

Thrênoi to Moiológia: Female Voices of Solitude, Resistance, and Solidarity

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Margaret Alexiou's *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* offered a diachronic, comprehensive study of Greek ritual lament that emphasized continuities between ancient and modern lament traditions while incorporating stylistic and thematic analyses of lament texts. In the past three decades, Alexiou's seminal work has been fundamental in shaping the field of lament studies; it has influenced scholars from such various academic fields as classics, comparative literature, anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore to engage in explorations of mourning that take into account textual, performative, and cultural contexts.¹ The anthropologist Anna Caraveli-Chaves, whose fieldwork emphasizes cultural issues of gender and lament in rural Epiros and Crete, has identified the following salient elements of modern Greek women's lament: the role of the lamenter as mediator, or "bridge" between the worlds of the living and the dead; the aesthetics and function of *ponos* ("pain"); lament as vehicle for revenge; lament as an instrument for social criticism and protest; and finally the role of lament in establishing solidarity among the community of women mourners.² This essay explores the relationship between gender, lamentation, and death in the Greek tradition, making use of Alexiou's diachronic paradigm and by expanding upon Caraveli-Chaves' ideas regarding the social role of lament by examining and comparing ancient literary representations of women in mourning with authentic examples of women's lament practices based on ethnographic material from modern rural Greece.

I shall focus specifically on the function of female lament as an expression of individual and collective pain (*ponos*; plural *ponoi*) and as a vehicle for uniting Greek women mourners through social bonding and solidarity in a community—what Caraveli-Chaves has termed a

¹ Alexiou 2002; Auerbach 1987; Caraveli-Chaves 1986; Caraveli-Chaves 1980; Danforth 1982; Derderian 2001; Dué 2002; Feld 1982; H. Foley 2001; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Kitzinger 1991; Koskoff 1987; Kurke 1992; Lardinois 2001; Levaniouk 1999; Loraux 1998; Martin 2003; McClure 1999; Nagy 1996; Ó Laoire 2005; Partridge 1980; Racy 1986; Rosenblatt et al. 1976; Segal 1989, 1993; Seremetakis 1991; Sultan 1993, 1999; Suter 2008.

² See Caraveli-Chaves 1986 for a further detailed discussion of the categories of the functions of women's lament in the social context of modern Greek village culture based on her fieldwork in contemporary Epirot communities.

“sisterhood of pain”—by interweaving the threads of tragic descriptions of female mourning in Euripides’ *Suppliants* with analogous examples of documented female lament (*moirólógia*) from modern rural Epiros, Crete, and Inner Mani.³ Female lamentation for the dead, both ancient and modern, is an emotive and expressive genre that voices an individual’s personal *ponoi* in her role as mourner—a voice of solitude; it also expresses a communal voice of collective grief, one of solidarity. Moreover, in the contexts of both ancient Greek tragedy and contemporary rural Greek society, female mourners use lamentation for the dead as a catalyst—more precisely, the “enabling event” (to borrow a term from John Miles Foley)—for expressing their essentially painful and sorrowful experiences in the world among the living and for protesting the power of the dominant patriarchal society (J. Foley 1995:64-65).

I intend to illuminate significant facets by which ancient and modern Greek lament traditions mirror each other in their function, theme, agency, and verbal art by using modern ethnographic evidence as a heuristic and interpretive device in order to better understand the ancient tragic texts. Such clear parallels in the modes of lament between material from the present and from the fifth century B.C.E. are not surprising. One might interpret the parallel thematic and functional elements of women’s laments for the dead as evidence of diachronic continuity and historical residue from ancient Greek tragic poetry through the contemporary laments in rural areas of Greece. Artemesia Kapsali’s modern lament for her husband Yiannis, for example (see below), expresses not only her grief for the loss of her husband but also embodies a voice that represents the community of Epirot women and mothers united in their feelings of helplessness and anger against war just as the chorus of Argive women in Euripides’ *Suppliants* manifests a collective voice of women and mothers bound by a “sisterhood in pain,” helplessness, and grief in their inability to properly mourn and bury their sons.

It is not my intention to privilege the ancient texts over modern performance contexts, nor to objectify or romanticize the modern Greek village *moirólóyístres*; for the voices of these women in black—voices that are otherwise marginalized in a distinctly patriarchal village culture—become instruments of cultural power in the context of lament performance. I intend, rather, to use the mirror images of ancient and modern women’s lament texts and lament-songs to demonstrate a diachronic continuity in the power of the female voice—albeit the marginalized and restricted female voice—through the tradition of Greek women’s lament for the dead. A comparison between the analogous features of modern and ancient female lament traditions is intended to help uncover what I believe are the veiled voices of the ancient Greek lamenters, namely, the anonymous women mourners whose powerful lament-songs were appropriated from their original context of oral performance (the mourning ritual) and incorporated into dramatic

³ Caraveli-Chaves (1986:181) uses the term, “sisterhood in pain” to describe the phenomenon of women’s bonding through lament performance in rural Epirot and Cretan communities. There is a consensus among female ethnographers who have researched the subject of gender and mourning in modern rural Greece (see n. 1 above) that the performance of laments and other ritual mourning practices serve to bond and unite women through a solidarity based on a community of shared grief and pain. Caraveli-Chaves’ phrase most accurately sums up this female sub-culture. Herzfeld (1986:215-34) cautions against generalizations concerning categories (e.g. “female vs. male,” “private vs. public,” “Mediterranean society,” “village culture”) used by (primarily female) anthropologists in ethnographies of modern Greece.

performances and texts that were composed by male poets and performed by male actors.⁴ I thus consider women's laments for the dead as they are represented in classical Greek tragedy to be an embedded genre of poetry, specifically, a genre of oral poetry that playwrights such as Euripides borrowed from the original, "native artists"—women who actually engaged in ritual lamentation—as well as from the traditional oral performance context and integrated into their dramatic poetic texts.⁵ Moreover, diachronic parallels in theme, verbal art, and function become evident when one situates women's laments for the dead in the genre and performative context of a continuous oral tradition and perceives representations of women's laments in ancient Greek tragedy as "oral-derived" texts (J. Foley 1995:60-65). In my view, the original female voices of the anonymous "native artists" were transposed to the dramatic personae of notable women mourners (performed by male actors on stage) and continued diachronically in the oral tradition of women's laments for the dead. This thread of an oral lament tradition that survived in the "oral-derived" texts of classical tragedy was rediscovered, so to speak, by ethnographers who have documented women's lament traditions in modern rural Greece in the performances of artful—often illiterate, but certainly not anonymous—lament poets such as Chrysa Kalliakati or Artemesia Kapsali (Caraveli-Chaves 1980; 1986).

I rely on Foley's definition of an "oral-derived" text—that is, a "text with its roots in oral tradition" as a category for (representations of) Greek women's laments for the dead as well as the process he explains as "the rhetorical persistence of pretextual, traditional forms" (1995:60-65). It is Foley's view that a developing literary tradition often gradually usurps and eventually privileges written texts over an original oral tradition—a process that eventually engenders the "oral-derived text" (60-65; 80-81).⁶ He describes how this process of textualization often diminishes the original force of the primary voices of "native artists" (e.g. the original creators, poets and performers) in various oral traditions (60-98).⁷

Surely women's lament-songs were emotionally potent enough in their original verbal art and performance to provide convincing and compelling material for the ancient Greek dramatic poets. Added to these vocal lamentations, the dramatic bodily movements—tearing the face and hair, beating the breast, rending one's garments—together with other vocalizations (shouts of *aiai*, *oi*, *ea*, and so forth), the dramatic potential for representations of women's lament performance was indeed considerable. It is no wonder that the dramatists found the emotional power of women's lament for the dead appealing and included their interpretations of it in their own dramatic texts; to have excluded it would have reduced the validity and the richness of their own works.

