Staging Ethical Resistance: Biopower, Governmentality and the Politics of the Body in Jean Anouilh’s Antigone

Dr. Zeliha Kuruducu

ORCID 0000-0002-4337-5983

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Antigone (1944) by Jean Anouilh through post-Foucauldian perspectives, drawing on the works of Giorgio Agamben and Thomas Lemke on biopower and governmentality to explore the intersection of the body, governance, and resistance. The study argues that sovereign power reduces the human body to mere bare life; however, paradoxically, this reduction simultaneously reveals the body as a site of potential resistance. Within this framework, Antigone emerges as a figure of the Other, positioned at the threshold of the political community. From a biopolitical perspective, power operates not only through prohibition and law but also through governmental rationalities that regulate and administer life itself. In the post-tragic reinterpretation of Antigone, the body becomes a space where control, violence, and potentiality converge. Here, the body can be understood as a border space between law and life, sovereignty and resistance. Within governmental rationality, resistance emerges as both an ethical and aesthetic gesture. Antigone’s decision to commit suicide operates as a withdrawal from sovereign legitimacy, revealing resistance as an aesthetic interruption. Thus, the body paradoxically becomes a site that exposes the limits of regulatory system and signals a crisis of the governmental order. However, her act does not establish an alternative political order but only momentarily suspends the rationality of the administrative system, as the body ultimately withdraws from the possibility of life itself. The paper contributes to existing readings of Antigone by offering a biopolitical interpretation that foregrounds the vulnerability of resistance as an ethical gesture within contemporary configurations of power.

Keywords sovereignty; bare life; biopolitics; governmentality; ethical resistance; otherness; liminality; border; Antigone; post-tragedy

© 2026 Dr. Zeliha Kuruducu. All rights reserved.
Reproduction or redistribution requires permission, except as permitted by law.