CHAPTER 14
DISMANTLING THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MACHINE: FELIKS MORISO-LEWA'S *ANTIGÒN* AND LUIS ALFARO'S *ELECTRICIDAD*

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Throughout most of Luis Alfaro's *Electricidad* (2003), his cholo adaptation of the myth of Electra set in the Boyle Heights neighbourhood of Los Angeles, Orestes is in exile in Las Vegas, where his mentor Nino trains him for gang life.[1] Eventually, affairs in LA demand Orestes' return, as Nino explains:

> In el mundo del cholo [the world of the cholo] the Four Directions are at war . . . We're trapped between three freeways and a Pollo Loco. La Casa de Atridas [the House of Atridas] is vulnerable.[2]

Near the play's climax, Las Vecinas ('The Neighbors', a chorus of 'mujeres [women] from the hood', 66), share their foreboding that something bad is imminent. As with Nino's words, Las Vecinas express their dread in terms that blend narrative demands with a sense that the neighbourhood, despite being in the middle of LA, is a kind of prison:

> Don't go near the windows.
> Trapped in our casas [houses].
> Trapped in our yardas [yards].
> Trapped in our barrios [neighbourhoods].[3]

These passages typify the world of Alfaro's Greco-cholo tragedies, both in terms of the urban confinement and his Anglo-friendly idiom of lightly inflected Spanglish.

This chapter centres in the intersection of verbal hybridity, socio-geographical marginalization, and the classical tradition. To access these issues more universally, I pair *Electricidad* with Feliks Moriso-Lewa's *Antigòn* (1953), the first major work of literature in Haitian Creole.[4] These examples are sufficiently separated in time, space, plot and cultural milieu that any direct influence is improbable. Instead, these two plays help us push beyond isolated case studies and work, together with many of the chapters in this volume, towards a more theoretical framework for approaching reception studies.

My impulse to pair these plays stems from the fact that both were composed in hybrid languages. Haitian Creole and Spanglish share certain similarities but also reveal, interestingly, different linguistic histories. Haitian Creole has long been the language used by the vast majority of Haitians, but French (and, increasingly English) continues to

be the language of education, politics and upward mobility. Moriso, originally a Francophone writer, championed Creole and lobbied for its official recognition, which eventually happened in 1987. Prior to Moriso's efforts, Creole was an unofficial and almost exclusively oral language with no fixed orthography, and although his aspirations for the language have not been fully realized (most Haitian authors today publish in English or French), Creole thrives in Haiti and throughout the diaspora.[5]

Like Haitian Creole, Spanglish is a hybrid language, and Spanglish speakers have often been marginalized because of their language. The Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz, for example, said that Spanglish 'is neither good nor bad but abominable' ('ni es bueno, ni es malo sino abominable'), but the prevalence and even *gravitas* of Spanglish has been on the rise recently. Already in 2000, Ilan Stavans described it as 'a vital social code, whose sheer bravura is revolutionizing both Spanish and … English'.[6] Today, Spanglish exists in a host of localized forms, especially along the US–Mexico border, and in culturally heterogeneous cities, such as Miami and New York.[7] The work of musicians like Cardi B, Pitbull, Demi Lovato and Daddy Yankee have brought Spanglish to global audiences.[8]

Despite these similarities, the differences between Haitian Creole and Spanglish loom large. Creole coalesced around many languages mixed with French, whereas Spanglish variously blends two well-established languages. One implication is that Spanglish is more fluid than Creole both regionally (e.g. LA vs. Miami) and culturally (e.g. Dominican vs. Mexican). Furthermore, Creole primarily exists in Haiti and several diasporic centres, whereas Spanglish has no geographical centre except within each local manifestation. The variability of Spanglish reflects the ethnic heterogeneity of its speakers, who combine any number of Hispanophone cultures intersecting with Anglophone contexts.

In using hybrid languages, Moriso and Alfaro consciously chose not to work in more established literary languages. Both playwrights predicate their productions on a social mission to elevate communities that have been sidelined by their limited fluency in hegemonic languages. The disadvantages of this systemic oppression are addressed more directly by Alfaro, who often has characters speak of the urban topography's confinement, and this physical isolation parallels the social consequences of poverty in Spanglish and Creole communities.[9] In choosing not to compose in French, English or Spanish, Moriso and Alfaro resist social marginalization based on a hierarchy of languages. Their work problematizes notions that 'Latin America' refers geographically to anything south of the US–Mexico border or linguistically to any Hispanophone context.[10] Alfaro's focus on cholo communities within the US challenges such geographical delimitation, and Haitian Creole undermines the linguistic assumption.

To analyse this combination of linguistic marginalization and Greek tragedy's cultural centrality, I draw upon the biopolitical theory of Giorgio Agamben, who offers a useful framework for understanding the politics of these plays.[11] Biopolitics is the Foucauldian idea that with the advent of modernity, political regimes began to assume responsibility for the organization and management of human bodies and life processes.[12] Whereas traditional sovereign authority asserted the power to kill those who transgress the law, biopolitical authority uses scientific technologies to regulate the lives of its subjects to

generate biopower. Foucault was particularly interested in institutions, such as prisons and hospitals, as mechanisms ('dispositifs') of controlling and regulating lives, but similar issues arise across the political spectrum, including policies about health care, pregnant women, foetuses, stem cells, immigrants, the mentally ill, the terminally ill, etc. The 1999 film *The Matrix* envisions a science-fiction biopolitical extreme, in which humans are farmed as living batteries to power the machines that control the world. Historically, the constant point of reference for biopolitical theory is the Holocaust, in which biopolitical control became so extreme that it morphed into a politics based on the production of death ('thanatopolitics') that claimed to purify the lives of those outside the camps.[13] Agamben's extension of Foucault's basic idea raises the possibility that by reworking classical narratives, typically reserved for elite educational programs, Moriso and Alfaro can resist the social stigmatization for communities regularly denied access to privileged educations. They can also respond to Agamben by broadening the scope of biopolitics to incorporate theatre as a force that can shape what I call *biopoetic* power.