⁴ See J. Foley's discussion of the original, "native artists" in various global oral poetic traditions (1995:80).

⁵ Segal (1989:355) comments on the relation between tragic and oral poet: "The tragic poet draws on the oral poet's inherited role as spokesman for communal values and the continuities of social and religious forms."

⁶ See Foley's bibliography for works on oral poetry and the oral tradition (J. Foley 1995). For a succinct history and additional bibliography on oral poetry, see J. Foley 1988. Cf. Bakker 1993; Finnegan 1977; Lord 1991; Nagy 1996; Ong 1982.

⁷ See Ó Laoire's illuminating discussions on the process of improvisation and oral poetry in the Irish folk tradition (Ó Laoire 2004).

The Aesthetics and Role of *Ponos* in Greek Village Communities

Anthropologists have demonstrated how women in modern Greek village communities use the occasion of the death of another as an opportunity to articulate their individual *ponoi* as well as their grievances against society's injustices.⁸ In this section, I will discuss how women in modern rural Greek village communities articulate lament: first, as an expression of individual pain and grievances, then to establish community and solidarity among the *moirolyístres*. As we shall see, however, there is often a fine line between these two categories: the genre of "widows' songs" in particular (see below) best exemplifies the integration of personal and social aspects of the mourners' *ponoi*. Here I rely mainly on Anna Caraveli-Chaves' research on female lament practice and performance based on her fieldwork in Dzermiades, Crete and in the Zagori region of Epiros (1980:129-57; 1986:169-94). She views the aesthetic, ritual, and social elements of lament performance as components of what she terms the "symbolic female universe" created by women mourners that serves as a "bridge" between the restricted, marginalized world of rural Greek women and the larger sphere of rural Epirot and Cretan communities (1986:170-71). Moreover, Caraveli-Chaves demonstrates how women's lament works to establish a female subculture of *moirolyístres* through social bonding and ways in which it impacts the larger sphere of the patriarchal village culture (1986:171; cf. 1980:144-47).

Caraveli-Chaves asserts that one of the primary social functions of women's lamentation is a means of expression for the individual and collective female voice: "The death of a beloved person is the catalyst for and focus of women's lamentation and the broader universe of activity and experience generated by it. Yet participation in death rituals also becomes an important expressive avenue for the living" (1986:171). She ascertained that the refined cultural system of lament aesthetics in Crete defines "pain" not only in terms of the mourner's chronological proximity to death, but by the emotional intensity, depth, and style of delivery of her laments. A mourner might consider herself (or might be judged by her community in terms of her lament performance) "to be in pain" or "not to be in pain" (*eine ston pono; den eine ston pono*) (171). In fact, the stronger the pain of the lament performer, the stronger her laments are valued as ritual communications with the dead (172). The ethnographer refers to Artemesia Kapsali (see below), an Epirot woman in her late sixties who could enter into a state of pain voluntarily. Although her husband had been killed in World War II, 37 years before Caraveli-Chaves conducted her research in 1978, Artemesia still lamented with an "original intensity" (173).⁹

Caraveli-Chaves identified a significant feature of modern rural Epirot and Cretan women's lament practices: although a female mourner's lament originates in her emotional pain, it lies within the thematic framework of women's lament performance for the mourner to shift

⁸ See n. 1 above for specific references.

⁹ Caraveli-Chaves observes that performers use a variety of methods to induce "pain"; they might loosen their black scarves or use objects (such as photographs) that have symbolic associations with the deceased (1986:173).

the focus of her song from the history and plight of the deceased to the pains and grievances (*ponoi*) of the lamenter herself (1986:181). The most significant thematic element concerning both the deceased's and the mourner's lives is the *ponos* of isolation and loneliness—loneliness felt by the lamenter due to the loss of the deceased, isolation of the lamented often because of her widowhood. Chrysa Kalliakati's Cretan lament for her deceased mother in Dzermiades, Crete, illustrates this dynamic (Caraveli-Chaves 1980:134; lines 1-20):

Oh slowly, oh mournfully, I will begin lamenting
 Shouting out your sorrows mother—one by one!
 Oh slowly, oh mournfully I will begin lamenting
 Singing about your sorrows, mother, crying for them,
 Because at the prime of your youth, you clothed yourself in black
 And then the darkness of your heart matched that of your dress;
 Because at the prime of your youth fate had written
 That you should lose our father, you should become a widow . . .
 Ah how many times at midnight, after the roosters had crowed
 Wouldn't you be coming down the road—pale and tired out! . . .
 How many times at midnight, on nights steeped in darkness
 Wouldn't you come home from the road—lips saddened and embittered!
 There is no one else who knows your sorrows, the plight of your life.
 I, alone, am left here, mother, to stand up by your side.
 Women of Dzermiathes come, decked out in your best clothes
 And give her your forgiveness now, from inside your heart.
 I'll go to Argolia no more. Whom should I visit there?
 My mother has traveled far away. To whom can I call out?

This lament begins with Chrysa's statement of her intention to commemorate her mother's sufferings, then transforms her narrative of her mother's grievous, sorrowful life to a description of her own *ponoi*, specifically her isolation and loneliness. The lamenter's use of the verbs "to weep" or "to lament" (*kleo*, and *klapso* in the original Greek, lines 1-3) repeats her statement of intention to commemorate her mother's grievous, sorrowful life; Caraveli-Chaves remarks that "though the verbs used are either different aspects of the same verb or synonymous in the Greek original ('shouting out your sorrows' and 'singing about your sorrows' in the English translation) . . . the singer will not merely list the mother's sorrows, but she will shout them out as well" (1980:136).¹⁰ Thus, women mourners use the event of the death of another as an occasion to transform their mourning into a genre of lament performance that becomes the "instruments for voicing the concerns of the living" (1986:171).

Themes expressed by the mourners' personal *ponoi* such as isolation, widowhood, loss of social status, desertion by male relatives, sufferings brought on by childbirth or the raising of children, and grievances against war and death, find expression in the function of women's

¹⁰ Alexandra Pateraki's lament (*ibid.*:133) shows similar features and structure.

practices of modern medicine, priests, and the institution of the Greek Orthodox Church (183-84).¹¹ This verbal art of lament in an oral performative context allows women in modern rural Greek communities to experience and transmit *ponos*, to transform the phenomenon of the death of another into an expression of their individual grievances and the concerns of the female community, and to use lamentation “as an avenue for social commentary on the larger world, rather than an instrument of restriction and isolation” (1986:191).

Caraveli-Chaves argues that rituals of shared grieving, the process of oral composition of laments, and their transmission across generations reinforce the sense of female bonding “in pain” and provides a context for creating a type of female subculture within the wider male-dominated world of the rural Greek village (1986:177-78; cf. 1980:144-45). Through the experiences of shared pain, emotional catharsis, and a collective identity as mourners, women in rural Greek communities “create, reflect, reinforce, and negotiate realms of experience and action that are exclusive to women” (1986:178). She adds that sometimes lament voiced as a social protest “recognizes a ‘sisterhood in pain’ among women, a sense of communal victimization inflicted by either social or natural forces . . . often this voice takes the form of an invitation to communal grieving” (181-82). The modern Epirot lament below illustrates this phenomenon and presents a striking introduction to literary examples from ancient Greek women’s laments that emphasize women’s solidarity, sense of bonding, and collective mourning in a collective voice from a marginalized group of society that is normally muted, if not silenced altogether (171; 182-83):¹²

Come women! Let you who are still untried, and us, who’ve known sorrows,
join together our tears, shape them into a river;
and let the river turn to lake, to seashore, water fountain,
(oh, my love, my eyes!)
where young beauties can come to wash, young men to groom themselves,
and where unmarried children can have their target practice.

