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Trauma, Exile, and Cultural Displacement



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## Oikic Exile and Maternal Hauntology: Clytemnestra's Chthonic Sovereignty in the Matricidal Cosmogenesis of Greek Tragedy

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### Abstract

In Greek tragedy, Clytemnestra emerges as a controversial figure whose voice articulates a suppressed cosmology struggling against erasure. As she has been read traditionally in terms of gender inversion, revenge, and political transgression, this paper re-placed Clytemnestra, under matricidal cosmogenesis, the cultural procedure in which patriarchal order assures itself by overriding maternal and chthonic action. She represents oikic exile, the estrangement of oikos itself, and maternal hauntology, spectral recovery of the lost maternally ordered. Her nets, baths, and blood language are ritualized and claim chthonic sovereignty, a sub-power based on the underworld and sacrifice as opposed to civic law. By drawing upon linguistic analyses of *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus and Caruth, Ricoeur, Said, Derrida, Irigaray, and Cavarero, this article identifies Clytemnestra as a paradigmatic victim of trauma, alienation, and cultural estrangement.

**Keywords:** *Clytemnestra, Matricidal Cosmogenesis, Oikic Exile, Maternal Hauntology, Chthonic Sovereignty*

## Introduction

Of characters in the Greek mythology, there can be very few as Clytemnestra who runs such an amalgamation of ambivalence, terror, and fascination. Her outstanding status has been mentioned by both classical and modern critics: she is a woman with an exceptional status that disobeys the gender positioning of the polis, the perpetrator of the gender hierarchy; she is, as H. D. F. Kitto remarked (1961), “a man-minded woman” (p. 84), disruptive of the gender hierarchies; and her role is seen as a cursed avenger, the phenomenon who continues the cycle of blood revenge<sup>1</sup>; her sorrow over Iphigenia turns, to Froma Zeitlin, into a destructive sort of sovereignty<sup>2</sup>. But these readings, despite being lightning-bolts, keep us bound to items of gender reversal, vengeance, and political legitimacy, and they fail to reflect on or acknowledge the more serious philosophical and cosmological interests her character ciphers.

In this paper, Clytemnestra is reconsidered in the following light of matricidal cosmogenesis: the movement whereby the hinge of a patriarchal order entails symbolic repression of the maternal powers along with the underworld. As Ünsal Çimen has argued (2019), the overthrow of maternal principles in Greek myth—whether in Zeus’s victory over Cronus or Orestes’ matricide of Clytemnestra—constitutes not merely political reconfiguration but a foundational act in the “cosmogenic transition from cyclical, maternal time to patriarchal linearity” (p. 42). Within this genealogy, Clytemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon and her own subsequent death at her son’s hands function as episodes in a broader cultural logic of matricidal cosmogenesis, a process underwriting the very ontology of the classical world.

Clytemnestra can be seen as an example of what could be called oikic exile: displacement not that of a physical movement but of a

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<sup>1</sup> Winnington-Ingram R. P., *Studies in Aeschylus*, Cambridge UP, 1983, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Zeitlin Froma, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 63. Cf. Tripoula, I., “The Ethics of War Leadership as Seen through Ancient Greek Poetry”, *Dia-noesis*, 15, 2024, pp. 123-138, <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.38177>.

feeling of alienation both within the oikos and within the polis. Edward Said describes (2000) describes exile as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (p. 173). This division is internalized by Clytemnestra. She is still inside her palace, but she is alienated by her position as a wife, a mother, a queen, which is a part of her belonging. The anguish of this alienation is manifested in her discontinuous voice, wavering between grief, anger, and resistance, a testimonial, as described by Cathy Caruth (1996), “an event not fully owned at the time but only belatedly experienced through repetition and haunting” (p. 4)

It is this haunting where it is termed as maternal hauntology: spectralization of the maternal order in a patriarchal universe that aimed to eradicate it. In his idea of hauntology (1994), Jacques Derrida refers to the importance of repressed beings to “return as ghosts” (p. 63) and disrupt the seeming unity of the present. The images of blood, nets, baths, and movement into the underworld associated with Clytemnestra may therefore be interpreted as hauntological outbursts, the voices of a subjugated cosmology trapped in the civil space of tragedy. In this regard, she transforms into the maternal specter that rejects the possibility of erasure as she haunts both her own immediate house and the cultural imagination through the centuries.

