

**The Greek/Barbarian Interaction in Euripides' *Andromache*,  
*Orestes*, *Heracleidae*  
A Reassessment of Greek Attitudes to Foreigners**

**I. Tragic Poetry: A Vehicle of Chauvinistic Propaganda?**

Barbarians and the theme of nationality as a determinative factor of human value or power arise as popular issues in tragedy; numerous dramas either bring barbarian figures on stage or explore the notion or condition of barbarism in more theoretical terms. Despite the varying approaches and discrepancies among the dramatists, the common denominator is that the image of the Foreigner and the interaction of “Self” and “Other” constitute a fertile ground for investigation and comment. The increasing interest in that type of interaction can be attributed to the interest in human nature in a genre as anthropocentric as tragedy, but can also be explained in historical terms. The developments that marked the fifth century, primarily the emergence of Athenian democracy, the Persian invasions and the Herodotean history-ethnography (but also the works of the sixth-century logographers, such as Hecataeus<sup>1</sup>), the Peloponnesian war and the Sophistic movement, contributed decisively to both the acquisition of knowledge of the non-Greek world and the broadening of horizons in reference to the perception and interpretation of the human condition as a whole.

By contrast with epic and archaic non-epic poetry, the term “barbarian”<sup>2</sup> appears quite frequently in drama, either as an ethnic

---

1 For more on Hecataeus and his geographical treatise *Periegesis* see e.g. L. Pearson (1939). *Early Ionian Historians* (Oxford) 26-27 and K. von Fritz (1967). *Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung* (Berlin and New York).

2 On the semantic evolution of the word see F. Skoda (1980). “Histoire du mot βάρβαρος”, *Actes du colloque franco-polonais d'histoire, Nice-Antibes, 6-9 Novembre 1980*, 111-126. On the word “barbarian” see also E. Weidner (1913). “Βάρβαρος” *Glotta* 4:303-304. See also C. Tuplin (1999). “Greek Racism? Observations on the Character and Limits of Greek Ethnic Prejudice” in G.R. Tsetskhladze (ed.), *Ancient Greeks West and East* (Leiden) 47-75 for a

designation or as a (pejorative) value term. Ethnic identity, as part of a character's image, though hardly ever the most predominant one, is given a respectable role in many plays. The term 'barbarian' often defines the entire non-Greek-speaking world as an indistinguishable whole; very often barbarians themselves use it in an obviously unmarked way (e.g. throughout *Persae*, *Andromache* 173, *Hecuba* 1199-201). There are numerous tragic passages in which barbarism is employed simply in order to mark a person's non-Greek origin or in connection with elements of non-Greek ethnography, such as places, distinctive objects or practices of minor importance, with no further implications. In many other contexts, on the other hand, barbarism is treated as a distinct or even stereotyped cultural status that is accompanied by substantial connotations of inferiority. These might include for instance the treatment of barbarians as morally corrupt, savage or slaves by nature (all combined e.g. in the Greek world's accusations in *Andromache*). These points are far more challenging and telling not only because they refer to the core of the Greek/ barbarian antithesis but also because they are incorporated into contexts which often blur, undermine or at least raise doubts about their validity. If viewed in isolation, these points can and do lead to misleading conclusions.

In her influential study *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (1989), E. Hall adopts the view that fifth-century dramatic barbarians are predominantly portrayed (or treated by the Greek characters) as:<sup>3</sup>

---

discussion of Greek definitions of barbarians and the ways in which these definitions developed. According to Herodotus, the Spartans called foreigners *xeinoi* instead of "barbarians" (9.11.2 and 9.55.2).

3 E.g. Hall (1989) 121-133, even though she certainly allows some room for exceptions and divergences (Ch. V). With variations of emphasis and in connection with various classical passages or plays, this view about the ethnocentricity of classical literature is quite common in recent scholarship, held also by e.g. R. Goossens (1962). *Euripide et Athènes* (Brussels); T. Long (1986). *Barbarians in Greek Comedy* (Carbondale, IL.); E. Hall (1989). *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford); P. Cartledge