Such communal bonding among village women during the lament ritual operates both diachronically as well as synchronically through collective performance and transmission across

¹¹ In part due to the religious dimensions of women’s lament performance and practices, laments may also constitute a protest against the official Greek Orthodox Church and the Christian doctrine of death that express contrary views and attitudes to those of traditional laments of an afterlife of reward for the pious: “Christian attitudes toward death preach patience, acceptance, and perseverance. Laments express despair, fear, and anger toward death and the deceased” (Caraveli-Chaves 1986:184). Auerbach (1987:24-43) addresses the function of *ponoi* in expressing personal pain and grievances against society in the context of lament performance in her work concerning the connections between gender, lament, and musical meaning in modern rural Epiros. A verse from an Epirot lament exemplifies the communal aspect of Greek female lament: “We’ll cry for our sufferings and our grievances, whoever has the most, we’ll divide them” (38).

¹² Performed by Alexandra Tsoumani; recorded by Caraveli-Chaves in Tsepelovo, Epiros, August 15, 1978. This lament is interesting for its erotic elements as well.

generations of women (Caraveli-Chaves 1980:145).¹³ Caraveli-Chaves cites the example of Alexandra Pateraki's lament that she learned from her mother Chrysa (see above): the subject of her lament was Alexandra's grandmother; therefore it connected three generations of women in this family. Caraveli-Chaves concludes from this particular example that "the lamenter's manipulation of narrative conventions transforms a given item of subject matter (such as the mourning of a dead relative) into a source of personal benefit and a means of affirming a complex network of relationships among the female participants" (*idem*). Her observations, based on her fieldwork in women's laments for the dead in Epiros and Crete, may be applied to the creation of female solidarity and community through mourning as depicted in Euripides' *Suppliants*.

"Sisterhood in Pain": Female Solidarity through Mourning in Euripides' *Suppliants*

Literary representations of female lament for the dead from the textual and performative context of fifth-century Greek tragedy—specifically, Euripides' *Suppliants*—are, in my view, analogous to the previously cited examples of modern Greek rural lament in practice and performance. In addition, the antiphonal structure and style of lament performance contribute to social bonding among women; they mourn in a fugue. Perhaps a comparison between the ancient and modern Greek lament traditions might beg the question as to whether ritual mourning allowed ancient Greek women to express a certain power through female solidarity in their mourning, just as contemporary women, a marginalized group in modern rural Greece, become empowered through their mourning rituals. The plot of Euripides' *Suppliants* centers on the right of the dead to receive a proper burial and on the desire and duty of the living—here, the mothers of the Argive heroes slain at Thebes—to properly mourn their loved ones (*philoï*). Yet the more profound issue of this play concerns itself with the subordination of women's voices to the masculine encomium for the war-dead—the traditional *epitaphios logos*.¹⁴ During the course of the *Suppliants*, the voices of the mothers of the warriors who died fighting against Thebes, raised throughout most of the play in lamentation, become muted and subordinate to the traditional funeral eulogy (the "true, just praise")¹⁵ composed and delivered by Adrastus, with the assistance of Theseus, the two primary male characters.¹⁶ The mourning mothers of the slain Argive chiefs create a "sisterhood in mourning" not only among themselves; they also form a bond within a

¹³ This observation raises a provocative and essential question: how "improvised" can a lament be if it is handed down from generation to generation?

¹⁴ See Loraux 1986:47-49; 107-8. Her discussion of the replacement of the Argive mothers' laments for their sons by the traditional *epitaphios logos* has influenced later criticism of this play; cf. McClure 1999:45-47; H. Foley 2001:36-44; Michelini 1991:16-36. While H. Foley's analysis and interpretation of this play overlaps with several of my points, I read her chapter after I wrote my views on this play as expressed in my Ph.D. dissertation (Fishman 2002) and in this essay.

¹⁵ ἔπαινον . . . ἀληθῆ καὶ δίκαι, 858-59.

¹⁶ See McClure's synopsis (1999:45-46).

community of mourners together with Aethra, the mother of Theseus, and Adrastus, the king of Argos. Adrastus' role in this community of mothers in mourning is significant. I argue that he is a male character who represents the agency (e.g., the role and function) of a female lamenter. Euripides portrays Adrastus as a feminized, certainly an emotionally and psychologically weakened male—metaphorically θῆλυς (“female,” “womanly”)—although not as feminized nor as “orientalized” as the chorus of Persian male elders in Aeschylus' *Persians*.¹⁷

The *Suppliants* opens in front of the temple of Demeter at Eleusis where Aethra is engaged in prayer for the welfare of her family and city while expressing pity and compassion towards the suffering of the suppliant Argive mothers who mourn their lost sons. Euripides conveys a notion of shared female identity as mothers and sense of community between Aethra and Argive women in Aethra's poignantly sympathetic speech at the start of the play (*Supp.* 8-17):¹⁸

ἐς τάσδε γὰρ βλέψασ' ἐπηυξάμην τάδε
 γραῦς, αἱ λιποῦσαι δώματ' ἄργείας χθονὸς
 ἰκτῆρι θαλλῶ προσπίτνουσ' ἐμὸν γόνυ,
 πάθος παθοῦσαι δεινόν· ἀμφὶ γὰρ πύλας
 Κάδμου θανόντων ἐπτὰ γενναίων τέκνων
 ἄπαιδές εἰσιν, οὐς ποτ' Ἄργείων ἄναξ
 . . . νεκροὺς δὲ τοὺς ὀλωλότας δορὶ
 θάψαι θέλουσι τῶνδε μητέρες χθονί,

They have left their homes in Argos and are falling with
 suppliant branches at my knees because of their terrible
 sufferings. They have lost their children: their seven noble sons
 perished before Cadmus' gates
 . . . the spear laid these men low,
 and their mothers want to bury them.

One must keep in mind that Aethra and the Argive women nominally belong to two politically opposing sides: Aethra is the mother of Theseus, the Athenian king who tenaciously prevents the Argive female lamenters from regaining the remains of their sons for burial. Yet Aethra's feelings of sympathy and pity for the aged Argive mothers in mourning, together with her reverence for their vulnerable status as suppliants—rendered all the more powerful because the women occupy the same sacred space inside the temple of Demeter at Eleusis—prove to be more compelling than the queen's sense of allegiance to her son's political agenda. Aethra is

¹⁷ On the topic of gender and representation in Greek tragedy, see (for example): Bassi 1998; Fishman 2002; H. Foley 2001; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Kurke 1992; Segal 1992, 1993; Suter 2008; Zeitlin 1996. On “Orientalism” and the feminization of the chorus of Aeschylus' *Persians*, see Saïd 1979:21, 56, 332.

¹⁸ The Greek text and English translations in the indented paragraphs of Euripides' *Suppliants* are taken from Kovacs 1998 (unless otherwise noted); all other translations are my own.

metaphorically (emotionally and ethically, almost magically) “bound” (δεσμὸν)¹⁹ by a sense of piety that is symbolized by the lamenters’ suppliant branches (ιερά στέμματ’). Indeed, the sacred space and her powerful fusion of feelings of compassion and reverence imbue Aethra with a sense of solidarity with the Argive suppliant women (*Supp.* 32-36):²⁰

δεσμὸν δ’ ἄδεσμον τόνδ’ ἔχουσα φυλλάδος
 μένω πρὸς ἀγναῖς ἐσχάραις δυοῖν θεαῖν
 Κόρης τε καὶ Δήμητρος, οἰκτίρουσα μὲν
 πολιᾶς ἄπαιδας τάσδε μητέρας τέκνων,
 σέβουσα δ’ ἱερά στέμματ’.

Since I feel the constraint of these suppliant branches—
 which bind without any chain—
 I stay here at the sacred hearths of the two goddesses,
 Kore and Demeter, in pity for these
 gray-headed mothers bereft of their sons
 and in reverence for their suppliant wreaths.