This repetitiveness of such ritual image highlights her assertion of what it would be described as chthonic sovereignty: a source of power that does not reside in civic power or Olympian command; rather, it resides and is based in underground, ritual, and maternal aspects of the very life. In her interpretation of Lycophron’s *Alexandra*, Celsiana Warwick identifies (2018) Clytemnestra and her analogs as encoded “chthonic disruptors” (p. 91), bearers, as Celsiana Warwick puts it, of a pre-Olympian cosmology of sacrifice, ritual, and the underworld rather than of the city-state.

## Literature Review

Critical evaluation of Clytemnestra has found it hard to paint her in a single light, as scholarly opinions have ranged from different positions of gender inversion to ritual symbolism. Early critics focused on her unusual strength, depicting her as a woman

who broke gender norms by taking on male roles of authority and violence.<sup>3</sup> Feminist critics later broadened this interpretation, portraying her as both rebellious and paradoxical—simultaneously conforming to the structures of the oikos while subverting them through her usurpation of power.<sup>4</sup> Such interpretations often highlight her as a warning figure, emblematic of the dangers of female agency within a patriarchal polis.

Scholars frequently put Clytemnestra in the frame of vengeance and tragic pathos. Winnington-Ingram highlights her complicity in this logic of revenge by pointing out that her act perpetuates rather than ends the blood feud.<sup>5</sup> Some critics approach her from a thematic point of view of maternal grief, and they emphasize her tragic rather than threatening side, whereas symbolist critics focus upon images of blood, nets, and sacrifice in order to portray Agamemnon's murder as a breach with chthonic foundations, and with the home as well as the gods. Comparative approaches further gender the dialectics of retribution, in which she is caught.

Learned works have recently taken her voice politically into account, as well as in contemporary reception. Helene Foley interprets her as possessing legitimate, if male-coded, political authority,<sup>6</sup> While others position her as a figure of cultural transition, caught between older fertility rites and emergent linear patriarchal orders. Feminist re-interpretations reclaim her as more human and much less demonic, a figure whose crime is rethought with the frameworks of resistance and with cultural displacement in mind.<sup>7</sup>

Collectively, these readings reveal the inexhaustible richness of Clytemnestra as a site of interrogation - simultaneously murderess and mother, warrior and queen, transgressor and victim, conformist and rebel. Yet the critical emphases have continued disproportionately to focus on socio-political paradigms without sufficient

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<sup>3</sup> Kitto H. D. F., *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*. Routledge, 1961, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Zeitlin Froma, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 63, 77.

<sup>5</sup> Winnington-Ingram R. P., *Studies in Aeschylus*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Foley Helene P., *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 121. Cf. Janssen, J. "Ethics as a Means to Power", *Dia-noesis*, 15, 2024, pp. 59-80, <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.38166>.

<sup>7</sup> Vernant Jean-Pierre, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Translated by Janet Lloyd, Zone Books, 1990, p. 102.

attention to her ravaged subjectivity that serves as a site of intersection between trauma, exile, and cosmological transition. This paper takes on the task of intervening in that gap by setting forth a new conceptual choreography consisting of the following into articulation: *oikic exile*, *maternal hauntology*, *chthonic sovereignty*, and *matricidal cosmogenesis*, through which the historical figure of Clytemnestra becomes paradigmatic of cultural displacement, spectral survival, and cosmological resistance.

### **Toward a Conceptual Grammar of Displacement**

The hermeneutic orientation of this study arises from the confluence of trauma studies, narrative philosophy, exile theory, hauntology, and feminist philosophy of the maternal. In concert, these frameworks generate a reconceptualization of Clytemnestra, moving beyond her conventional positioning within tragedy and paternal retribution to recognize her as a paradigmatic figure who gives voice to trauma, estrangement, spectral presence, and the cosmogenic violence of patriarchy.

