagged her tall wrinkled finger at me as the gold wreath-like ring shone in the sun, "We use her [Zaynab] way of mourning when we discipline and raise our kids, we use her way of mourning when we argue with our husbands, we use her way of mourning when we talk to our neighbors, when we talk to enemies, when we talk to ourselves. Her mourning was not for the sake of crying or wailing, it was a

scream of an affirmation of existence. She was mourning her dead brother, but she was also celebrating her alive self. She was celebrating the birth of a strong resilient Shi'i woman, a woman that was set to inspire a whole community of women after her.”

V. CONCLUSION

Through female mourning and performance studies, I have analyzed the mourning role of women in two literary texts, *Antigone* and *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali*. The analysis of these dramatic texts provided a basis for a discussion of the gender oppression encoded in the socially imposed kinds of performativity in one contemporary culture of mourning. I elaborated and focused on how the constricting and oppressive role women are placed into during mourning periods comes into question, especially when they are the kin of the deceased. I showed how Antigone and Taha have managed to break through that role and create political and social discussions through their mourning – going back to key points of mourning discussed by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* – thus defying the initial roles they were corralled into. These literary and theatrical texts offer a rich foundation within which to read the dynamic culture of mourning within the Lebanese Shi'a community. Here I analyzed the evolution of the female mourning role through practices and rituals performed by the women. I also explored female mourning in terms of performance studies in order to bring light to a new dimension of mourning; one that can be powerfully illuminated by theatrical analytical equipment, even though it is not happening on stage. Attention to female mourning within the theoretical scaffold of performance studies unlocks novel viewpoints on both female mourning and performance. Most notably perhaps, it acts to strengthen and raise an awareness of the underlying notions in female mourning, specifically focusing on the Middle East, and thus enabling a reassessment of the category of mourning as performance. I say specifically in the Middle East due because anthropological studies regarding female mourning in Arab culture remain notably few

in number, and I believe, if further research were conducted it would bring forth significant and worthwhile contributions to the scholarly fields like gender studies and performance, in parallel with the central literary critical work of this project. If this work ought to be continued, my preliminary idea would be an on-ground case-study of the sisterhood or female to female relationships in context of mourning in the Middle East, all while taking advantage of opportunities to develop the literary reception angle and the compelling need of Arab dramatists to return to *Antigone*, as director Omar Abusaada, and playwright Mohammed al-Attar did with *Antigone of Shatila*, a play where Syrian refugee women channel the tragedy of Antigone in the refugee camps Sabra, Shatila, and Burj al-Barajne in Beirut.

“I do not believe there is an end of grief. But working through grief sometimes gives us a way to let the dead be as dead. The work is hard because we must kill our desire to make them live and killing our desire often feels as if we are effectively killing them (again). This is why aggression is so crucial to psychic health” (Phelan, 171). Phelan ends *Mourning Sex* with this statement immortalizing mourning and grief, and staging the questions that haunt her: “Who knows if they [comforting stories she recites to put herself to sleep] are true? Who can know what happens after death?” Death poses itself to one of the most terrifying concepts to humankind, whether we admit it or not, the fear of the afterlife is very much present in most people. To a believer, the fear of entering eternal damnation is at stake, and to a non-believer, the fear of eternal emptiness and purposelessness is at stake. However, in the world of living, the mourning and grief that accompanies the death of individuals dear to us, can be described as eternal damnation or emptiness to some people. I would highlight Phelan’s emphasis on “working through grief”, which appears to be crucial to any mourning

process. If we allow ourselves to be completely taken away by grief, we will wither to nothing, and I have seen it happen in many people, as they die in spirit along with their loved ones. Also perhaps the idea of unawareness, of what is exactly lost, that Butler confronts in *Precarious Life*: “If I do not always know what seizes me on such occasions, and if I do not always know what it is in another person that I have lost, it may be that this sphere of dispossession is precisely the one that exposes my unknowingness, the unconscious imprint of my primary sociality. Can this insight lead to a normative reorientation for politics? Can this situation of mourning – one that is so dramatic for those in social movements who have undergone innumerable losses – supply a perspective by which to begin to apprehend the contemporary global situation?” (p. 28). Apprehending the large-scale situation as a one-way street to redirecting the politics around us and understanding them in the light of mourning, because when the portrayal of grief yields a different form where rituals are taking place, where it is being transmitted to different types of media: that is when mourning takes on a social, cultural and political meaning. Being from a Shi’a southern Lebanon village, but never having actually spent more than one week there was a source of some discouragement when I chose to take on this subject. It was something I was truly passionate about – I wanted to know more about the culture and social dynamics that unfold such a complex history. I saw a strong female mourner in each of Antigone and Raeda Taha through the orator woman from my village introduced in the anecdote at the start of the first chapter. The role of the female mourner threatens to become fixed as a wailing and crying machine, and not only have I encountered this point of view in scholarly pieces, but also in modern day life, among friends and students. Therefore, this thesis aimed to show how a woman can be the pillar of society through performance

of any ritual, even while expressing the “weakest” of emotions; crying, and through Antigone, Taha, and Sitt Zaynab, I have hopefully managed to do that. Women sometimes are forced into adapting a certain social mourning role post death, they are pressured into wearing the right length of ‘aabaya, and are obligated to shed the right amount of tears, and maintain the right crying volume. This has been shown to be a constant across Athenian legislation, Palestinian social norms, and Shi’a traditions. However, when women are rid of these shackles, they adapt mourning into something bigger than anyone could imagine; Raeda Taha managed to shatter all Palestinian beliefs about martyrdom and women affiliation with mourning in a sixty page text which features her monologue in *Where Can I Find Someone Like You Ali?* while being the only cast member. Sophocles’ *Antigone* has set the iconic path for many women as a role model of defiance against the state. Sitt Zaynab’s account of Karbala was passed down generations until our day forward, surpassing any male scripter of oral tradition. Not only in terms of historical texts recounting the battle of Karbala, but also the most prominent role she played, held its ground in the community of Lebanese Shi’a women and men, as well. Shi’a communities pay homage to the great woman behind the battle of Karbala by naming their girls after her. The transmission of her role also becomes a cultural anthem that is sung and commemorated in every occasion. Having a historical, religious figure like Zaynab births a diverse reception in the female community. Heroines like Antigone, Raeda, and Sitt Zaynab provided an entrance into the social, cultural, and political arena for the women who confront and form rebellions against patriarchal configurations in modern times. Leading by example, they challenge the current situation, and, through astute arguments, leadership behavior, and refusal to adapt to outdated beliefs, they provide strength and confidence to enter conversations

that enable the breaking of male-controlled models of power in society. Returning back to Butler's questions: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, *What makes for a grievable life?*" (p. 20), I would start at the simplest to say a life that was worth spending and observing a life that left forms of vivacity in people behind. Maybe also a life that created a ripple effect after it. But perhaps it's worth considering that it's not the aspect of what makes the life grievable that is worth looking into, but the celebratory revelations and outcomes that come after the grief.

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