The chorus of the Argive mothers addresses Aethra directly as they call her attention to their lamentation, specifically to the physical manifestations of mourning that creates the impression of a female community united in solidarity through their roles as caretakers of the dead. In the first antistrophe, the chorus insistently beseeches Aethra to “look at” (ἐσιδοῦσ’) their tears and torn flesh; the self-inflicted violence upon their aged bodies symbolically renders the lamenting mothers as victims of war, even though it is their sons who are properly the war-dead (φθιμένους) (*Supp.* 47-53):

ἐσιδοῦσ’ οἰκτρὰ μὲν ὄσσων δάκρυ’ ἀμφὶ βλεφάροις, ῥυ-
 σὰ δὲ σαρκῶν πολιᾶν
 καταδρύμματα χειρῶν. τί γάρ; ἄ φθιμένους παῖ-
 δας ἐμοῦς οὔτε δόμοις
 προθέμαν οὔτε τάφων χώματα γαίας ἐσορῶ.²¹

¹⁹ I am not insisting that the Argive women are engaged in magical practices in the temple of Demeter in this opening scene, for Euripides does not state this explicitly. However, it is my view that the poet implies and suggests the spell-like effect of lamentation; this is a topic that I would like to explore at length in an expansion of the present work. Nevertheless, I would like to call attention to the powerful force implied in the noun δεσμός; it is a loaded term in the vocabulary of magic: e.g., the term κατάδεσμος, or “binding spell,” for the curse tablets that have been unearthed in Sicily, Olbia, and Attica, dating from the fifth century B.C.E. See Faraone and Obbink (1991:3-32) and literature cited therein.

²⁰ See Rehm (1994:110-21) for a discussion of this play that emphasizes the religious elements and symbolism. Rehm emphasizes the importance of the Eleusinian setting throughout the opening scene of the play (111). He analyzes how the staging of the opening scene of Euripides’ *Suppliants* is organized around the central altar (1988:283-88).

²¹ Collard (1975:121 *ad loc.*) notes that the noun καταδρύμματα is a *hapax legomenon*.

Look at these pitiable tears upon our cheeks
 and the gashes our hands have torn
 in our old and wrinkled flesh! How can we do otherwise?
 Our dead sons we could not lay out in the house for burial
 or see a mound of earth raised over their tombs.

These non-verbal signs of female mourning (tears, disfiguring one's flesh, particularly the face or chest, beating one's breast) are ubiquitous in Greek epic and tragic poetry and may be interpreted as symbols of the archetypal female (or a feminized male) mourner.²² In order to draw Aethra into their sphere of "sisterhood in pain," the chorus in the second strophe emphasizes their shared identities as women, mothers, and wives (*Supp.* 55-58):

ἔτεκες καὶ σύ ποτ', ὦ πότνια, κοῦρον φίλα ποιη-
 σαμένα λέκτρα πόσει σῶ· μετά νῦν
 δὸς ἔμοι σᾶς διανοίας, μετάδος δ', ὅσσον ἐπαλγῶ
 μελέα <γῶ> φθιμένων οὐς ἔτεκον,

You too once bore, my lady, a son, making your bed
 pleasing to your husband. So grant me a portion
 of your kind regard, grant it, in pity for the grief
 that I, unlucky one, feel for my son's death.

The Argive women mourners thus appeal to Aethra's sympathy as a mother when they entreat her to persuade her son Theseus to allow them to bury their own sons who died in battle against the Thebans: εὐ- / τεκνία δυστυχίαν τὰν παρ' ἔμοι / καθελεῖν ("relieve my misfortune by the noble son you bore," 67-68), and in their declaration: τὸ γὰρ θανόντων τέκνων / ἐπίπονόν τι κατὰ γυναῖ- / κας ἐς γόους πάθος πέφυκεν· αἰαῖ ("For when their children die, the grief in women's hearts is ever involved in the toil of lamentation. Ah me!" 83-85). With his entrance, Aethra's "noble son" Theseus reiterates the Argive chorus' reference to their gestures of ritual mourning upon his discovery of a community of women engaged in a highly emotive lament performance: τίνων γόους ἦκουσα καὶ στέρνων κτύπτον / νεκρῶν τε θρήνους ("Whose is the wailing, the beating of breasts, and the keening for the dead that I

²² Physical manifestations of female lament include tearing off one's veil, tearing the hair, beating one's breast, and tearing one's face (usually the cheeks) with the nails. See Derderian 2001:53-54 and n. 146 for Homeric examples of male and female physical manifestations of ritual lament. Male heroes in the Homeric poems openly weep and grieve for the dead; ritual gestures such as tearing one's face and hair and beating one's breast are exhibited by both men and women in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Suter (2008) addresses the topic of male lament in Greek tragedy. Holst-Warhaft (1992:107-8) states that there is nothing unmanly about Homeric heroes mourning the dead, "provided that the circumstances are appropriate"; she adds that, "it is the men, rather than the women, who must be enjoined to stop weeping lest they become morbid or dangerous." Cf. Alexiou 2002:11-13, 132-34. On tragic images of the body and lament, see Murnaghan 1988.

have heard?” 87-88). Their dirges and physical acts induce fear and confusion (φόβος, 89; τί ταῦτα, μητέρα; 98). Theseus’ reaction of shock at the female mourners’ “dangerous voices,” as well as their dramatic physical gestures of ritual lamentation, is complicated by his discovery of the apparent solidarity between his mother and the “foreign women” mourners (ξένας γυναῖκας) (*Supp.* 92-97):²³

τί χρῆμα; καινὰς ἐσβολὰς ὀρῶ λόγων,
μητέρα γεραίων βωμίαν ἐφημένην
ξένας θ’ ὁμοῦ γυναῖκας οὐχ ἓνα ῥυθμὸν
κακῶν ἐχούσας· ἔκ τε γὰρ γερασμίων
ὄσσων ἐλαύνουσ’ οἰκτρὸν ἐς γαῖαν δάκρυ,
κουραὶ τε καὶ πεπλώματ’ οὐ θεωρικά.

But what is this? Here are strange things to speak of,
my aged mother sitting at the altar, and foreign women
with her in many attitudes of misery. From their aged eyes
they shed pitiable tears on the ground, and the cut of their
hair and the garments they wear are not fit for a festival.

Theseus is disturbed by the notion that his mother Aethra and the chorus of enemy Argive women have formed a female community that focuses on the chorus’ intense state of emotional grief that is manifested by their public ritual lamentation; their solidarity is subversive and alarming to the king of Athens. Aethra’s response to Theseus’ accusatory query conveys feelings of camaraderie and solidarity with the suppliant women due to their shared identity as mothers of sons. Euripides emphasizes this point semantically by the repetition of the words “son” and “mothers” in Aethra’s address to Theseus: ὦ παῖ, γυναῖκες αἶδε μητέρες τέκνων . . . τέκνον (“My son, these women are mothers of sons . . . son,” 100-103).²⁴ In this scene, Aethra has literally entered into the Argive women’s sacred circle of mourning: φρουροῦσί μ’, ὡς δέδορκας, ἐν κύκλῳ, τέκνον (“they keep watch, encircling me, as you see, with their suppliant boughs, son,” 103), the ancient literary equivalent of what Caraveli-Chaves terms the “symbolic female universe” among modern Epirot and Cretan women lament-performers (1986:170).²⁵

²³ The phrase “dangerous voices” in reference to female lament is inspired by the title of Holst-Warhaft’s influential 1992 book.

²⁴ I find interesting Collard’s comment (1975:139 *ad loc.*) that τέκνων (100) has sometimes been emended to νεκρῶν, apparently due to the “tautologous” phrase μητέρες . . . τῶν κατθανόντων . . . στρατηγῶν (100-102); this emendation (which most modern editors, including Collard, do not accept) supports my notion that Euripides here emphasizes Aethra’s and the chorus’ shared identities as mothers of sons.