- 1) Effeminate, luxurious, highly emotional and cowardly (e.g. the Persians of the eponymous play, Ganymedes in *Troades*, the Phrygian slave in *Orestes* or the allegedly Lydian Dionysus in *Bacchae*),
- 2) Despotic and servile (the Aeschylean *Suppliants*, *Persae*, *Ajax*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, *Heracleidae*, *IA*),
- 3) Savage, lawless and unjust (e.g. Tereus in the Sophoclean play, Medea, the Thracian Polymestor of *Hecuba*, the Egyptian Theoclymenus of *Helen*),
- 4) Unsophisticated or unintelligent (e.g. Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, *Helen*, *IT*, *Bacchae*), or even a combination of all four categories, as opposed to the dramatic Hellenes, who exhibit the correlative virtues (that is manliness/bravery, political freedom, lawfulness/justice<sup>4</sup> and intelligence/reason<sup>5</sup>). As regards the distribution of these negative traits, there seems to be a rough division into two types of barbarians, the Eastern and Northern, applying to both tragedy and comedy (and more loosely to

---

(1993). *The Greeks. A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford); J. Hall (1997). *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge); and T. Harrison (2000). *The Emptiness of Asia: Aeschylus' 'Persians' and the History of the Fifth Century* (London). There are of course studies which oppose this tendency to overemphasize the significance of the Greek/barbarian polarity in classical literature. To refer to tragedy only see e.g. K. Synodinou (1977). *On the Concept of Slavery in Euripides* (Ioannina); C.A.E. Luschnig (1988). *Tragic Aporia: A Study of Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis*, Ramus Monographs 3 (Victoria), especially Chapter 7; J. Mossman (1995). *Wild Justice: A Study of Euripides' Hecuba* (Oxford); P. Vidal-Naquet (1997). "The place and status of foreigners in Athenian tragedy" in C.B.R. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford) 109-119; S. Saïd (2002). "Greeks and Barbarians in Euripides' Tragedies: The End of Differences?" in T. Harrison (ed.), *Greeks and Barbarians* (Edinburgh) 62-100; and M. Miller (1997). *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge).

4 Cf. Hdt. 7.104.

5 Cf. Hdt. 1.60, where the Athenians are said to be the most intelligent of Greeks (and the Greeks are said to have superior wits to other nations).

Herodotus); the former (notably the Persians, Phrygians and Lydians) are mostly associated with effeminacy, softness, cowardice and servility, while the latter (Thracians, Scythians) are mostly associated with crudeness, savageness and ferocity (traditionally associated with Ares, e.g. in *Choephoroi* 161-3 and *Alcestitis* 498). Certainly, this division is not absolute; stereotypes of either group are occasionally attributed to the other. The Greeks of tragedy and comedy are contrasted with one “type” of barbarian at a time, that is there are few contexts which represent the simultaneous interaction of Greeks with both Easterners and Northerners. The few exceptions are *Hecuba*, which involves the Trojan female victims and the Thracian Polymestor, *Rhesus*, which again brings into contact Trojans and Thracians, allied against the Achaeans, and, on the side of comedy, *Acharnians* which brings on stage an allegedly Persian ambassador and Thracian mercenaries.

According to Hall, the pejorative portrayal of dramatic barbarians is the result of an anti-barbarian ideology newly established at the beginning of the fifth century and consciously intended to be highlighted in art.<sup>6</sup> Hall concludes that “barbarian characters are often made to manifest one or more of these vices [i.e. stupidity, cowardice, abandonment and lawlessness], thus helping the tragedian to define the nature of Greek morality.”<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of their individual features or functions, dramatic barbarians are consistently invested with some standard traits (often corresponding to historical reality), such as their unintelligible language, their monarchical regimes, the luxury and effeminacy of oriental societies and the violence or savagery, particularly of northern tribes. More often than not, these traits are spoken of or elaborated by Greek characters (and more rarely by barbarians themselves) in heated moments of conflict; thus, they are used as accusations against the non-Greek world, not as

---

6 E.g. Hall (1989) 5.

7 Hall (1989) 121-122. See also 187.

theoretical statements or general reflections. These standard properties in themselves certainly create a polarity with the Greek world and might highlight such constituent ideals of Greek identity as free institutions, modesty, restraint and reason. However, the issue of those barbarians' (sharp) contrast with their Hellenic counterparts and the self-definition and identification of the latter through that polarity does not seem to be at all clear or simple.<sup>8</sup> The ways in which the barbarian rhetoric is deployed and incorporated into varied contexts are by no means confined to the demonstration of Hellenic superiority. The Greek characters' ethnocentric attacks very often emerge in the end as controversial, ambiguous or ironic.