At the core of this study lies Cathy Caruth's theorization of trauma, which functions as its guiding framework. According to Caruth, traumatic experience is never fully absorbed at the time it happens; it is belatedly discharged in the form of intrusive repetition, a repetition that Caruth defines as "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (1996, p. 4). Clytemnestra's torn nets and blood, her alternating cycles of mourning and celebration, convey this delayed discharging of trauma. These phenomena do not constitute mere rhetorical flourish, but are symptomatic intrusions of an unassimilated rupture. Consequently, her oration functions as a traumatic testimony, which conserves and transmits the trace of an irrecoverable loss.

Paul Ricoeur radicalizes this insight by locating testimony within the philosophical architecture of memory and narrative. He intensifies this insight by inscribing testimony within a hermeneutic philosophy of memory and narrative. In his view (2004), remembrance is never an act of unmediated immediacy but always a process of narrative mediation, which "configures the temporal discordance of lived experience into intelligible form" (p. 21). Within

this framework, Clytemnestra's speeches can be read as hermeneutic reconstructions that translate alienation and lament into discursive articulations of justice and legitimacy. The instability of her narratives - the oscillation between prophetic vision, ritualized enunciation, and violent confession - signals both the indispensability and the precariousness of narrative testimony. What Ricoeur terms (2004) the "duty of memory" (p. 88) reverberates through her fractured voice, as she testifies to a rupture that at once resists narration and yet compels it.

A further twist would be enlarging this reading model with Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile*, which are essential in this case. Exile, Said writes (2000), is "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (p. 173). The fracture Clytemnestra's life is not territorial but domestic and cultural; she is still within the walls of the palace, but is cut off from participation in one generation's collective identity as mother, wife, and citizen. This paradox can be theorized with the term 'oikic exile', a form of the exporting of self, of exdomos (exodos), but within the domestic context itself, the oikos. This condition exposes her broken subjectivity as an index to an even deeper cultural displacement, that of the marginalization of the maternal order in the structures of patriarchy.

When the oikic exile formulates her condition, 'maternal hauntology' specifies the mode of her return. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida develops a theory of hauntology as the persistence of repressed or excluded haunts that reappear to disrupt the present's supposed self-containment.<sup>8</sup> Hauntology, in turn, becomes a kind of ontology of the spectral, of a being somewhere in between absolute absence and presence. This study argues that the voice of Clytemnestra serves as a spectral presence, in which the repressed maternal order reappears through reiterative patterns, manifestations of a cosmology that patriarchal power has endeavored to erase. By evoking libation in the form of blood, ritualization of imagery of nets and entrapment, and the evocation of chthonic forces, she brings to the fore hauntological dislocations of a maternal cosmology that will never be completely effed up.

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<sup>8</sup> Derrida Jacques, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Routledge, 1994, p. 63.

The repressed order that emerges with hauntology is a maternal ontology as theorized by Luce Irigaray and Adriana Cavarero. Irigaray has repeatedly argued that the maternal origin is effaced by Western metaphysics, giving prominence to the paternal and the phallic in its place.<sup>9</sup> and Cavarero in *In the Name of the Mother* (1985) has argued that the maternal voice is systematically silenced in the story of the foundations of philosophy<sup>10</sup>, for it is this maternal voice that she sees as a site of what might be called the “unspeakable other” (p. 102) of metaphysics, a voice that becomes the test of what Irigaray calls the maternal ontology, which is an ontology that is essentially the superego of patriarchal hegemony seen in light.

The endurance of the maternal is expressed as ‘chthonic sovereignty’ in this paper. In contrast to the civic and Olympian bases for the sovereignty of classical tragic power, the sovereignty of Clytemnestra is derived from subterranean forces and ritualized enactment. Her power is not accomplished through law, but through violence, blood, and the logic underground of death. Jean-Pierre Vernant has shown the interest of Greek tragedy in tensions between the chthonic and Olympian<sup>11</sup>, and Celsiana Warwick shows how Lycophron presents Clytemnestra as a chthonic intruder against Olympian incorporation.<sup>12</sup> Reading her sovereignty in chthonic terms thus aligns her with a cosmology based on fertility, death, and cyclical temporality in opposition to linear historicity.