In the following pages, I harness a biopolitical apparatus to the decisions to set Greek tragedy to hybrid languages. I first discuss each play, with an emphasis on language and religion. For both Moriso and Alfaro, the prestige of the classical (and, for Moriso, French neoclassical) model becomes the fulcrum against which the dynamism of Creole and Spanglish culture can be highlighted. I conclude by showing how Moriso and Alfaro similarly harness the classical tradition to demand more equitable systems of social organization. The staging of Haitian and cholo characters and concerns constitutes a decolonizing politics that forces the hegemonic cultural paradigm to listen with new ears to voices too often ignored.

Moriso's *Antigòn*

A seductive legend describes how Moriso (1912–98) conceived his plan for *Antigòn* as a friendly bet about Creole's (in)ability to accommodate Greek drama.[14] Classical and neoclassical drama was a staple of Haitian Francophone culture, but Moriso introduced such material to the wider Creole audience and couched it in a uniquely Haitian idiom.[15] Fradinger explores this theme insightfully in making the argument that Moriso's play amounts to a '*Haitian historical drama*'.[16] Given this goal, the idea of a wager inspiring Moriso's *Antigòn* sounds too bland, and Danticat is surely correct that composing in Creole represented a bold artistic statement in politically dangerous times.[17] Moriso himself outlined a history of Creole theatre extending back to the colonial era, suggesting that his task was not so much to stretch the powers of Creole but, rather, to instantiate them forcefully in public consciousness.[18] By adapting a classical story, he could wield the cultural prestige of that tradition against the Francophone minority who saw Creole as a defective language. Whereas Fradinger interprets *Antigòn* as a performance that works through many of the enduring cultural legacies of the Haitian Revolution, I follow Moriso's statements about his choice of language to show how he made Antigone a thoroughly Haitian tale.[19]

Lang has argued that 'a Creole literature does not just happen; it is willed into existence';[20] it is, therefore, essential to understand the general linguistic climate in which Moriso made his choice. Haitian Creole emerged in the colonization of the Caribbean when the Taïno population of Hispaniola was largely wiped out; in its place, French became the language of the educated class, while the rest learned to blend elements of European, African and Caribbean languages. The great rupture came in the Revolution of 1791–1804 when nearly all Europeans died or fled at the establishment of the first independent black nation. French, thus, had an ambivalent status as the language associated with colonial oppression but also the only established language of education, administration and social advancement. As M^{c}Connell argues in her chapter in this volume, this basic pattern holds true throughout the Francophone Caribbean. The case of Haiti is different in that the Revolution removed virtually all Europeans at the establishment of independence. This transformational moment inspired Aimé Césaire to describe Haiti in *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (1939) as the place where *négritude* asserted itself for the first time.[21] Some Haitians wanted to see the entire nation embrace French, but this has always remained a minority perspective. English might seem like an alternative, especially since Moriso, like many Haitian intellectuals, completed his advanced education in the United States (MA, Columbia, 1943).[22] Yet he grew up under the shadow of the US occupation of Haiti (1915–34), which brought English, too, into the dynamics of colonial domination.[23] The 1920s and 1930s saw early debates about the value, potential, origins and status of Creole. Was it, for example, a language at all or merely a transitional step towards 'proper' French? In 1936, linguist Jules Fain and anthropologist Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain published contrasting arguments that asserted Haitian Creole developed primarily from maritime French and Africa, respectively.[24]

In this cultural climate, Moriso decided to write in Creole after publishing his earliest works in French. This endorsement of a language with so few readers (albeit many speakers) represents a conscious two-part choice: first, *not* to write in an established literary language, and, second, to embrace a didactic role. As Moriso recalled, in composing his *Antigòn* he was obsessed with the status of Creole. He wanted the play to succeed not just for artistic reasons but also to prove that Creole could, as he put it, do more than 'just comedies and vaudeville'; he composed his *Antigòn* 'for the benefit of literature'.[25] This emphasis, contrasting the more political focus of his sequel to the story of Antigone, *Wa Kreyon* (*King Creon*), helps explain why his Creole adaptation of Anouilh's *Médée* from 1954 as well as Fouché's *Oedipe-roi* of 1953 never made it to print. Seeing Antigone not just to the stage but onto the page took particular focus and effort.

Antigòn's prologue juxtaposes the universalism of Antigone's story, as Moriso perceived it, with its own cultural specificity. The Haitian context of Moriso's play emerges most forcefully through his use of Creole and in his likening of Greek divinities to the spirits of Vodou. He introduces the latter point after relating the background of Antigòn's family:

Se yon kont yo te tire depi lontan, lontan.
Yo tire l deja nan tout peyi.