It is useful to divide the stereotypes against the barbarian world into two spheres: 1) the political/social, referring to the contrast between Athenian democracy and barbarian tyranny as well as between slavery and freedom, and 2) the moral, viewed as a broad category, embracing patterns of conduct. Religion as a domain of differentiation seems to be largely ignored in tragedy (by contrast with comedy).<sup>9</sup> The relative treatment of Greeks and barbarians in the political sphere is much more straightforward. There is no doubt that the replacement of the tyranny typical of the Hellenic world of the seventh and sixth centuries by the democratic Athenian government at the end of the sixth century<sup>10</sup> introduced a new era in political thought and brought about social changes. There are numerous fifth-century literary contexts which underline the privileges of democracy while condemning or illuminating the

---

8 This is related to the much broader issue of the mechanism of self-definition and the question whether the stereotypes attached to various ethnic groups are necessarily constitutive of the (ethnic) identity of the creators of these stereotypes. See e.g. J. Brigham (1971). "Ethnic Stereotypes" *Psychological Bulletin* 76, 15-38.

9 See Long (1986) 20-48.

10 See e.g. Thucydides 1.6.3 and 1.6.4. The Athenian alliance soon became more of an empire, violently controlling the other city-states. See further A. Powell (1988). *Athens and Sparta: Constructing Greek Political and Social History from 478 BC* (London) 1-95.

principal flaws of tyranny (though ambiguities are not missing) as well as associating it with barbarian societies.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, dramatic cities, communities or individuals of the heroic world are anachronistically rendered with characteristics of the democratic *polis* (e.g. Argos in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and *Orestes*, Athens in *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Suppliants*<sup>12</sup>). The political differentiation of non-Greeks, which is moreover negatively marked, is in most cases straightforward (e.g. Aeschylus' *Suppliants* 370-5, *Helen* 276, *Heracleidae* 423-4, Euripides fr. 850 inc., which associates tyranny with lawless or impulsive desires).<sup>13</sup> There are, however, cases in which the contrast between tyranny and democracy is treated in more theoretical or neutral terms -- not so much as an ethnic marker but as a *real* difference. The matter of slavery is more complex, particularly in contexts where it is said that barbarians are or ought to be the slaves of the Greeks, e.g. in *Andromache* or *IA*. Several of these contexts contain elements which blur or undermine the face-value earnestness or gravity of these declarations. Obviously, it is not enough to isolate what is said about barbarians; due attention should be paid to the identity of the speaker (and here it is not enough to say that he/she is a Greek) and the wider circumstances of the interaction. Things get far more difficult and perplexed in the moral sphere, where

---

11 E.g. Aeschylus' *Suppliants* 370-5, *Persae* (various passages), *PV* 224-5, Sophocles fr. 873 inc., *Helen* 276, *Heracleidae* 423-4, fr. Adesp. 359, Herodotus (various passages), Thucydides 2.37, Anonymus Iamblichi 89.7.12 DK. The noun *turannis*, just as the adjective *turannos* and its derivatives, are not untypical in tragic contexts referring to both Greek and foreign kingdoms and often seem to have an ambiguous meaning or implications. See e.g. *Agamemnon* 802; *Choephoroi* 479 and 974; *OT* 380-2, 535, 588 and 592; *Medea* 119, 140, 877 and 991; *Phoenissae* 560-1; *IA* 470; *Rhesus* 388, 406 and 484. Contrast *Orestes* 1167-68. On the implications of the word see A. Andrewes (1956). *The Greek Tyrants* (London) 20-30. Contrast C. Tuplin (1985). "Imperial tyranny: some reflections on a classical Greek political metaphor" in P. Cartledge and F.D. Harvey (eds.), *Essays in Greek history presented to GEM de Ste Croix*, 1985, 374.

12 See 433-55.

13 Cf. Thucydides 2.37. See S. Benardete (1969). *Herodotean Enquiries* (The Hague) 137-138 for this idea in Herodotus.

ambivalences, contradictions and subtle overtones are more to be expected.

It should more generally be remembered that barbarians in tragedy are for the most part either kings found in a dangerous or grave condition (e.g. Xerxes, Polymestor, in part Theoclymenus and Thoas) or female slaves/ suppliants (the Trojan victims and the Danaids); thus, there is not such a wide range of barbarian types of people or individuals and, furthermore, these individuals are very often not given the same detailed treatment as the Greeks. It is exactly the more limited range of dramatic foreigners and their status as the defeated ones (either literally or figuratively) that make their subtle and multi-layered (rather than altogether stereotyped, pejorative or aphoristic) characterization on the dramatists' part even more striking and noteworthy.