Finally, by placing Clytemnestra in the context of matricidal cosmogenesis, these strands are related to the broader philosophic genealogy of the patriarchal order. As Ünsal Çimen notes, the symbolic murder of the mother that is the paradigm of matricide (Zeus’s overthrow of Cronus and the slaying of Clytemnestra by her son) represents the very beginning of patriarchal ontology.<sup>13</sup> Clytemnestra’s tale is at once part of and beyond this transition:

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<sup>9</sup> Irigaray Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Cornell UP, 1985, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Cavarero Adriana, *In the Name of the Mother*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D’Onofrio and Áine O’Healy, SUNY Press, 1995, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> Vernant Jean-Pierre, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Zone Books, 1990, p. 132.

<sup>12</sup> Warwick Celsiana, “Chthonic Disruption in Lycophron’s *Alexandra*”, *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2018, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Çimen Ünsal, “Zeus’ Overthrow of Cronus within the Context of Symbolic Matricide”, *Journal of International Social Research*, vol. 12, no. 65, 2019, p. 42.



her death seals patriarchal succession, while her voice preserves the haunting memory of what is violently silenced. The maternal is repressed in the name of laying the foundation for a new order, but its very repression guarantees its return in spectral form. Thus, ‘matricidal cosmogenesis’ marks the cultural process by which patriarchal cosmos is born out of the destruction of maternal sovereignty, as proven dramatically in the figure of Clytemnestra and preserved. This framework weaves together Caruth’s trauma, Ricoeur’s narrative testimony, Said’s exile, Derrida’s hauntology, and feminist philosophies of the maternal to articulate a new interpretive model. Through the coinages of ‘oikic exile’, ‘maternal hauntology’, ‘chthonic sovereignty’, and ‘matricidal cosmogenesis’, Clytemnestra is reimagined as a paradigmatic figure whose fractured voice speaks both the originary violence in which cultural order is founded and the hauntological insistence of what that order tried to erase.

### The Net and the Blade: Ritualized Matricide

The climactic moment of Agamemnon’s murder, as narrated by Clytemnestra in the so-called “net speech” (*Agamemnon*, 1372–1398), furnishes a privileged site for scrutinizing how her voice articulates ritual violence, cultural estrangement, and cosmological rupture. In this passage, she delineates how she ensnared Agamemnon “in a vast, voluminous net, as if for fish” (*Agamemnon*, 1382) before striking him down with the sacrificial labrys. The image of the net cuts across the domestic and ritual planes and thus has an implication of the consistency of domestic weaving, the frame of entrapment of the sacrificial, and also the reason for predatory entrapment. Her speech swings between success and fear, power and disintegration, thus reflecting the swings that characterize her trauma and displacement state. This rhetorical play underscores the doubled character of her agency, in which she plays the roles of the perpetrator and the victim and thus makes her traditional readings of her character more difficult.

From the perspective of matricidal cosmogenesis, this scene presents the paradox of the cultural basis obtained due to violence in relations to matrons. Karina Talts insists (2019) that the death of Agamemnon is not displayed as a simple violent act, but it is a

ritualized show, “with its ritual patterns: bath, the robe, the net, and blood-as-libation” (p. 212). In this respect, Clytemnestra turns the murder into a kind of quasi-sacrificial ritual appealing to the semiotics of cult and not the semiotics of crime. But the ritual also holds her in the genealogy of matricidal cosmogenesis: when she kills Agamemnon, she brings back to life the repressed maturation mythology, though its eradication by her ultimate murderer, Orestes, is inevitable. Her speech, therefore, becomes emblematic of what Ünsal Cimen (2019) refers to as the “cosmogenic rupture” (p. 42), the very process through which the patriarchy is reconstructed by the effacement of the maternal.