Yo mete l deja nan tout lang.
M di kite m wè si m pa ta mete l an kreyòl tou.
M pran tou sa m te kapab pran ladan l
jan yo te rakonte l lontan, lontan . . .
Epi, m mete ladan l solèy d Ayiti,
m mete ladan l yon jan yon mannyè,
pèp d Ayiti genyen pou l konprann lavi ak lanmò,
kouray ak lapenn,
chans ak devenn.
M mete ladan l
lèsen, lèmò, mistè,
lespri ki gade gran chimen,
simityè, baryè, pyebwa, jaden, lanmè, larivyè,
ki koumande lapli, van, loray, ann Ayiti,
e ki byen sanble ak sa mesye a yo rele
dye grèk la yo.
Antigòn pral antere Polinis
kou sa ta pase ann Ayiti.
Wa Kreyon pral touye Antigòn
kou yon gran nèg Ayisyen
konn regle yon zafè kon sa.
Epi, m ap kite Antigòn, Izmèn, Marenn,
Wa Kreyon, Tirezyas, Emon, Filo
di tout pawòl Ayisyen ta di
nan yon ka parèy.
M pa reskonsab sa yo fè . . .
M kou nou tout la a.
M prale rete gade yo.
M prale chita tande yo.
Men Antigòn nou an.[26]

This is a folktale they used to tell a long, long time ago.
They had already told it in every country.
They had already translated it into every language.
I said, let me see if I can translate it into Creole too.
I took everything I could take from it – the same as they told it long, long ago.
And I put into it the Haitian Sun,
I put into it a style and a manner
the Haitian people have of understanding life and death, courage and sorrow, chance and woe.
I put into it the saints, the dead, and the mysteries,
the spirits who give protection to the highway,
cemeteries, fences, trees, fields, seas, rivers,

the spirits who command the rain, wind, and thunder in Haiti,
which seem close to what the author called the Greek gods.

Antigòn will bury Polinis, just as might happen in Haiti.
King Kreyon will kill Antigòn, just as a rich man in Haiti might do in such a case.
And I will let Antigòn, Izmèn, Marenn [the girls' godmother],
King Kreyon, Tirezyas, Emon [Haemon], Filo [Kreyon's attendant]
say everything a Haitian would say in a similar case.
I am not responsible for what they do. . .
I am like all of you present here.
I will stay and watch them.
I am going to sit down and listen to them.
Here is our Antigòn.[27]

Moriso opens a conduit through which Haiti takes over the story of Antigone. Like a theatrical alchemist, he adds Haitian culture into the story and then steps back to observe the results. He claims responsibility for bringing the two cultures together but not for what a Haitian Antigone or Creon might say or do. The characters and the cultural inputs take control, and the playwright joins the audience to watch the tale unfold.

In bringing Antigone into Creole, Moriso focuses on the similarity between the Haitian spirits (the Vodou *lwa*) and Greek gods. The parallel between divine beings actively engaged in human society in both cultures offers a superficial connection, but Moriso also uses Vodou as the mechanism for making his two most important plot innovations: Kreyon kills Antigòn directly (as opposed to the Sophoclean suicide) and Antigòn and Emon become happily married *lwa* after their deaths.

In the Greek play, Creon speaks with Haemon (635–780) before Antigone is led away (her last line is 943), after which Tiresias enters (987) and persuades the king to reconsider his judgement. Moriso reworks this sequence such that Kreyon sends Antigòn away, then speaks with Emon, and, before Tirezyas comes on stage, he flies into a rage and calls upon the spirits to help him kill Antigòn:

[Emon] pral chèshe Antigòn? Se zonbi Antigòn l a kontre. Se kadav Antigòn l a kenbe men. Lò l ap konprann l ap pale ak Antigòn, se ak zonbi Antigòn la val fè kontwòlè sa a. (*Kreyon . . . soti ak yon vè dlo, yon kouto.*) . . . Sekle-Kite,[28] ou menm ki gade lèmò, gwo lwa mwen . . . ou menm k ap veye Antigòn, ale chèche kote li ye, nanm Antigòn. Mennen l vini nan vè dlo sa a pou m pike l . . . m ap pike nanm Antigòn. . .M ap pran nanm Antigòn . . . Ou wè m nan dwa mwen. M ap pike nanm Antigòn.[29]

[Emon] will go and look for Antigòn? He will find her zombie. He will hold the hand of Antigòn's corpse. When he finds himself talking to Antigòn, he will be talking to Antigòn's zombie. (*Kreyon . . . gets out a glass of water and a knife.*) . . . Sekle-Kite, you who watch over the dead, my great *Lwa* . . . you who protect

> Antigòn, go and look for where it is, Antigòn's soul. Bring it into this glass of water, and I will stab it . . . I stab Antigòn's soul . . . I am taking Antigòn's soul. . .You see that I am right. I stab Antigòn's soul.

Sophocles' Antigone can be understood as someone who has been reduced to a kind of living death, since her story emphasizes how much has been stripped away from her.[30] She is a daughter who has lost her parents amid the shocking revelation of her family's history, a sister who has lost her brothers, a fiancée who rejects her betrothed in favour of a dead brother, a member of the royal family who has been deemed a criminal and, most sweepingly, a living person who has committed herself to the demands of the dead.[31] Yet for all of Sophocles' efforts to present his Antigone as isolated and vulnerable, this aspect of her character emerges even more powerfully in the Haitian idea of the zombie (*zonbi* is a Creole word derived from African, most probably Bantu, rather than European language traditions).

Before becoming a staple of modern horror, the Haitian zombie was simply an animated corpse. Not a slathering monster eager to feed on the living, the Haitian zombie stands for the control that a *bokor*, or sorcerer, can exert over de-animated flesh. Fradinger sees Kreyon's fixation on Antigòn's zombie in terms of national trauma:

> [A zombie] is a haunting image in folk belief and an extreme metaphor for national consciousness: it represents the complete loss of will on the part of a slave; it is a body whose soul has been robbed with black magic and can be used to serve a *human* master, in contrast to the Vodou servitude to the spirits. Creon summons the most nightmarish image of the colonial past: Antigòn's 'No', in contrast, is everything that the Haitian rebellion stands for.[32]