Certainly, success in the Persian wars and the birth of Athenian democracy did not leave unaffected cultural production and the fifth-century Greeks' perception of themselves and, by extension, others. But it is all a matter of degree and focus. Was the Hellene/barbarian polarity so strongly realized and so defining, a solid and consistent ideology systematically propagandized in theatre and literature? Was it beyond genuine question or challenge? Was barbarism a clear-cut condition -- or did it suddenly become one after the Persian defeat-- against which the Hellene was discovered and understood, and was this why it arose as a popular theme in classical theatre? And was this contrast the most predominant one in tragic production (overshadowing other sets of contrasts)?<sup>14</sup> Or was interest in the dialogue between Greek and non-Greek one among many other areas of interest which arose as a result of not only the narrow historical circumstances but also the fifth century's intellectual growth, which inevitably led to further inquiry and reflection upon central issues of human nature?

---

14 As Hall argues (1989:3-4).

The Civic Dionysia, at which tragedies were performed, whilst involving praise of the city of Athens and underlining of its special position in the Hellenic world,<sup>15</sup> was an event with aspirations to be Panhellenic, attracting visitors from many Greek city-states other than Athens.<sup>16</sup> This mixture of people, though encouraging the feeling of an ethnic collectivity, at the same time exhibited the variety and heterogeneity of what we could call “Greek society” of the period, a reality that complicates the issue of (ethnic) self-definition by comparison to others.

In reference to extant tragedies, Aeschylus and Euripides, and secondarily Sophocles, depicted the interaction between Greeks and foreigners in widely different contexts and forms -- and in association with more or less familiar mythical stories. Despite the differences among the dramatists and indeed among different plays of the same dramatist, barbarians in fifth-century theatre are frequently associated with certain negative characteristics, namely low moral quality (materialism, criminality, impiety [e.g. *Persae*, *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, *IT*, *IA*]), sexual corruption [e.g. *Andromache*, *Bacchae*]), un(der)developed political thought/ systems (monarchy, servility, lack of freedom [e.g. the Aeschylean *Suppliants*, *Persae*, *Ajax*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, *Heracleidae*, *IA*]), lesser intelligence (e.g. *Persae*, *Helen*, *IT*, *Bacchae*, *Rhesus*) and inferior military performance (e.g. *Helen*, *IT*, *Orestes*). In almost all relevant tragic contexts, Greeks actually state these accusations (i.e. there are explicit pejorative references to barbarians) -- thus they are not meant simply to emerge from the course of events itself or the behaviour of barbarians. In this way, the overall picture composed by these accusations becomes a subject of debate (and, therefore, reprocessing or at least consideration) rather than being treated as a firmly established *status quo*, taken for granted

---

15 See e.g. H. Butts (1942). *The Glorification of Athens in Greek Drama*, Iowa Studies in Classical Philology 11 (Ann Arbor) 17-75.

16 See e.g. A.W. Pickard-Cambridge (1988). *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*. 2nd ed. Revised by J. Gould and D.M. Lewis (Oxford) 58-59 and 263. See also *Knights* 573-6, *Thesmophoriazusae* 834 and *Isaeus* 5.46-47.

and beyond question. This “dialogue” on the issue of Otherness, besides revealing the dramatists’ interest in that theme’s exploration, is invaluable for the all-round comprehension of its various aspects.

Through a close reading and contextualization of the relevant tragic passages, it becomes clear that the theme of barbarism is on many occasions invested with overtones and connotations which are often overlooked and which, through their complexity and occasional ambiguity, cast serious doubts on the view that fifth-century drama radically re-interpreted myth in the light of a newly introduced ethnocentrism. The body of purely pejorative material associated with foreigners, which is indeed to be found in tragedy, is only one aspect of the issue. Other literary uses and effects of barbarism include ethnographic purposes, explanatory force for historical or cultural developments, comic effects, exploration of certain features of Greek identity, self-praise, self-criticism, exploration of the idea of human unity, and other, strictly dramatic purposes.

The major mechanisms that weaken the power and/or perplex the effects of the evaluative model of Greekness versus barbarism in drama are:

1) The ironic, blurring or undermining use of established sets of contrasts, and, for our purpose, the Greek/non-Greek contrast; this refers, for instance, to contexts in which Greek characters exhibit behaviours or mores which they themselves condemn as barbarian, unGreek, unacceptable to the standards of Hellenic civilization and the texts more or less explicitly underline that assimilation/similarity (e.g. *Hecuba*, *IT*, *IA*). More usual manifestations of the blurring or undermining effects of the Greek/barbarian polarity are contexts in which the Greeks’ accusations against the barbarian world appear expressively unpersuasive, unsustainable or rhetorical (e.g. *Andromache*).