Discussing it within the context of vocality and affect, it can be argued that the utterance incorporates what can be called maternal hauntological. Here, the net takes on the status of a spectral artifact, full of such layers of suppressed memory: the net activates Iphigenia’s sacrifice, the entwining of fateful textiles, and the web of kinship relationships. In hauntology by Derrida (1994), the specter lies in between, “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive” (p. 63). Likewise, there is a level of saturation in this scene of Clytemnestra with her voice projecting victory, and at the same time, she brings out a breakage, rules, and brings out trauma. That lost maternal in Aulis, which is re-created in her speech as a ghostly figure, is the blood that she is losing, not merely Agamemnon, but some disturbing re-emergence of a maternal cosmology violently repressed.

Her narration also performs what this paper defines as ‘oikic exile’. Edward Said (2000) defines exile as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place” (p. 173). The framework of her palace bears witness to Clytemnestra’s profound alienation from the conventional roles of wife, mother, and queen. She underscores this dislocation within the *oikos* by transforming domestic symbols (such as clothing and the net) into instruments of death, repurposing them to render the home itself a symbolic site of displacement, turning it into an arena of dislocation. Therefore, she is a queen in exile, locked in her walled house, and her broken testimony reflects the natural incalculability of the way to reconcile the subjectivity of the maternal with the patriarchal.

At the same time, the discourse about the net speech contains a ‘chthonic sovereignty’. Unlike Agamemnon, whose kingship is supported by civic organizations and Olympian ranks, the power

of Clytemnestra is based on underground power. Noted by Jean-Pierre Vernant, tragedy often enters the opposition between the Olympian order by the fratricidal power of the chthonic; the latter functions as a disrupting element of the so-called coherence of civic legislation.<sup>14</sup> Clytemnestra appeals to the chthonic world again, by appealing to blood as libation and the net as a means to the sacrifice: she dictates no longer according to the law, but according to the ritual, no longer according to the polis. Warwick shows that the subsequent receptions, especially the adaptation by the *Alexandra* of Lycophron, relate her explicitly as a contributor to disruptive underworld traditions, which do not fit within the Olympian system.<sup>15</sup> A net speech is therefore a prefiguration of this postmodern world, reflecting her sovereignty as a root in the underground.

When discussing the interaction between these registers, it is possible to see how Clytemnestra destabilizes simple distinctions between crime and transgression by virtue of her voice. This act is beyond the expediency of individual revenge but rather a stylized act of an ancient cosmology, which the patriarchal system is both referencing and refuting. This speech prefigures the paradox that is concealed in the matricidal cosmogenesis; the new patriarchal order of succession relies upon the repression of the maternal image, but the process of repression leaves behind a spectral trace. Hermeneutic clues by Paul Ricoeur are once summoned and pursued further as the role of testimony forces the two-way charge of both preservation and disjointedness and fashions the memory into a narrative, at the same time exposing its vulnerable nature.<sup>16</sup> The performative rhetoric of Clytemnestra is a representation of this duality, as her story tries to confer legitimacy upon her act as being righteous, but the mechanical unreliability of her imagery, both vagrant between home and sacrifice, both victorious and horrific, is evidence of a damaged and disjointed subject.

In brief, the murder scene explains that Clytemnestra is a paradigmatic example of domestic exile, she is misidentified with her

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<sup>14</sup> Vernant Jean-Pierre, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Zone Books, 1990, p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> Warwick Celsiana, "Chthonic Disruption in Lycophron's *Alexandra*," *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2018, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, U of Chicago P, 2004, p. 21.

own family; she is the earliness of woman hauntological talk, the spectral re-emergence of the repressed order of social relations; she is, at the same time, a character that takes part in the culture-slaughtering oscillation of the maternal; and she is the servant of the exile of her own cosmos, she is an agent of matricidal creation. Therefore, her oratorical intervention is not a duty of a simple vengeful narration but rather a philosophical paradigm of an act of cultural alienation when ritual, traumatizing, and cosmogenic intersections occur.