²⁵ Here, as in lines 33-36, I see a suggestion of ritual magic associated with female lamentation.

In the next short, irregular stasimon of the play (271-85), the chorus directly supplicates Theseus to release the bodies of their sons for burial.²⁶ In the following second part of the first episode, the king of Athens questions his mother's act of mourning—thus her solidarity—with the foreign Argive women (*Supp.* 286-88):²⁷

μη̄τερ, τί κλαίεις λέπτ' ἐπ' ὀμμάτων φάρη
βαλοῦσα τῶν σῶν; ἄρα δυστήνος γόους
κλύουσα τῶνδε;

Mother, why are you weeping, holding your fine-spun
garments before your eyes? Is it because you hear the unhappy wailing
of these women?

Theseus rebukes Aethra for showing excessive sympathy and solidarity with the Argive mothers in mourning, for she is not one of their “tribe”: τὰ τούτων οὐχὶ σοὶ στενακτέον . . . οὐ σὺ τῶνδ' ἔφυς (“You must not groan at these women's fate . . . you are not one of their tribe,” 291-92).²⁸ Despite Theseus' warning, Aethra becomes an actively vocal member of this “tribe” of foreign Argive mothers in mourning by taking on the role of spokeswoman for their cause of regaining possession of the remains of their sons for proper burial and ritual lamentation; she successfully persuades Theseus to change his mind and recover the slain Argive chiefs (297-331).

As we have seen in several passages in the beginning of Euripides' *Suppliants*, ritual lamentation creates solidarity among the female characters. This “sisterhood in pain” is potentially empowering, as it becomes a communicative event that affirms social bonding through shared female suffering. Yet the *Suppliants* also reveals what one critic calls the “potentially subversive effects of uncontrolled feminine lamentation,” and “the subordination of women's ritual language to the city's collective eulogy” (McClure 1999:46). Adrastus' funeral oration (857-917), modeled on the fifth century B.C.E. Athenian *epitaphios logos*, eventually supplants the essentially female speech genre of ritual lamentation for the dead.²⁹ However, before Adrastus, urged on by Theseus, delivers his eulogy in praise of the Argive war-dead (842-56), he plays a part in the traditionally female antiphonal style and structure of lamentation. This

²⁶ Collard (1975:179-81 *ad loc.*) includes a metrical analysis of this passage, which is mostly hexametric. He terms these lines as “not a regular stasimon” in part because the astrophic lyrics (which indicate extreme emotional tension) interrupt the episode (179).

²⁷ Aethra holds her garment over her eyes (like a veil) in a gesture of grief and ritual lamentation.

²⁸ “You are not one of their tribe” is my translation of οὐ σὺ τῶνδ' ἔφυς. Although there is a fine distinction between “you are not one of them” (taking ἔφυς in the sense of φύω = “you are” [LSJ s.v. φύω, B. II]) and “you are not one of their tribe (taking the verb as suggestive of the noun τὸ φύλον = “tribe”), I prefer the latter because: 1) the Argive women are a different “tribe” of Greeks, and 2) because poets used this noun (most often in the singular) with a partitive genitive to refer to classifications of women as well as to animals (see LSJ s.v. φύλον).

²⁹ See Collard 1975:323-39 *ad loc.* and H. Foley 2001:37-38.

topic of gender, lament, and antiphony in ancient Greek tragedy and modern Maniat laments is one that I shall now address.

Antiphony, Gender, and Lament: Ancient and Modern Threads of Grief

There are textual examples of lament from Euripides' *Suppliants* that are comparable to the practice and performance of women's lamentation in the Inner Mani region of the Greek Peloponnese. Antiphonal lament is ubiquitous throughout fifth-century Greek tragedy, yet I will concentrate here on this single play, since, atypically, the male character Adrastus is included in the female community of mourners.³⁰ Lamentation for the dead has been traditionally expressed as an antiphonal "call" and "response" dialogue between a single lamenter and chorus—both typically female—in ancient Greek tragedy and modern women's lament performance; in fifth-century tragic poetry, the *kommos* became the term that was specific to the antiphonal lament between an actor and the chorus.³¹ Alexiou noticed the importance of antiphonic style and structure in the historical continuity of ritual lament in the Greek tradition (Alexiou 2002:150):³²

Antiphony, dialogue and refrain, among the oldest structural features of the Greek lament, are still vital and dynamic elements of the modern *moirólógia*. They have survived, not because they have been consciously preserved . . . but because antiphony is still imbedded in the ritual performance, with more than one group of mourners, sometimes representing the living and the dead and singing in response to each other Continuity has been the strongest and most spontaneous in popular tradition.

The phenomenon of antiphonal lament structure and style may be interpreted as an act of reinforcing the emotional and social bonds, a sense of camaraderie, connections, and community among the performers of ritual laments. C. Nadia Seremetakis argues for the importance of antiphonal style and structure of Maniat women's lament performance in creating and cementing bonds between the soloist and chorus in the group of women mourners, and between the

³⁰ Several examples of tragic antiphony (by no means exhaustive) are: Aeschylus *Pers.* 1038-77; *Choeph.* 156-59; Sophocles *Trach.* 874-80, 881-95; Euripides *Hel.* 164-90; *Phoen.* 1033-39; *Troad.* 146-52. See Alexiou 2002:131-60 on the Homeric origins of antiphonal structure in lamentation and for diachronic illustrations of antiphonal lament from the Homeric poems through to modern *moirólógia*.

³¹ Aristotle in the *Poetics* 12.1452b defines the *kommos* thus. Cf. H. Foley: 2001:152-57; Sultan 1993:93-103; Holst-Warhaft 1992:45-47 for synopses of Alexiou's earlier work and brief comparisons between antiphony in ancient Greek tragedy and Seremetakis' work on antiphonal style and structure in Inner Mani. See Alexiou 2002:102-28, chapter 6, "The classification of ancient and modern laments and songs to the dead," particularly 102-8 on the epic and tragic distinctions between the terms *thrênos*, *góos*, and *kommos*. To the best of my knowledge, all subsequent work on ancient Greek lament traditions follows Alexiou's classifications as set forth in her chapter.

³² See chapter 7, "Antiphonal structure and antithetical thought" (131-60), for a detailed history of the form and meaning of antiphony in Greek lament in the Homeric poems, Greek tragedy, Byzantine Christian hymns, and modern *moirólógia*.

community of female mourners and the larger village community (1991:99-124).³³ Her discussion of the role of antiphonic performance of laments as a vehicle of communication and social bonding among female mourners in rural Greece is instrumental to my argument for understanding this function of antiphonal style and structure within a diachronic framework of lament performance. My view is that the sense of female camaraderie and community represented in Euripides' *Suppliants* is mirrored in women's mourning practices in Inner Mani. A comparison between antiphonal passages from Euripides' *Suppliants* and modern Maniat laments documented by Seremetakis reveals ways in which antiphonal style and structure establish female community and solidarity through mourning (99-124).

Although Adrastus' persona is male, I would argue that throughout the play his character represents the role and function of a woman mourner. Euripides' portrayal of the Argive king in a state of lament in the beginning of the play clearly characterizes Adrastus as a weak and feminized male who manifests and enacts features of traditional female mourning. From the start of the play, the male Argive king is clearly included in the mourning mothers' communal "circle" of lamentation and solidarity. Thus, in the opening scene of the *Suppliants*, Aethra indicates that Adrastus is not only sympathetic to the mothers in mourning, but is actively engaged in lamentation, weeping as he "lies upon the ground" at Demeter's temple at Eleusis (*Supp.* 20-23):

κοινὸν δὲ φόρτον ταῖσδ' ἔχων χρείας ἐμῆς
 Ἄδραστος ὄμμα δάκρυσιν τέγγων ὄδε
 κεῖται, τό τ' ἔγχος τήν τε δυστυχεστάτην
 στένων στρατεῖαν ἦν ἔπεμψεν ἐκ δόμων.