The zombie – body without soul, human without humanity – offers an extreme manifestation of the typical Antigone motif of being reduced to a kind of living death. Stratton has already connected the thoroughly Hollywood-ized zombie that begins with Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) with marginalized populations, such as *Muselmänner* of Nazi camps and displaced or immigrant populations.[33] Yet the zombie of the modern American imagination traces its roots back to Haitian contexts. William Seabrook's occultist novel *The Magic Island* (1929), the original zombie film *White Zombie* (1932) and Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological study *Tell my Horse* (1938) were all released against the backdrop of the US occupation of Haiti (1914–34). These popular works from Moriso's young adulthood all disseminated the connection between zombies and Haiti in the Anglophone imagination. *White Zombie*, in particular, because it presents zombies initially in the economic role of soulless workers in a sugar mill, uses zombies to comment on the oppressive tactics of capitalist overlords. Set (though not filmed) in Haiti but completely Americanized, the film parallels Fradinger's contextualization of Antigòn within Haiti's anti-colonial history. In both cases – the economic and the historical – zombies represent the extremity of human degradation. The Haitian cultural trauma that gave rise to the zombie, furthermore, suggests new dimensions for the Greek Antigone.

Moriso's second major plot innovation uses another aspect of Vodou culture to upend the pessimism of Kreyon's attempt to make Antigòn into a zombie. In Vodou, the *lwa* are not a fixed pantheon. Some, such as Papa Legba and Baron Samedi, endure across the country, while others represent the spirits of recently dead ancestors. That is to say that a *lwa* comes into existence when someone honours the spirit of a departed loved one. When that *lwa* no longer receives recognition, it passes away. When Kreyon kills Antigòn, he uses his sovereign power[34] to kill a rival, and he relies upon his human position to gain the support of the spirit world and seemingly assumes that Antigòn would not join the *lwa* upon her death. As he is completing the ceremony of killing Antigòn, Tirezyas arrives and convinces Kreyon of the error of his ways.

In Sophocles' play, Creon rushes to the cave in which Antigone had been imprisoned but arrives too late; in Moriso's version, the action splits between what happens on- and off-stage. After Tirezyas claims that the spirits (*lespri*) are abandoning the king, Kreyon asks him to contact Danbala, an extremely powerful *lwa*. Danbala does not respond. Instead, when Marenn, the godmother, comes on stage, she is immediately possessed by Èzili Freda, a female spirit of love who is married to Danbala. The voice of Èzili reveals that Emon is about to die. At this point, Kreyon leaves the stage in hopes of saving his son, while Tirezyas summons the voice of the dead Antigòn. While Kreyon is offstage, Moriso accomplishes what must have been an amazing and ethereal theatrical effect. We hear, but do not see, Antigòn lead Emon into a new realm of existence as *lwa*. The voices of the two lovers describe a spirit-marriage as their earthly concerns fade away. As Antigòn and Emon recede from this world, their bliss overwhelms their consciousness. Just then, Kreyon returns and announces that where he had expected to find Antigòn and Emon, he saw only two rainbows, the outward sign that they had become children of Danbala and become *lwa*. Moriso uses Vodou as a primary mechanism for making Antigone Haitian, and by showing that Antigòn and Emon can transcend the oppressive politics of Kreyon, he urges his audience to see that they can create their own *lwa*, their own gods and ultimately their own political destiny.[35]

Alfaro's *Electricidad*

As we jump half a century from Haitian Creole to Californian Spanglish, many of the same sociolinguistic issues surrounding Moriso's play persist. Powers has brought Luis Alfaro's adaptation of *Electra* by MacArthur fellow Luis Alfaro (b. 1963) into discussions of classical reception with an article that situates his play as 'a sort of therapy for the sociological problems' of the cholo community.[36] While she notes the importance of his use of Spanglish, especially as a tool for empowering the cholo youth with whom Alfaro regularly conducts workshops, I emphasize the impact of Spanglish among his wider, primarily Anglo audience. By bringing the often-insular world of the barrio to the consciousness of theatregoers, Alfaro addresses the social marginalization that hampers his characters' communities, and demands an end to that stigma by inviting American culture to hear a little Spanglish and witness the conflation of his Greco-cholo adaptations.

A language that can rework the canon cannot be ignored, and communities that embody the ethos of tragic performance cannot be dehumanized. Whereas Moriso's primary achievement was to make Sophocles a Haitian writer,[37] Alfaro's success emerges from the invitation to his audiences to connect their biases and expectations about Greek tragedy and the cholo barrios of the Los Angeles basin.[38]

Alfaro has developed an iconic style of bringing together Spanglish and Greek tragedy. He is a professor at the University of Southern California's School of Dramatic Arts and a MacArthur Fellow, and his early plays and poetry have won many awards. But his adaptations of classical plays, beginning with *Electricidad*, which debuted at the Borderlands Theater in Tucson, Arizona (2003), present a provocative intersection of language and plot.[39] Since then he has staged *Oedipus el Rey* (San Francisco, 2010) and two adaptations of Euripides' *Medea*: *Bruja* (San Francisco, 2012) and *Mojada* (Los Angeles, 2015).

Asked in an interview to explain the mixture of English and Spanish that he developed for *Electricidad*, Alfaro responded: 'I consciously wanted to create a play in Spanglish that people who don't speak any Spanish could understand.'[40] This formulation does not go both ways: the verbal foundation of the play is English, since Alfaro's goal is to raise up one community, which is spread across monolithic language zones, to a new level of awareness among another that is primarily monoglot. Whereas Moriso had aimed to champion the ubiquitous Creole spoken throughout Haiti at a newly elevated social register, Alfaro uses a highly accessible version of Spanglish to suit his different theatrical agenda. Thus, one main difference between the languages of Moriso and Alfaro is that, while the former wanted to present his Creole Antigone in ways that seem natural, seamless and obvious to his primary audience, the latter emphasizes narrative and verbal hybridity as the characters navigate the cramped space of the barrio ('trapped between three freeways and a Pollo Loco') that squeezes the neighbourhood into a kind of bare life.