### **Light as Haunting: The Beacon of Displacement**

Clytemnestra's initial entrance in *Agamemnon*—where she proclaims Troy's fall through the beacon chain (264–316) - positions her as an authority marked by both assertiveness and fragmentation, a paradox of anticipation and spectrality. Such a description of the transmissions of signal between Mount Ida and Argos is expressed with extraordinary confidence, she says, "From Ida's fire to Hermes' crag it leapt, / then passed the torch on to Messapion's peak" (*Agamemnon*, 1977) Although the net speech already plays off ritualized slaughter, the beacon discourse exists in a different idiom - one that attempts to exert a discipline of coherence on the incoherent and to instantiate a viewpoint of exile and discontinuity.

Viewed from the perspective of the oikic exile, the speech delivered to the beacon is possibly paradoxical. On the one hand, Clytemnestra plays the role of the herald, thus usurping the traditionally and exclusively male role of messengers or city officials. Conversely, the fact that she needs to assume such a position as the marker of her alienation from ordinary roles of wife and queen. Applying Edward Said's conception of exile (2000) as "the unhealable rift between self and home" (p. 173) helps to illuminate this paradox. Now she speaks to her people in the tent of her palace, but her power lies not in her roles of passive wife; nor can she yet claim her status of ruler. Therefore, the address is rather a performance of being part of the oikos, and at the same time is deceptive in her being exile-in-place.

When considered critically, her fractured subjectivity becomes more convincingly clear in terms of the paradigm of trauma. Cathy

Caruth explains that the process of repetition reinstates trauma, which evidently cannot be enacted entirely at the moment of the event but subsequently comes after many years.<sup>17</sup> This structural logic may be observed in the repeated number of images of fire jumping on top of mountains: the chain of light is simultaneously a signifier of triumph and a compulsion that refers to an act of crossing the trauma. Every second part repeats the initial dispensation at Aulis, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which supplies the overall sweep of the warfare itself.<sup>18</sup> The genocidal remains ultimately emerge as the traumatic remains of sacrificial loss, appearing to manifest what would otherwise be viewed as a heraldic statement into haunting of unassimilated grieving.

Even this haunting, though, serves to give rise to what is called maternal hauntology: the continuance of the non-existent, of the ghostly coming back to life of the banned, exactly what Derrida is interested in speaking about in the discussion about hauntology, offers the theoretical frame on which it is been visualized the beacon speech has been visualized.<sup>19</sup> The voice of Clytemnestra in the beacon speech could also be interpreted as a ghostly intrusion; she claims triumph, but her rhyme is the silence of Iphigenia, who had been sacrificed to ensure the demise of Troy. The victorious beat of her Feminine wound is troubled by the sexual hurt that is the core of the whole conflict. Accordingly, the beacon chain becomes not merely an act of transmission of fire, but of a conduit of haunting as well; the spectral lack of the daughter is flung onwards in every flash of it. In that way, the chain represents both transference of technology and transference of affection. The story of Clytemnestra thus represents a feminine statement, one that throws a wafer of triumph, so far so civic, into anarchy.

As the kingship of Agamemnon is confirmed by Olympian recognition, the kingship of Clytemnestra is proven by the intertextuality and ritualistic means. By breaking the cosmic codes of

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<sup>17</sup> Caruth Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 4

<sup>18</sup> Zeitlin Froma, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 63–65.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida Jacques, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Routledge, 1994, p. 63. Cf. Kakoliris Gerasimos, “Jacques Derrida’s Deconstruction of Western Metaphysics: The Early Years”, *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 4, 2017, pp. 43-62.

fire, she aligns herself with a rationality grounded more in omens and ritual dances than in the laws of the state. As Jean–Pierre Vernant observes, tragedy depicts a theatre where Olympian and underworld rationales clash, thereby exposing the vulnerability of civic stability.<sup>20</sup> In the expectation of such a dichotomy, the rhetoric of the beacon speech has Clytemnestra talking not only of herself as herald of change, but more significantly, of herself as priestess of signs, a princess whose authority is anchored not on an art that declares but on an underground economy of omen, sacrifice, and blood. Hence, her rhetorical voice replaces the male proponent, therefore restoring chthonic wisdom to civic discourse.