2) The use of barbarism as an ethical term, applicable to both Greeks and barbarians, referring to a universal, generic and inner condition of human nature (*Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Helen*, *Heracleidae*). This is a distinctive Euripidean feature that considerably weakens the idea of a firmly established bipolar vision of the world based upon a narrow Greek/non-Greek antithesis.

3) The questioning of the Greekness of famous Hellenic figures who employ anti-barbarian arguments. Twice in tragedy, Agamemnon's distant foreign lineage (by Tantalus) is treated as a marker of inferiority, in contexts in which Agamemnon himself attacks barbarians on the grounds of their origin (*Ajax*, *IA*). It is precisely this combination that produces undermining or puzzling effects.

4) The theme of ethnic ambivalence, consisting in various characters' mixed (Greek-barbarian) descent. This ethnic ambivalence does not necessarily have pejorative implications (as was the case in 3), but can be manipulated in various ways. Alongside other functions (e.g. plot-related), the emphasis on mixed ethnic identities highlights the complications of the ethnicity-issue, especially when it is based upon genealogies.

5) The emphasis on intra-Hellenic disputes and discrepancies. Greek states in Euripidean drama are often seen to be capable of generating just as much fury and destruction among themselves as they face in an inter-ethnic context (and *Heracleidae* in particular borrows inter-ethnic themes to apply to such intra-ethnic contention).

## **II. Barbarians in Euripides – A Brief Overview**

Euripides was much influenced by the historical and intellectual environment of his time; the escalating Peloponnesian war, on the one hand, and some of the major intellectual trends of the period, on the other, influenced the tone and content of many of

his dramas. The doctrines of the Sophists in particular, who were mostly active in Athens in the second half of the fifth century, had a significant impact on the poetry of Euripides<sup>17</sup> -- reflected in his exploration of issues such as that of high versus low birth,<sup>18</sup> slavery,<sup>19</sup> the belief in the gods and the nature of the divine.

Accordingly, Euripides was very interested in the foreigner in both the literal and metaphorical sense. Almost his entire extant tragic production involves, in one way or another, the representation of the Barbarian and his relationship, or rather confrontation, with the Greeks. In this respect, the fact that Euripides is the tragic poet who uses the word *barbaros* more frequently is simply a detail. What is more interesting is the variety of persons, places and situations that are associated with barbarism. Euripides' foreigners are situated either in their homeland (*Helen*, *IT*, *Troades*, *Rhesus*) or in Greece (*Medea*, *Andromache*, *Orestes*, *Phoenissae*, *Bacchae*) or on some relatively neutral ground (*Hecuba*). In almost all cases, they are brought into conflict with Greeks, be it physical or intellectual/cultural conflict or a mixture of both. At all events, Greeks and non-Greeks are always found in very close contact.

Apart from the larger number of relevant plays and

---

17 On the relation of the Sophists to tragic poetry see e.g. E. Bignone (1938). *Studi sul pensiero antico* (Naples) 140-152, J.H. Finley (1967). *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass.) Ch. II, R. Pfeiffer (1976). "Die Sophisten, ihre Zeitgenossen und Schueler", in C.J. Classen (ed.), *Sophistik* (Wege der Forschung, clxxxvii, Darmstadt), 170-214 and D.J. Conacher (1998). *Euripides and the Sophists: Some Dramatic Treatments of Philosophical Ideas* (London).

18 See *Electra* 367-90, *Dictys* fr. 336 and *Alexandros* fr. 61b (52 N.<sup>2</sup>). Cf. Antiphon 878b 97 DK. On the appropriateness of the slavery of barbarians in Plato and Aristotle see *Republic* 469b-471c and *Politics* 1252b7-9 respectively. See also Diogenes Laertius 1.33, where Hermippus refers to a popular saying about Socrates' dismissal of barbarians together with women and beasts.

19 E.g. *Alexandros* (various passages), *Helen* 730, *Melanippe* fr. 511, *Phrixus* fr. 831 and *Frogs* 949.

passages, the dual use of barbarism as an ethnic designation with merely descriptive effect and a pejorative value term is a far more frequent and easily recognizable practice in Euripidean tragedy. This probably shows that Euripides was more conscious of (or interested in) the subtlety and variety of that theme's implications, and, more specifically, of the relative value of Greeks and non-Greeks.<sup>20</sup> Euripides is the single tragedian who repeatedly used the term “barbarian” figuratively, that is with no relation to ethnic origin, in various contexts, as a synonym for “savage”, “cruel”, “lawless”, thus giving an additional dimension or new twist to (the exploration of) established definitions and boundaries. Additionally, several of his dramas can acquire a different or additional meaning when viewed in the context of the Peloponnesian war, a dimension which is not always irrelevant to the depiction of foreigners. Euripides also placed emphasis on the scenic appearance (costumes or distinctive equipment) of non-Greeks, as many points of his extant tragedies suggest, but this aspect *per se* is not so important for our purposes.