This hybridity shapes *Electricidad* on various levels, as Alfaro coaxes his primarily Anglo-audiences into a new experience of the theatrical and the verbal landscape of America.[41] Beyond the mixture of Spanish and English, the characters themselves sense the strangeness of their Greco-cholo roles. Early in the play, Las Vecinas ask what sort of name Clemencia is, and one suggests, with a terse humour typical of Alfaro's plays, that it might be Texan (67); a few lines later, they note the strangeness of the name Agamenón and the nickname El Auggie (68).[42] Yet the most intriguing name is that of the title character, who evoked the Greek *a-lectros*, 'unmarried' for ancient readers.[43] Electricidad sounds like Electra, though Alfaro builds on this phonetic similarity to emphasize the energetic importance of Electra's new Spanish name (Electricity) by having Orestes marvel at the myriad lights of Las Vegas. The city of lights makes him long for the simplicity of the single bulb in the family's bathroom in LA and for his sister (75), whom he calls his 'little lightbulb' (82). For Orestes, who has a 'poet's corazón ['heart']' (71), Electricidad offers a guiding light.

Beyond this, Alfaro uses the name Electricidad to convey his interest in contrasting feminine roles. His title character, with her devotion to her father, represents 'the old

ways, the indigenous ways', in contrast to whom Clemencia stands for progressive innovation; in Alfaro's own words: 'when [Electricidad] kills her mother, in some ways she kills off progress. To me, Clemencia is feminism.'[44] Electricidad is thus the electricity that drives the plot, but for all the modernity implicit in her name, it is Clemencia who wants the young cholas to take charge of their finances, start businesses, fight back when beaten and reject the sexual violence of men like El Auggie that engendered la casa de Atridas. (This aspect of Clemencia's relationship with her husband explains her coldness towards her children.) As Clemencia describes her sexual history (raped at thirteen in the back of El Auggie's car, rejected by her father as a dirty tramp, sold to El Auggie and forced into motherhood), she asks Electricidad to join her in a new vision for escaping the barrio (with the Spanglish fading into straight English):

> Did I get to escojer [sic]? No my stubborn daughter, I didn't get to choose. And neither will you. History just keeps repeating itself. Cholos don't move forward. They just keep going farther into the past . . . And I want to change it. I want to take back every bruise your father gave me and turn it into a dollar. I want the memory of every one of his punches to be a kiss that could make me believe in myself.[45]

Homer had presented Clytemnestra in bluntly negative and largely passive terms;[46] in Athenian tragedy, she became a more complex character, though primarily in order to highlight the plight of Electra and the ethical challenge facing Orestes;[47] but the idea of a Clytemnestra-figure as admirably progressive had no place in the ancient world. Alfaro's Clemencia is hardly a likeable character, but her story, chafing against classicizing expectations, offers a compelling twist and broadens the ancient revenge-narrative to include the ethical demands of acknowledging and redressing sexual trauma.

Like Moriso, Alfaro also adapts the religious context of his play. The general atmosphere is one of disaffected Catholicism with moments that draw on Aztec mythology (including a gently mocking aetiology of the cholo), but Alfaro's Ifigenia uses religion to reshape the urban landscape. In Greek tragedy, Agamemnon kills Iphigenia before the Trojan War, so she is absent from stories about his doomed homecoming. Yet in *Iphigenia at Tauris*, Euripides has Artemis snatch the girl away from the knife and take her to Tauris. Alfaro plays up this aspect of his La Ifi, as she is known, being both dead and alive in his description of her as the meanest and most violent of them all, who is now born again. Both Abuela, Clemencia's mother, and Electricidad had assumed that Ifi died or was in jail, because she has been absent for so long, and they are surprised to see her return. Yet they are even more surprised to hear that she has been in a convent in Fresno.[48] Alfaro describes this religious rebirth as a socially viable way out of gang violence.[49] Ifi offers Electricidad an alternative to her obsessive, self-destructive devotion to her father and his violent legacy. Before running back to the convent, Ifi asks Electricidad to reconsider what killing their mother will accomplish (79). In contrast to the progressive vision of Clemencia, therefore, Ifi represents the possibility of side-stepping the cycles of violence demanded by the gang system.

La Ifi also draws attention to another type of language in Alfaro's play that reworks a classical motif: scars. Odysseus is recognized because of his famous scar, which he earned on a nearly deadly hunt (*Od.* 19.455–527). Euripides undermines the heroic *bona fides* of recognition-by-scar when his Orestes is discovered by the scar he got as a boy while playing with a pet deer (Eur. *El.* 573–4).[50] Far from ennobling, this scar suggests that Orestes was a typically accident-prone child, and it fits with Euripides' realism in drawing his characters. In all of Alfaro's Greco-cholo plays, a different kind of bodily mark is always visible on stage, namely tattoos. His Orestes learns from Nino that tattoos tell your life's story, and that each one must be earned, since they preserve the achievements and sorrows of the community.[51] But Ifi, whose tattoos are not hidden by her Catholic school-girl attire,[52] connects these tattoos to the emotionally scarring experiences of their lives: 'Hermana [Sister], [El Auggie] gave us these tattoos. But these tattoos are also scars.'[53] At their reunion, Orestes brags to Electricidad that he has learned to read 'the map of our tattoos',[54] but only Ifi seems to realize the trauma that each recalls. Again, she offers a different perspective, one from outside the barrio, because Alfaro has constructed her in terms of the language of spiritual rebirth.