Sharing the burden of these women's appeal to me is
 Adrastus here. His face is wet with tears as he lies upon the
 ground, lamenting the ill-fated expedition he led from home.

Euripides again calls attention to Adrastus' femininity in Theseus' references to the Argive king's "pitiful mourning" (στενάζων οἰκτρὸν, 104) and his sharp command to the lamenting Argive king to λέγ' ἐκκαλύψας κρᾶτα καὶ πάρες γόον ("uncover your head, leave off your lament, and speak!" 111). A bit later in the play, Adrastus prefaces his plea to Theseus to retrieve the bodies of the slain Argive heroes with a recognition of his "disgraceful" acts of mourning and supplication: ἐν μὲν αἰσχύναις ἔχω / πίτνων πρὸς οὐδας γόνυ σὸν ἀμπίσχειν χερί ("I consider it disgraceful to fall upon the ground and cover your knees with my hands," 164-65); such actions are acceptable when they are manifestations of women's mourning and supplication, but shameful when enacted by a male.

Since Adrastus' agency in Euripides' *Suppliants* is comparable to that of a woman in a state of lamentation and he is included in the circle of Argive mothers in mourning, the antiphonal exchange between Adrastus and the chorus (794-821) is analogous to the

³³ See also Holst-Warhaft 1992:45-48.

phenomenon of female communication and bonding “in pain” that Seremetakis offers in her paradigm of modern Maniat women’s lament performance (see below). The lament-song exchange between Adrastus and chorus leader (*coryphaeus*) occurs during a highly emotional and dramatic point in the action of the play when the bodies of the slain Argive heroes are brought on stage to be lamented by Adrastus and the chorus. After the *coryphaeus* declares her desire to die and travel to Hades with the slain sons (794-97),³⁴ Adrastus initiates the antiphonal lament-song exchange that constitutes the *kommos* from lines 794-837 (*Supp.* 798-801):³⁵

στεναγμόν, ὦ ματέρες,
τῶν κατὰ χθονὸς νεκρῶν
ἀύσατ’ ἀπύσατ’ ἀντίφων’ ἐμῶν
στεναγμάτων κλυοῦσαι.

Utter, speak aloud, mothers,
A groan for your sons below the earth!
Listen to my groans
and answer!

The intense emotional connection that this community of mourners shares is expressed rhetorically by the closely woven “threads” of emotional utterances—antiphonal “groans” or “laments” (στεναγμάτων)—that the singers of these laments (Adrastus and the chorus) “utter,” “speak aloud,” “listen to,” and “answer” (ἀύσατ’, ἀπύσατ’, κλυοῦσαι, ἀντίφων’). The antiphonal στεναγμάτων that Adrastus invites alludes to the *thrênoi* (ritual laments) that the Argive mothers will soon deliver. Euripides binds Adrastus and the chorus together psychologically and emotionally by interweaving their utterances of grief and lamentation within the stylistic framework of antiphonal performance. Both the Argive mothers and king take up and echo the threads of each other’s lament-songs in this highly emotive exchange (794-837). A poignant example is the interchange between them in lines 814-27:

δόθ’ ὡς περιπταῖσι δὴ χέρας προσαρμόσασ’ ἐμοῖς ἐν ἀγκῶσι τέκνα θῶμαι	(Chorus): Let me put my arms about my son and embrace him!
ἔχεις ἔχεις πημάτων γ’ ἄλις βάρος.	(Adrastus): You have, you have . . . (Chorus): . . . a weight of grief that suffices!
αἰαῖ <αἰαῖ>.	(Adrastus): Ah me, <ah me>!
τοῖς τεκοῦσι δ’ οὐ λέγεις;	(Chorus): Is it not to his mother that you speak?
ἀίετέ μου.	(Adrastus): Hear me!

³⁴ The motif of the journey occurs in ancient and modern laments for the dead. See Alexiou 2002:189-93.

³⁵ Lines 794-97 are an anapestic prelude to the antiphonal lament (the meter is primarily iambic) between Adrastus and the chorus. See Collard (1975:310 *ad loc.*; 311) for the metrical schema of the first *kommos*.

στένεις ἐπ' ἄμφοϊν ἄχη.	(Chorus): You lament both your woes and mine
εἴθε με Καδμείων ἔναρον στίχες ἐν κονίαισιν.	(Adrastus): Would that the Cadmean ranks had felled me in the dust!
ἐμὸν δὲ μήποτ' ἐζύγη δέμας ἐς ἀνδρὸς εὐνάν.	(Chorus): And I, would that my body had never been yoked to a man's bed! ³⁶
ἴδετε κακῶν πέλαγος, ὦ ματέρες τάλαιναι τέκνων.	(Adrastus): Look upon this sea of troubles, O unhappy mothers of sons!
κατὰ μὲν ὄνυξιν ἠλοκίσμεθ', ἀμφὶ δὲ σποδὸν κάρᾳ κεχύμεθα.	(Chorus): Our cheeks are furrowed with our nails, our heads besprinkled with dust!

It is worth noting that the above exchange echoes the playwright's earlier description of antiphonal lament performance in lines 71-72 (chorus): ἀγῶν ὄδ' ἄλλος ἔρχεται / γόων γόοις διάδοχος ("See, each one takes up and leads laments in response to lamentations"). The close connection between the individuals who comprise this community of lament performers is reiterated in the chorus' cry to their "fellow singers" (ξυνωδοί) and those who "share in grievances" (ξυναλγηδόνες) to "take up the chorus that Hades honors" (73-75).

Ponos, Truth, and Antiphony in Inner Mani

The function of antiphonal lament performance in establishing a bond among the community of female participants that Euripides portrays in his *Suppliants* is mirrored in modern women's lament practices in the Inner Mani region of the Peloponnese. I reiterate that in the *Suppliants* Adrastus represents the agency and function of a female mourner through Euripides' feminized characterization and his traditionally "female" role in the antiphonal lament with the chorus (794-837), thus conforming to the paradigm of female mourning in ancient Greek tragedy. Interpreters of the *Suppliants* discuss the subversive and disruptive nature of the Argive mothers' lamentations as well as their suppression by Adrastus' eulogy, delivered in the style of the *epitaphios logos*.³⁷ However, they have generally neglected to discuss how the antiphonal lament between Adrastus and the chorus of Argive mothers in mourning expresses the sense of communal grief that develops among female lamenters in ancient Greek tragedy and modern women's lament performances. In the final section of this essay, I refer to Seremetakis' observations about female lament in modern Inner Mani to illustrate modern analogues to ancient tragic examples of the expression and validation of *ponos* as well as the importance of antiphony in constructing and preserving a female community in mourning.

³⁶ Lines 822-23 are my own translation.

³⁷ See, for example: Collard 1975:308; Derderian 2001:48; H. Foley 2001:36-45; Loraux 1986:48-49, 107-8; McClure 1999:45-47.

Seremetakis, who has family origins in Inner Mani and who participated in mourning rituals as a *moiroloyístra* during her research, believes that the Maniat women's lament tradition is an instrument of cultural power for an otherwise marginalized group in a traditionally male-dominated community (1991:2-5, 99-125, and *passim*).³⁸ Indeed, she recognizes women's laments as poetic expressions of emotion as well as a means of creating and cementing individual and community identities within the cultural context of Maniat village society: "Antiphonic reciprocity between women in the mourning ritual entails the intensive interpenetration of collective and individual poetic creation" (3). Essential to Seremetakis' examination and interpretation of Maniat female ritual lament is her chapter concerning what she terms "the ethics of antiphony," in which she explores the complex elements and functions of Maniat women's lament performance by discussing different ways women signify, witness, and validate pain (99-125). Seremetakis observes that mourning is a ritual process through which Maniat women construct an identity of the self; the element of pain (*ponos*) as "truth-claiming" is an essential aspect of female identity and of establishing an alternative, resistant community through the performance of laments for the dead.³⁹ In the context of the Maniat *kláma* (the wake and mourning ritual, a distinctly female institution), women mourners construct "truth" by expressing, witnessing, and validating each other's pain through a ritual process of mourning manifested in the antiphonal form and structure of lament performance. In the following Maniat *moirólói*, the leader of the dirge (*koriféa*), twice widowed, asks her audience to "witness to the truth of her discourse" (103):

I married off my Andreas
 nearby me and conveniently
 here in Koumouidrianika,
 and afterwards, my Demos,
 he took Christofilo,
 the sister of Alogakos
 who was a prosperous man
 and filled our houses
 with dresses and slips.
 Eh, Alogako, come close
 For me to speak this
 And you to hear it.
 Am I speaking truth or lies?