It is Euripides' extensive engagement with barbarians and the variety of the situations associated with the Greek/barbarian interaction that have led to conflicting scholarly views as to the poet's predominant attitude towards foreigners. Thus, Helen Bacon argues that, by contrast with the two other tragedians, in Euripides we are presented with the symbolic rather than the “real” foreigner. Not much emphasis is placed on the actual origin or the factual aspects of the foreign figures' ethnicity. The focus is rather on the idea/condition of foreignness, marginalization or alienation (which is not necessarily confined to people of non-Greek descent).

Euripides' foreigners do not have the believable, concrete traits of the foreigners of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Like the myths in which they appear they have lost their historical reality. But

---

20 This was already observed by W. Kranz (1933). *Stasimon* (Berlin) 109-112.

together with the myth they have gained another kind of reality. In the same way the barbarians who arouse the self-righteous contempt of Jason, Pentheus, Hermione, though they have no recognizable nationality, are real strangers. Nobly enduring, or wildly and cunningly vengeful, they are the types of the outsider, the exploitable caste, or nation, or sex, of every period.<sup>21</sup>

Timothy Long considers that Euripidean drama is *par excellence* suggestive of the collective Greek thinking about barbarians:

During the late fifth century the tragic stage, and particularly the plays of Euripides, became a pulpit from which all Greek accusations and complaints against the non-Greek were preached. He is cowardly, weak, treacherous, unreliable, stupid, mean, uncultivated, savage. "Barbarian" is now as much an ethical description as a national designation. The Phrygian of Euripides' *Orestes* becomes the finest expression of Greek thinking about the stereotypical barbarian.<sup>22</sup>

Suzanne Saïd, on the other hand, explores the issue of the probable "end of differences" (as far as ethnic discrimination goes) in the dramatist's production and offers many solid examples of plays and passages in which the evaluative Greek/barbarian opposition is undermined, blurred or reversed by elements of the broader context.<sup>23</sup> In a similar spirit, Katerina Synodinou, concentrating on the theme of slavery, argues that "far from believing in a natural state of slavery in barbarians, Euripides takes

---

21 H.H. Bacon (1961). *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy* (New Haven) 171-172.

22 T. Long (1986) 132. Similarly see T. Haarhoff (1948). *The Stranger at the Gates. Aspects of Exclusiveness and Co-operation in Ancient Greece and Rome, with Some References to Modern Times* (Oxford) 55. Haarhoff argues for Euripides' belief in the superiority of Greek institutions.

23 S. Saïd (2002) 62-100.

pains to show that what matters are the qualities of a person and not one's social status.”<sup>24</sup> E. Hall speaks about the “deconstruction” of the Greek/barbarian polarity in reference to some of the Euripidean Trojan plays due to the indisputable nobility of certain Trojan figures, which even surpasses that of their Achaean conquerors. Many of these views have some truth in them and they are not necessarily irreconcilable. As already said, Euripides was extensively engaged with the theme of barbarism, and so nuances, controversies or contradictions are more to be expected. It is definitely the case that in his dramas the anti-barbarian accusations of the Greek world are greater in number and in variety; but it is also the case that the contexts of the relevant plays often have more things to tell us, are more revealing, complex and occasionally subversive, than these isolated accusations.

Euripides' extant plays<sup>25</sup> might be divided into three groups, in reference to the particular identity of the foreigner and the overall degree to which these plays are engaged with the Other:

1) Plays with Trojan characters in conflict with Greeks within the frame or aftermath of the Trojan war (*Andromache*,<sup>26</sup> *Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Orestes*, the Euripides-attributed *Rhesus*). Due to their subject matter, these plays are generally idiosyncratic as to the depiction of not only barbarians but also their Greek rivals.

---

24 K. Synodinou (1977) 58.

25 Of the Euripidean fragments, the most interesting in relation to the issue of the barbarians' supposed inferiority are *Andromeda* fr. 139, *Telephus* fr. 712, 713, 719, *Philoctetes* fr. 796 and fr. 907 inc. On *Telephus* see further Handley and Rea (1957). *The Telephus of Euripides*, *BICS* Suppl. 5, 33. Other fragments include ethnographic material, such as physical appearance (*Phaethon* fr. 771 and *Archelaus* fr. 228 about the dark-skinned Ethiopians), objects (*Erechtheus* fr. 360, 369 and 370 about Thracian music) and places (e.g. *Archelaus* fr. 228 and 230 about the Nile's flood from the melting snows of Ethiopia [cf. *Helen* 1-3] and *Melanippe* fr. 514 about Adonis' gardens). For a detailed account of Euripidean foreign geography see Bacon (1961) 155-167.