The language of Alfaro's tragedies encapsulates and reiterates his broader theatrical aims. The preponderance of English welcomes his primarily Anglo-audience into the storyline, but at every opportunity he insinuates material that allows viewers to see a little further into the cholo world. As if in a dialogue between audience and characters, everyone shares the burden of working through this strange fit. The Spanglish ought to disorient – though only slightly – anyone who knows no Spanish; but so too do the classical names strike the characters within the narrative as strange. Alfaro continually reminds us that Greek tragedy was never meant to take root in this cultural context, and that is precisely the perspective that makes his adaptations so compelling. Whereas Moriso had brought Greek tragedy into his Creole community to demonstrate the language's literary potential, Alfaro shares his Greco-cholo tragedy with an audience that goes far beyond the Spanglish world in order to offer a glimpse into the barrio.

Conclusions: Agamben, bare life and the classical tradition

In *Homo Sacer*, published in Italian in 1995, Agamben develops Foucault's theories about biopolitics in two ways that are relevant to my reading of Moriso's *Antigòn* and Alfaro's *Electricidad*. First, Agamben sees biopolitics as a fundamental consequence of sovereignty rather than, as Foucault had suggested, its modern successor. He finds an Aristotelian distinction between *zoê*, biological life, and *bios*, a way of life within the polity, as proof that the assertion of sovereignty involves a biopolitical differentiation between these two categories. The foundational sovereign act delimits acceptable forms of *bios* from reduced forms of existence that Agamben calls bare life: 'The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, *zoê*/*bios*, exclusion/inclusion.'[55] This bare life is exemplified in the Roman concept of the *homo sacer*, whose legal status initially seems contradictory: anyone may kill the *homo*

sacer with impunity, but he cannot be killed as a sacrifice.[56] Agamben explains this idea in terms of a political ban, in which the *homo sacer* is included within the political order specifically by being excluded from it.[57] Much as the Church includes within its purview those who have been excommunicated from participating in its services, or the state maintains citizen-prisoners who are deprived of many forms of civic participation, the *homo sacer* is included by a logic of exclusion. The *homo sacer* exists outside normal civic life so that the rest of the population may define themselves in terms of their full inclusion; he represents the outer surface of the wall that separates civilized social space from its opposite.

Secondly, Agamben reformulates the modern situation as a shift from treating bare life as the excluded exception to a scenario in which it 'gradually begins to coincide with the political realm'.[58] Nazi concentration camps represent an ultimate example: 'The Jew living under Nazism is the privileged negative referent of the new biopolitical sovereignty and is, as such, a flagrant case of a *homo sacer* in the sense of a life that may be killed but not sacrificed.'[59] For Agamben, the isolated Roman *homo sacer* serves as the model for marginalized populations within modern states that permits the rest of society to see in themselves a naturally justified lifestyle in contrast to groups who are now reduced to bare life and excluded by a process of inclusion.

Having laid out the basic framework of his political theory in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben has refined his thinking in a series of subsequent works. In *The Open*, he develops a critical conceptual model of how a group identifies or creates the *homo sacer* in its midst. Based on a reading of Heidegger, Agamben asserts that 'the originary political conflict . . . [is] between the humanity and animality of man' and that 'humanity has been obtained only through a *suspension* of animality'.[60] Whereas many theories about what differentiates humans from non-human animals begin from the assumption that humans have something in excess (e.g. language, a soul, *vel sim.*), Agamben claims that humanity exists through the animalization of certain persons achieved via a mechanism that he calls 'the anthropological machine',[61] which marks the *homo sacer* as something other. This is the mechanism that has, at various points in history, deemed slaves, barbarians, women, Jews, Africans, homosexuals, epileptics, the impoverished, pagans, the homeless and immigrants to be less than human – an exclusion that creates the privileged category of human.

In applying this biopolitical model to Moriso's and Alfaro's contexts, we can recognize that the Creole population of Haiti and the Spanglish-speaking cholo populations of urban California have long suffered under an anthropological machine that has reduced them to something approaching Agamben's bare life.[62] This process results from a systemic racism within which non-hegemonic languages serve as one marker of marginalization. (We can contrast this to the English-only movement, which aspires to the institutionalization of language privilege in the United States.) The Creole and Spanglish stories may be less shocking than the carefully and proactively calculated genocidal plan of the Holocaust, but within their wider social contexts in Haiti and the US, speakers of these hybrid languages have been deemed less deserving, less valued, less visible and ultimately less human than their Francophone and Anglophone counterparts.

Yet whereas Agamben presents his biopolitical theories in markedly negative terms that make the idea of resistance seem all but impossible, I suggest that sovereign power does not have exclusive control of the anthropological machine.[63] Indeed sovereign power responds to and is shaped by cultural trends including literature and theatre, and Moriso and Alfaro, in using hybrid languages to retell ancient Greek tales, insist that bare life can be a space of contestation, that bare life can speak back to sovereign power from below and demand a new sociopolitical landscape.

A key biopolitical debate hinges on the origins of sovereignty, since the establishment of a political order does not have an obvious source of authority through which it brings itself into existence. As Antoni Negri puts it, the power to create a new order (*il potere constituente*) is 'an act of choice, the precise determination that opens a horizon, the radical apparatus of something that does yet exist, and whose conditions of existence imply that the creative act does not lose its characteristics in the act of creating'.[64] He contrasts this inchoate force with the normative and fixed parameters of sovereignty, which represents the 'termination' and 'exhaustion of the freedom that constituent power carries'.[65] By way of conclusion, I suggest that this model speaks to the adaptations of Moriso and Alfaro by seeing their plays as examples of constituent power that target the sovereign cultural authority of the classical tradition. Their plays represent revolutionary acts, examples of Danticat's injunction to 'create dangerously',[66] that can shape the biopolitical framework of respective cultures. Any specific form of biopolitical power, built upon the marginalization of a particular form of the Other, must arise from cultural inputs that frame and condition that system. Foucault emphasized that the technologies that foster and inform biopolitical structures, but theatre and literature, too, can serve as such a Foucauldian *dispositif* and can exert their own bio-*poetic* influence upon a system.[67] Biopolitical theory has tended to focus in negative terms on how such *dispositifs* are used to marginalize certain groups (as with the history of germ theory and eugenics underpinning of the Nazi thanatopolitical regime), but Moriso and Alfaro make an implicit claim that biopoetics can work in the opposite direction as well. *Antigòn* and *Electricidad* work towards dismantling the anthropological machine that has kept Haitian Creoles and Spanglish Cholos in conditions of bare life. In both cases, bare life exists in large part due to a language segregation that connects to wider patterns of social marginalization (as Alfaro stresses through his comments about the organization of urban space).