Beacon discourse is therefore placed within the greater genealogical framework of matricidal cosmogenesis. Ünsal Cimen, in particular, believes that matricide (literal or symbolical) is the cultural ordeal of transferring cyclic and maternal structures into a linear patriarchal structures.<sup>21</sup> Such linearity, on its part, is a characteristic of the beacon chain: a fire that traverses without interruption between apogee and apex and by any such operation requires a representation of history as a forward transmission. However, the disruption of the so-called linearity is brought about by a white-haired vocalization of the ghost-like Clytemnestra who still makes to recognize that the source of this fire is sacrificial, motherly, and cyclical. This seeming sharpness of the signal, above which the maternal body is paradoxically sealing the terrain, is compensated, transforming it in its turn, into a spectral presence that comes around her damaged speech, like a specter in her shattered words. As a result, despite what could be viewed as a triumphant statement of purpose, the beacon discourse still produces the paradox of matricidal cosmogenesis; the patriarchal order pronounces itself via linear marks, but the maternal, even though subdued, remains an apparition.

Where, in the traditional speech, Clytemnestra strives to claim sovereignty by enacting killing, the so-called beacon speech reveals her projective fractured voice, a voice trapped between utterance and wailing, and interpretative power and ghostly witnessing. These two discourses together form her subjectivity as oscillating

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<sup>20</sup> Vernant Jean-Pierre, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Zone Books, 1990, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> Çimen Ünsal, “Zeus’ Overthrow of Cronus within the Context of Symbolic Matricide”, *Journal of International Social Research*, vol. 12, no. 65, 2019, p. 42.

between the largely oikic exile (estrangement within her own palace), maternal hauntology (cyborg return of the suppressed maternal), chthonic sovereignty (counter-power based on ritual and omen), and matricidal cosmogenesis (the violent cultural shift that erases as much as it preserves the maternal). Through interrogation of the beacon speech in terms of these conceptual apparatuses, Clytemnestra is not only a prophecy of conquest, but also a figure characterized by a disunity of voice that already reports the cultural displacement cravings that are both staged and held in the tragedy.

### **Matricidal Cosmogenesis: The Cultural Birth of Patriarchy**

Through the closer inspections of both the beacon and net speeches, it becomes evident that the talk of Clytemnestra simply will not fall into a simplified classification of either vengeance, political rhetoric, or even tragic Pathos. Instead, her broken voice operates at the outer edges of trauma, exile, ritual, and cosmology. It is not what is seen outside, just as an image of a hideous queen, but a philosophical paradigm that this paper referred to as matricidal cosmogenesis.

The beacon speech is a parody of literary convention in which an effort to make the jarring of discontinuity into a linear sequence is carried through; its radiant and joyous imagery of brightness asserts a patriarchal logic of identity that finds an echo in the historiographical edifice of canonical authority. However, as Caruth insists, trauma films out in an ultimate late return and disrupts the supposedly definitive turnaround of events, providing a palimpsest of memory.<sup>22</sup> The mute loss of Iphigenia suffuses the conversation with a deep lack-victory mingled with grieving, power made of displacement, and the concept of absence as potential that suggests a psychoanalytic interpretation of the absence as positive possibility, is experienced. Since the net speech stands in stark contrast to the sovereignty of the ritual, Clytemnestra enacts violence through nets, baths, and libations, thereby transforming vengeance into a form of cultic performativity. Talts's reading of sacrificial

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<sup>22</sup> Caruth Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 4.

vocabulary underscores how private murder is reframed as cosmological rupture.<sup>23</sup> This sovereignty is, however, precarious both in itself and in alternating between victory and threats, action and discontinuity, and so forcing the question of any unitary image of power.