26 *Andromache* is not actually Trojan, but comes from the Asian Thebes.

Barbarians are here represented by either female captives of war or Trojan male slaves, utterly subjected to the power of their conquerors; their identity, then, is primarily determined by their inferior position as the ultimate victims of a major destruction (and also by their sex, in *Andromache*, *Hecuba* and *Troades*). The single exception is *Rhesus*, which takes place in the middle of the Trojan war and thus brings on stage Trojan warriors in action. In all these plays, save *Rhesus*, there are several points which seem to define the entire barbarian world as inferior.

2) Plays involving foreigners of non-epic origin (foreigners not represented as characters in epic poetry), again in conflict with Greeks (*Medea*, *Helen*, *IT*, *Phoenissae*, *Bacchae*). This group is far more heterogeneous, since it includes dramas with widely different settings and individuals. References to barbarism as a pejorative value term are frequent and more varied. The ethnic ambivalence of figures such as the Phoenician Chorus, Cadmus and Dionysus is an additional dimension that makes the exploration of the Greek/non-Greek relationship even more intriguing.

3) Plays with no foreign characters, but in which the theoretical opposition between Greek and Foreigner, often alongside the opposition among different city-states of the Hellenic world, plays a more or less important role (*Heracleidae*, *IA*; secondarily, *Hippolytus*, *Ion*, *Heracles*). In this group, *Heracleidae* and *IA* are the most interesting examples of the flexibility and ambiguity or irony with which ethnic boundaries and, more importantly, moral judgments based upon these boundaries can be approached. *Ion* and *Heracles*, on the other hand, though virtually lacking any meaningful references to barbarism, are suggestive of the problematics of intra-Hellenic relationships, in fact of competitive Greek cities (just as in *Heracleidae*) and the tense polarization that can apply to them (as well).

A common thread that runs through the plays of all three categories is that barbarians of any origin are said to be marked (to

differing degrees) by certain negative features, which could be summarized in the following three: despotism, servility and moral lawlessness (impiety, criminality, debauchery). Yet, the placing of these accusations in context often provides us with a different, less straightforward, reading.

*Andromache*, *Orestes* and *Heracleidae* are interesting examples, partly because they contain some of the strongest anti-barbarian statements in tragedy. Despite their great differences in dramatic situation and tone, in all three plays the barbarian world is depicted in very grim terms, being roughly described as despotic, immoral and cowardly.

### **III. *Andromache***

Andromache's Asian origin and status as a slave -- the two attributes that result in her present alienation and inferiority-- are emphasized throughout by all characters, herself included. In her very first words, which are the opening lines of the drama, the heroine introduces herself by referring to her birthplace, Thebes, and prosperous marriage to the Trojan Hector (1-5). The repetition of her origin in combination with her fortune's grave reversal (effectively expressed in the transition *nun d'* in 6) concisely mark her present predicament.

The play as a whole is permeated by a number of oppositions that determine each character's position -- applying to both Greeks and barbarians. The major contrasts operating are: freedom versus slavery, legitimate wife versus concubine, Greeks versus barbarians, friendship versus enmity. The first of these contrasts is particularly pertinent to the Greek/barbarian antithesis as employed in the drama. Andromache's servile status is repeatedly underscored by all characters to two different effects, either pejoratively and in association with her barbarism (Hermione, Menelaus, Orestes [e.g. 155, 583]) or as a grim reality