Throughout the so-called Western tradition, especially since the Renaissance, classical learning has fuelled the anthropological machine in ways that legitimize the privileged status of elite white males. Richard Thomas, for example, has highlighted extreme cases of this in the attitude towards antiquity within Italian Fascism and German Nazism, and the Pharos website is now tracking the use of classical material by white supremacist groups.[68] Emily Greenwood has aptly described this process of identification between exclusive, privileged groups and the classical tradition in terms of a network of 'false genealogies and cultural traditions masked as historical continuities'.[69] These alleged historical continuities have traditionally contributed to mapping the globe in ways that mimic and reiterate patterns of Eurocentric sovereignty.

The infrastructure of that system reveals itself in the plays by Moriso and Alfaro, as I have outlined above. Most strikingly, Moriso uses the idea of Kreyon turning Antigòn into a zombie as a metaphor for the history of Francophone oppression of the Creole population of Haiti, and Alfaro continually returns to images that show the barrio in LA to be an island ('split by the freeway. / Border the river. / In the shadow of the skyscrapers')[70] around which the high-profile wealth, beauty and opportunity of Southern California speed. In many ways these playwrights, by speaking from within these communities that have been squeezed into the confines of bare life, articulate a demand for new considerations of the biopolitical landscape. By appropriating and speaking through the sovereign force of the classical tradition, they can lay bare and undo the 'false genealogies' Greenwood describes. Yet in other ways, one might wonder if the classical canon has simply expanded its purview. The genealogies may be false but the cultural capital of ancient Greece and Rome remains. Did Moriso and Alfaro have to participate in the legacy of that canon in order to achieve their theatrical and cultural aspirations? Such a question is impossible to answer succinctly. It may well be that even as Cholo and Creole adaptations of Athenian tragedy erode connections between the classical canon and structures of privilege, they may nevertheless reiterate the cultural centrality of that very canon – social and demographic progressivism counterbalanced by a conservative valorization of literary-aesthetic norms.[71]

14 DISMANTLING THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MACHINE: FELIKS MORISO-LEWA'S *ANTIGÒN* AND LUIS ALFARO'S *ELECTRICIDAD*

1. Alfaro uses *cholo/a*, originally derogatory (López 2011: 224), in positive terms to refer to any Latinx from a barrio.
2. Alfaro 2006: 76. El Pollo Loco is a fast-food Mexican restaurant.
3. Ibid.: 80.
4. I use the Creole name Feliks Moriso-Lewa, rather than the Francophone Félix Morisseau-Leroy.
5. Spears and Joseph 2010 offers historical and contemporary studies of Haitian Creole.
6. Stavans 2000 on the rise of Spanglish and Paz's comment.
7. For the historical variability of Spanglish, see Stavans 2008; Rosa 2016; Zentella 2016.
8. See McFarland 2013 for such popularizations.
9. As discussed in Powers 2018: 51–88.
10. See this volume's introduction.
11. Weiner's chapter draws on Agamben and builds upon Weiner 2015a. On Agamben and classical more broadly, see Hawkins 2018.
12. Developed particularly in Foucault 2003: 239–64.
13. Esposito (2004/2008: 41–2) demonstrates the ambivalent assessment of Foucault, for whom '[Nazism] was the old sovereign power that adopts biological racism for itself . . . Or . . . that it is the new biopolitical power that made use of the sovereign right of death in order to give life to a state racism.'
14. As recorded by Hoffman 1997: 567.
15. See Saint-Lot 2003: 31; Morisseau-Leroy 1992: 448–9.
16. Fradinger 2011b: 128, original emphasis.
17. Danticat 2010: 8–9.
18. Morisseau-Leroy 1992: 669–70; he states that some thought his *Antigòn* essentially predicted the Duvalier regime. His *Wa Kreyon* (*King Creon*) is an explicit commentary on Duvalier.
19. Fradinger (2011b: 128) resists reading *Antigòn* as 'a Haitian adaptation of a "Western classic" made palatable for local and international audiences'. 'Western' and 'classics' are both problematic terms, but however Antigone is phrased, Moriso made it meaningful for Haiti.
20. Lang 1997: 44.
21. Césaire 2017: 28.
22. Previously most Haitian intellectuals went to France for higher education, creating a colonial tension foregrounded in Césaire's career.
23. Morisseau-Leroy (1992: 667) describes shows called *Les cacos in caci* ['Soldiers in khaki'] that were popular during the occupation.
24. Lang 1997: 39–42.
25. Morisseau-Leroy 1992: 668–9. Reviews in Haiti were positive (Anonymous 1953a, 1953b), but negative in Paris (Kemp 1959).
26. Morisseau-Leroy 1987: 8–9.
27. Citations are from an unpublished translation created by Guilene Fiéfié and me based on Morisseau-Leroy 1987.