I chose this *moirólói* because the addressee of the phrase "come close" is a male kin of the *moiroloyístra*. Seremetakis asserts that the female mourner's appeal to her male relative to

³⁸ H. Foley (2001:152, 156-57) and Holst-Warhaft (1992:45-7) also refer to Seremetakis' discussion of the role of antiphony in modern Maniat lament performance.

³⁹ See Martin (2003:126-28) for a discussion of the importance of "truth-claiming" in the contexts of modern Maniat, Homeric, and Irish lament. See also Ó Laoire 1999, 2004, 2005 and Partridge 1980 on Irish lament.

“witness” her *ponos* is in fact an appeal to her audience of women to “witness” and to “validate” her lament, since a male will avoid “crossing the gender boundaries of the lament session” (1991:103). During the *kláma*, the female lamenter will often call to and name a woman in the audience and invite her to draw closer to the corpse; those summoned then actively enter the mourning ritual, thus intensifying the emotional atmosphere of the *kláma* (97). In contrast, when a *moiroloyístra* calls upon a man, he neither responds nor engages in a dialogue with the mourners; nor does he enter into their physical space of lamentation, for the *kláma* exemplifies the interior, distinctly female space (95).⁴⁰ Seremetakis recounts a salient illustration of the geography of gender boundaries in the modern Maniat *kláma* (98):

The square was always divided into two gender domains—one side was occupied by women, the other side by men. One man moving towards the male side inadvertently passed too close to the female space of the *kláma*. He was immediately addressed by a female mourner, literally called to “come close and join.” The expression on his face was one of embarrassment, disorientation, and confusion. He quickly moved away.

This interaction is reminiscent of the interface between Theseus and the community of female lamenters in Euripides’ *Suppliants* 87-99. The Athenian king’s reaction to the mourners’ dirges and physical gestures of ritual lamentation is one of fear and “disorientation, and confusion” as well. Although Theseus and Aethra engage in a dialogue, Theseus refuses to take part in the pitiable “wailing, beating of breasts, and keening of the dead” (γόους . . . καὶ στέρνων κτύπτου / νεκρῶν τε θρήνους, 87-88). Unlike Adrastus, who, in the first part of Euripides’ *Suppliants*, is part of the community of lamenting women, Maniat men remain on the periphery or outside of the geographic and emotional/psychological boundaries of the female-controlled *kláma* mourning ritual. Instead, they exercise legitimate legal and political control through their participation in the *yerondikí*, the all-male council.⁴¹

During the *kláma* ritual, a single female lamenter (*koriféa*) emerges from among the collective mourners (*moiroloyístres*) as a leader who improvises a solo lament; Seremetakis observes that at least one woman is perceived to be the *koriféa* of all of the mourners “because she attains the deepest intensities of pain” (1991:99). The antiphonal responses of the *moiroloyístres* “validate” the soloist’s pain with their own pain, thereby legitimizing *ponos* by “witnessing” it. Antiphony is in fact “an extension of the ethic of helping,” that Seremetakis views as “a complex system of social exchange” that encompasses the female spheres of agricultural labor as well as mourning (100-101). One example of an intense and dramatic antiphonal lament is that of a “poetry-prose counterpoint” that takes place during a *kláma* ritual

⁴⁰ Seremetakis examines the multiple boundaries between men and women in Maniat society. Mortuary, agriculture, and household spaces are connected by the “ethics of care” (95-98): “In this society with its everyday emphasis on optical distancing, care and tending are symbolized by special intimacy. Because of the predominant inside/outside polarities, and the multiple boundaries between men and women, clan and clan, and society and nature, special intimacy has a particular impact and meaning: interiority” (96).

⁴¹ See Seremetakis (1991:126-58) on the function of the *yerondikí* and the conflicts between this all-male jural institution and the indirect political and social power of the female-controlled *kláma* in Maniat society.

where the monologues are sung by the two daughters of the deceased in coordination with the lament, which is sung by an elderly woman (112-15).

Seremetakis perceives a relation between the modern Maniat *koriféa* and the ancient Greek *coryphaeus*, for both emerge as leaders of the chorus who engage in a dialogical relationship with them: “Like the *coryphaeus*, the Maniat *koriféa* emerges as a leader from within the chorus, and in the *moiolói* establishes an antiphonic relation to the chorus. The *koriféa* is united with the chorus in an agon with the Other, be that death, *moira* (fate), or the male social order outside the *kláma*” (124). However, unlike the professional mourners’ and the kinswomen’s singing of antiphonal *thrênoi* in ancient Greek epic and tragic poetry, the modern Maniat *thrínos* holds no association with professional mourners; nevertheless, highly skilled mourners are often given precedence in a *kláma* mourning session (124-25).⁴²

Seremetakis calls attention to the importance in the Maniat culture of mourning of properly “witnessing” death through ritual lamentation. There are two types of death in Inner Mani: the “silent” and “naked” (therefore “bad”) death, and the “witnessed” (thus “good”) death (76-77, 101). A “silent” death implies isolation, cold, nakedness, poverty, and public shame (*ibid*). One of the signs of a “naked” death is “the absence of a chorus and of other soloists to ‘take’ the *moiolói* from the *koriféa*” (76). When the chorus, through their antiphonic responses (e.g., singing refrains, doubling the last word of a verse, stylized sobbing), hears and responds to the soloist’s speaking the discourse of death, they are “witnessing” her pain and therefore validating the lament discourse (100; 104). Indeed, a “silent” death in Maniat society is a death without proper antiphonal lamentation (103-4). The “good” death, in contrast, is “witnessed” by female relations and friends in the female *kláma* mourning ritual. This process of validating, witnessing, and legitimizing the soloist’s pain by her group of fellow mourners, Seremetakis argues, is essential to female Maniat identity and in establishing an alternative, resistant female community through lament-performance (120). Moreover, Maniat women themselves claim that they cannot sing laments properly without the help of others; in this cultural context, pain must be socially constructed in antiphonic relations in order to be rendered valid (*ibid*). Seremetakis defines the “acoustics of death” as embodied in lamenting and “screaming” the dead (101). In the following lament, recited by an elderly Maniat woman, the mourner emphasizes the lack of a witness (104):

Where are you
 Yiannakena [the dead]?
 I climbed up your staircase
 and I found Yiannakis [husband of the dead]
 I climbed down the stairs
 and I found Voulitsa alone
 and Kalliopitsa the little one
 and Vasilo drawing water [daughters of the dead].
 I climbed back up

⁴² Cf. Alexiou 2002:11-13, 131-32.

And said to Yiannakis,
 “Are we not going to say anything
 to witness her, to suffer for her?”