Taken together, the speeches dramatize a maternal hauntology, in which the repressed order re-emerges as a spectral presence within the structures of patriarchy. Derrida has contended that ghosts upset the idea of presence as such, showing structures that are based on erasure as fundamentally weak.<sup>24</sup> In his case, Oedipus viewed through the skewed testimony of his daughter, Clytemnestra, is another illustration of such a phenomenon: the maternal muted at Aulis comes back in the beacon speech, the suppressed chthonic order comes out in the net speech. This ghosting is not an accidental, but definite feature; patriarchy demands the destruction of the female, but it cannot entirely repress its revenge.

This dynamism names Clytemnestra in the very heart of a matricidal cosmogenic order. As Çimen argues, both the dethronement of Cronus by Zeus and the killing of Clytemnestra by Orestes are symbolic matricides that initiate the ontology of the patriarchs.<sup>25</sup> Her account swings back and forth between these extremes: on one hand, as an agent, she plays out the perpetuation of the maternal, and on the other, as a victim plays out the extinction of it. This duality indicates that there is a cultural rationality over the necessity of destroying the maternal to unleash the patriarchal order of things, but rather its obliteration ensures that it is haunted.

This paradox on the philosophical level demonstrates the nature of the fragility of the patriarchal ontology. Irigaray argues that the screened-out maternal origin on which Western metaphysics is founded renders it unspeakable as a matter of fundamental concern.<sup>26</sup> Cavarero, as well, asserts that the maternal voice is effec-

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<sup>23</sup> Talts Karina, "Violent Death in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*", *Philotheos*, vol. 19, 2019, p. 212.

<sup>24</sup> Derrida Jacques, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Routledge, 1994, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Çimen Ünsal, "Zeus' Overthrow of Cronus within the Context of Symbolic Matricide", *Journal of International Social Research*, vol. 12, no. 65, 2019, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Irigaray Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Cornell UP, 1985, p. 75.



tively cut out of the eventual narrative of any beginnings: the dis-united voice of Clytemnestra is both the witness of the otherwise unspeakable other of metaphysics, and the melancholy ghost of that other.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

The fractured voice of Clytemnestra when analyzed through the prism of beacon and net speeches works as a strong example of how tragedy can be neither domestic conflict nor gendered inversion, but even more compellingly, how tragedy runs through the processes of violence that form the basis of patriarchal order. It is her oikic exile that causes a sense of estrangement on a household scale; it is on a house-hold level, whose voice functions within the context of what is known as a maternal hauntology that reflects the spectral and ghostly retaliation; her authority, which is also the sovereignty of the chthonic, is rooted on sacrificial and underground logics; and her active role in matricidal cosmogenesis that causes her also both as a figure of defiance and a figure of destruction.

The indications of such a reading are more than the narrow confines of philological inquiry. As Ricoeur has underscored, testimony functions dually as a vehicle for preservation and as a mechanism of fracture, reshaping trauma into narrative even as it exposes underlying instability.<sup>28</sup> The testimony of Clytemnestra tells us that tragedy transfigures no one but to understand how tragedy brings about a generation of cultural memory. Her speeches also help to see what an irony in the patriarchal order is: it is built on the repression of the maternal image, although the one it should overcome haunts with the presence of its continuity that it still should extinguish.

This question is part of the general discourse of Trauma, Exile, and Cultural Displacement that rematerializes the question of Clytemnestra as the vehicle of representation, with the help of which the philosophical aspects of cultural displacement will be explored. No, she does not serve entirely as a tragic monarch who killed in

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<sup>27</sup> Cavarero Adriana, *In the Name of the Mother*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy, SUNY Press, 1995, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> Ricoeur Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 21.

revenge, but is a multifaceted character in which the discourses of trauma and exile outline the violent preconditions of the cultural identities. The voice of her afterlife expressed not only in classical works but also in later distributions is an indication of how the image of the mother has continued to resonate: not erased or lessened, but it has been re-formed as an apparition, as a witness to the testament, and as a sort of counter-sovereignty. In her turn, Clytemnestra helps us to remember that the process of cultural displacement takes place at loftier levels than at the expense of purely spatial displacement; it is written in the fabric of the world right into its depths.

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