28. Fradinger (2011b: 140) discusses the name Sekle-Kite, an obscure Vodou *lwa*.
29. Morisseau-Leroy 1987: 31.
30. Weiner 2015a discusses this theme in detail from a biopolitical perspective.
31. Rehm (1994: 59–71) analyses the connection between Antigone's marriage and death. Although Antigone seems to be reduced to bare life, the choice to move in such a direction is her own. This bring her close to the model of Ziarek 2012, which shows that British suffragettes who resorted to hunger strikes simultaneously combined traits of both sovereign and bare life.
32. Fradinger 2011b: 141. Immediately after the prologue, Antigòn speaks the first line of dialogue in the play: 'I tell you, no!' (Mwen di w non!); Morisseau-Leroy 1987: 11. This 'no', already used to sum up Antigòn's character within the prologue, represents the totality of Antigòn's resilience in refusing what Kreyon represents. The final line of the play, by contrast, is the complicit and complacent 'Yes, King Kreon' ('Wi, Wa Kreyon') of Filo, Kreon's lackey; ibid.: 41. I am grateful to Jesse Weiner for his suggestion that the 'No' of Moriso's *Antigòn* may reveal an influence from Anouilh's version of her story.
33. Stratton 2011, including a discussion of Agamben's idea that werewolves are the quintessential monster of bare life.
34. Morisseau-Leroy (1992: 668) makes it explicit that his Kreyon 'was set up by the Haitian army and was an agent of political dictatorship in Haiti'.
35. Moriso's vision for Haiti has struggled amid decades of oppressive politics, economic disasters and environmental degradation, yet his more moderate goals of empowering Creole largely succeeded. As he put it in *New Testament* (1971): 'In 1954 I wrote my will. I said I don't want any priest to speak Latin over my head. I don't have that problem today because priests don't speak Latin anymore. Even God had to learn Creole like any white man coming here to do business with us.'
36. Powers 2011: 194.
37. Danticat 2010: 16: through Moriso's play, 'Sophocles . . . became a Haitian writer'.
38. Many of Alfaro's performances play to primarily affluent Anglos, such as the staging of *Mojada* I attended at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in July 2017. Others, such as the 2011 performance of *Electricidad* at Seattle's eSe Teatro, draw a more mixed crowd.
39. In addition to the mixing of Greek with cholo, Spanish with English, Alfaro also draws upon Aztec mythology and Nahuatl language.
40. Alfaro 2006: 64.
41. I am grateful to Konstantinos Nikoloutsos for urging me to extend this contrast into the very titles of the two plays. Mosiso presents Antigone herself in Creole guise, whereas Alfaro's Electricidad ('Electricity') is a hybrid from the start.
42. Interestingly, no character comments on the more unusual names Ifigenia and Orestes.
43. For this ancient etymology, see Aelian, *VH* 4.26.
44. Alfaro 2006: 64. Alfaro's point feels engaged with the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, but I have found no mention of Aeschylus in interviews with him. On the concept of *alektruos*, 'unmarried', in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, see Ormand 1999: 69–70.
45. Alfaro 2006: 74.
46. Agamemnon presents Clytemnestra in the worst light at *Od.* 11.421–34; 24.199–204; other accounts of his death place the onus on Aegisthus (1.35–9, 3.304–10, 4.524–37).

47. Aeschylus (*Libation Bearers*, 876–8) has Clytemnestra nearly thwart Orestes' plan to kill her. In *Agamemnon* she dominates the stage throughout; she killed Agamemnon herself (1379–94) and defends her actions based on the execution of Iphigenia (1412–21), a point also made in Euripides' *Electra* (1000–3; 1011–50).
48. Alfaro: 2006: 69, 72.
49. Ibid.: 65.
50. For both scars, see Goff 1991. Still valuable is Auerbach's meditation on Odysseus' scar (2003: 3–23). On Auerbach's reading, see Bakker 1999.
51. Alfaro 2006: 80.
52. Ibid.: 69.
53. Ibid.: 73.
54. Ibid.: 82.
55. Agamben 1998: 8.
56. This definition comes from Festus' *de Verborum Significatione*, s.v. *sacer mons*.
57. Agamben 1998: 28–9.
58. Ibid.: 9.
59. Ibid.: 114.
60. Agamben 2004: 73 (my emphasis).
61. Ibid.: 37.
62. Fischer 2007 uses Agamben's theories to analyse the objectification of Haitians in the photojournalism of Gilden 2002; and Whyte 2012 begins from Agamben's commentary on humanitarian organizations, thus prefiguring the events of 2018 in which President Trump described Haiti as a 'shithole', the Oxfam sex-scandal in Haiti was discovered and Mary Beard tweeted about the difficulty of remaining 'civilised' in a place like Haiti (@wmarybeard, 16 February 2018).
63. Thanks to Jesse Weiner for pointing me towards the discussion of Agamben in Butler and Spivak 2007, in which Butler comments on some of the limitations of Agamben's concept of bare life (42): 'We need more complex ways of understanding the multivalence and tactics of power to understand forms of resistance, agency, and countermobilization that elude or stall state power.'
64. Negri 1999: 21.
65. Ibid.
66. This is the title of Danticat 2010.
67. Agamben (2009: 14) makes this point, though he does not seem to have incorporated this idea into his biopolitical theory.
68. Thomas 2001: 222–59; pages.vassar.edu/pharos.
69. Greenwood 2010: xx.
70. Alfaro 2006: 67.
71. I composed this chapter amid the turmoil and anguish surrounding the death of Freddie Gray, an African-American man who lived in Baltimore and who died on 12 April 2015 due to spinal injuries sustained while in police custody on charges of possessing a switchblade. I pray that those inspired by the likes of Moriso and Alfaro continue to work towards dismantling the anthropological machines that divide us.