The husband desires to “erase the dead” by silencing the mourners, but the *moiroloyístra* “rescues,” so to speak, the deceased from a “silent,” “naked” death by her *moiolóí*. Seremetakis’ account of an urban niece of the deceased who sang dirges, performed the ritual lament gestures, and talked to the dead for over seven hours in order to avoid a “silent” death is memorable (101). These accounts of Maniat *moiroloyístres* “witnessing” and “validating” a death in order to render it “good” reminds the reader of the tragic figure of Electra’s unceasing mourning in Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Electra*. For while the playwrights portray Electra’s continual mourning as excessive, overly passionate, and at times dangerous, in the context of modern Maniat culture she would be properly “witnessing” her father’s death—saving Agamemnon from a “silent,” “naked” death—by her extravagant lamentation. Perhaps Electra’s emotive utterances represent the ancient equivalent to the modern Maniat “screaming” the dead.⁴³ I see a striking parallel as well between the choruses’ laments in the final *kommos* of Euripides’ *Suppliants* after Theseus and the sons of the slain Argive chiefs bring in urns containing the bones (ὄστᾱ) of the war-dead and the reaction of female relatives during a Maniat *kláma* when a box, bearing the bones of the son of the deceased, is brought into the room (110-11). In the *Suppliants* passage, the *coryphaeus* reacts to the sight of the remains of the Argive mothers’ slain sons (*Supp.* 1114-22):⁴⁴

ἰὼ·
 τάδε δὴ παίδων ἤδη φθιμένων
 ὄστᾱ φέρεται. λάβετε, ἀμφίπολοι,
 γραΐας ἀμενοῦς (οὐ γὰρ ἔνεστιν
 ῥώμη παίδων ὑπὸ πένθους)
 πολλοῦ τε χρόνου ζώσης μέτρα δὴ
 καταλειβομένης τ’ ἄλγεσι πολλοῖς.
 τί γὰρ ἂν μεῖζον τοῦδ’ ἔτι θνητοῖς
 πάθος ἐξεύροις
 ἢ τέκνα θανόντ’ ἐσιδέσθαι;

Look! They are bringing the bones of our dead children!
 Attendants, take hold of a weak old woman! Grief for my
 son has left me strengthless. I have lived a long space of
 years and been melted away with many woes. What grief

⁴³ Seremetakis remarks that sometimes Maniat “screaming” the dead is completely cathartic and disorderly, while sometimes it is semi-musical (1991:110).

⁴⁴ These lines, as well as lines 794-97, are an anapestic introduction to the following iambic metra of the *kommos*, where Euripides employs a second chorus in lines 1123-64 (the sons of the seven slain Argive warriors). Cf. Collard 1975:390-95.

greater than seeing one's children slain could you find for
mortals?

The chorus follows with a lament that begins the *kommos* for the seven chiefs (*Supp.* 1127-30):

ἰὼ, ἰὼ,
πᾶ δάκρυα φέρεις φίλα
ματρὶ τῶν ὀλωλότων
σποδοῦ τε πλῆθος ὀλίγον ἀντὶ σωμαμάτων
εὐδοκίμων δὴ ποτ' ἐν Μυκῆναις;

Ah, ah,
How can you bring tears to the loving
mother of the slain
and a little dust in exchange for the bodies
of men once glorious in Mycenae?

The two choruses, one consisting of the mothers, the other of the sons of the slain Argive chiefs, continue their antiphonal lament for their *philoï* (1131-64). It is worth remembering that the death rites for the Attic war-dead involved the laying out and cremation of the bodies on the battlefield—the very ritual that Theseus performed for the slain Argive chiefs—and public lamentation over their bones, followed by the *epitaphios logos* (H. Foley 2001:39-40).⁴⁵ The following scene from a Maniat *kláma* ritual presents a striking analogy (Seremetakis narrates; 1991:110):

At some point in the late afternoon, a little box appeared, and I sensed an entire change in the atmosphere of the *kláma* (wake). . . . The box was placed by the head of the coffin, where it remained closed for some time. When a mourner referred to the dead son in her lament, one sister began to shout *adhérfi* (brother) and the *kláma* reached its peak. Ascending screams and calls to the dead son by his name filled the room. At that moment the box was opened and bones appeared. . . . When the box was opened, a sudden and powerful jolt electrified the room. It was so forceful that I do not recall who opened the box. One or two human leg bones were taken out. One scream, coming from the elder sister, rose above all others. It retained its peak without subsiding till the woman passed out. . . . Women were standing and screaming, pulling their hair out. It was the peak. . . . The two sisters had been exclaiming, “My brother, is that you?! Is that how you became? It can't be.” The men, aware of the power of the emotions in that room, were alarmed and frightened.

⁴⁵ Apart from H. Foley's illuminating analysis of this play (2001), neither she nor any other recent commentator (to the best of my knowledge) has remarked on the similarities between this final *kommos* of Euripides' *Suppliants* and the most dramatic scene of lament in Seremetakis' ethnography. See Garland 1985, Danforth 1982, Kurtz and Boardman 1971, and Morris 1992 regarding ancient and modern Greek burial customs and rituals.

The emotionally charged atmosphere of these two “lamenting the bones” scenes is certainly comparable: the intense emotional effect of introducing the bones of the deceased in both the ancient and modern performance contexts is tangibly kinetic. The *coryphaeus* of the ancient tragedy and an elder Maniat *moiroloyístra* both exhibit extreme physical weakness. The lamenting family members address their deceased relatives directly in the second person: the Maniat sisters in the *kláma* repeatedly exclaim “brother,” while the chorus of sons in the *Suppliants* in the *kommós* shout “Father (πάτερ), do you hear your sons’ lamenting?” (1142), and again “Father (πάτερ), I seem even now to see you before my eyes,” (1151).⁴⁶ The tragic choruses and the *moiroloyístres* “help” each other lament through antiphonal call and response in the *Suppliants*, and by the modern lamenters “taking” the cathartic screaming, one from the other. At the end of both of these ancient and modern “lamenting the bones” episodes, a male authority figure enters (Theseus in the *Suppliants*, the Maniat men in the periphery of the *kláma*) in order to interject a “rational,” calming influence to the mourning session.⁴⁷

Seremetakis’ observations regarding the function and significance of modern Maniat lament practices serve as a paradigm for the diachronic oral tradition and the “oral-derived” tragic textual tradition of Greek women’s laments for the dead. Performance of laments, be it the primary “enabling event” of the funeral itself, or the representation and reaction to death in the context of a tragic play, establishes and cements bonds among a community of women, or represented women in the case of tragedy. Lamentation utilizes pain (*ponos*) as a means of communication and expression of “truth”: the truth of an individual’s personal suffering and the truth concerning the female community’s criticisms and even protest against the wider sphere of patriarchal village society. Both ancient tragic representations of women’s laments for the dead and authentic modern accounts of lament performances may be viewed as empowering verbal arts, as manifestations of women’s ability to communicate individual and collective grief for the deceased, and as a “bridge” between the worlds of the living and the dead, between mourner and non-mourner, and between the otherwise marginalized members of the muted “female universe” and the larger social context in which men wield ultimate authority—with the exception of how women publicly lament their dead.

This comparison of the elements of solitude, resistance, and solidarity in the portrayals of female lament for the dead in ancient Greek tragedy with women’s lament practices in modern Greece suggests to me that modern *moirológia* have their roots in the ancient *thrênoi*, and that the ancient tragic representations accurately reflect the actual practice of ritual lamentation. This is not to claim teleologically that ancient and modern Greek ritual laments are the “same,” nor that we can understand everything about ancient women’s lamentation from studying its modern counterpart. Since parallels do exist, and since some bear striking resemblance to one another in

⁴⁶ A notable difference here is that, unlike the *Suppliants*’ passage, the female relatives of the deceased call to the dead son “by his name” before the sisters call out, “my brother, is that you?”

⁴⁷ Theseus reminds the Argive mourners that he rescued their “valiant” (ἀρίστων σώμαθ’) loved ones’ remains in his speech (*Suppliants* 1165-75). Seremetakis (1991:110-11) observes that men entered this *kláma* and took the women who had fainted out of the room to bring them back to consciousness by giving them coffee and fresh air.

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