which deprives her of the opportunity to defend herself (Andromache, Chorus, Peleus [e.g. 12-13, 25, 64-5]). However, the issue of slavery also extends to Hermione, who, after realizing the gravity of her lawless intentions, fears that she might be degraded to the slave of Andromache (927-8). This fear, even if exaggerated, highlights the fragile nature of human fortune, as well as of seemingly rigid social distinctions and boundaries. The theme of friendship/enmity and the way in which it relates to the ethnicity factor is itself rather complex. Far from having the representatives of the Greek world united by bonds of friendship/kinship against the barbarians/enemies in the light of the Trojan war, the intra-Hellenic disputes and enmities (as regards precisely the issue of who is the enemy) dominate the scene. Menelaus justifies his intentions on the basis of his (traditional) duty to protect his friends and harm his enemies (370-1, 376-7, 519-22), as well as of his greater authority over Andromache, whom he himself had enslaved (583). Yet, Peleus, besides considering Menelaus' intentions unjust, has a quite different view regarding the very identity of his enemies, considering them as belonging to the Greek rather than the Asian side (590, 610-15, 723-4). Orestes, in his turn, criticizes Menelaus for not keeping his word, since he gave Hermione to Neoptolemus despite his earlier promise to him (966-81), and has already taken action to avenge his enemy, Neoptolemus (993-1008). The Greek Chorus, as well as the Nurse, condemn Hermione's impulsive reactions throughout (*parodos*, 814-5, 840, 866-70). The Greek community, then, is evidently divided by conflicting viewpoints concerning central issues of its choices and course and, moreover, fails to reach any sort of agreement or reconciliation. Andromache, to some extent, falls victim to these tensions and discrepancies.

The polarity between Greeks and barbarians is manifestly expressed in the two *agones* of the play, namely that between the Spartan Hermione<sup>27</sup> and Andromache, and that between Menelaus

---

27 Hermione, an unsympathetic figure in all accounts, is repeatedly

and Peleus. In both contexts, the barbarian world is explicitly denigrated or condemned as a unified race. Yet, the points at which barbarism is employed as an argument against Andromache's and her son's right to escape death are structured in such a manner that they reveal the speakers' (Hermione's and Menelaus') failure to respond to crucial points of criticism.<sup>28</sup> The relevant attacks on barbarians concentrate on these people's lawless customs and (generically) servile status. Apart from and prior to the *agones*, Andromache's opening monologue (1-55), her exchange with her former servant and compatriot (56-116), as well as the *parodos* of the Greek Chorus, who, in their words, have come to share an Asian's misfortune (119-20), effectively illuminate the contrast but also relative value of both ethnic origin (through the Greek Chorus' emotional identification with the Asian's fate) and status (through the reversal of the social position of both Andromache and her former servant in relation to Andromache). The first and third choral odes, which recount the mythical start of the Trojan war and the pitiful destruction of Troy, as well as the misfortune that the war inflicted upon the Greeks, stress both the polarity, primarily consisting in armed strife, and the connection of the two worlds through the evils generated by war for both victims and victors.<sup>29</sup>

Hermione's arguments against Andromache appear linked with the latter's non-Greek origin. Even though Hermione's central point is clear -- Andromache has made her infertile through magic philtres, and thus alienated her from her husband (29-35)-- she keeps connecting it with Andromache's foreignness, since foreign women are allegedly skilled in poisons (155-160),<sup>30</sup> and with the

---

referred to as the "Laconian" or "Spartan" woman (e.g. 29, 194, 889), thus placing (negative) emphasis on her particular place of birth rather than her Greekness. This city-centric perspective (and attendant complications, particularly as regards Greek self-definition) underlies several dramas.

28 See also W. Allan (2000). *The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy* (Oxford) 270-271.

29 Cf. *Hecuba* 649-56 and 934.

30 This belief is also found in *Medea* (385, 709, 806, 1126, 1201), but is also parallel to the (actual and not hypothetical) practice of Greek women in

broader issue of the lawlessness of the entire barbarian world. At the same time, Hermione's opening words emphasize her own luxurious appearance and lifestyle (147-8, 166-7), which allegedly give her the right to speak freely (152-3), as well as her wild intentions, expressed in her repeated threat to violate a suppliant's refuge (160-2). This combination of materialism (as a marker of freedom and authority) and the intention to break a prominent religious law blurs the boundaries between Greekness and barbarism, since the latter is often (and in this play in particular) associated with the ideas/ stereotypes of great wealth and lawless violence.

Hermione's first attack on the barbarian race comes as a comment on Andromache's status as the concubine of the son of the very man who had murdered her former husband. This leads to a general denunciation of barbarians, whose life is allegedly marked by customs forbidden in the Greek world (168-9, 173-80). These customs involve incest,<sup>31</sup> murder of kin and polygamy<sup>32</sup> (173-6). Epic tradition offers no evidence that the Trojans in particular actually practised such things, with the exception of Priam's ambiguous marital status in the *Iliad*. On the other hand, Greek myth offers many relevant examples. As regards the murder

---

tragedy, most obviously the Athenian Creusa in *Ion* (845, 1185, 1221, 1286) and the Nurse in *Hippolytus*. The Peloponnesian Agamemede is said to know all the drugs of the earth in *Iliad* 11.741.

31 The Persian king Cambyses had allegedly married two of his sisters, as we learn in Hdt. 3.31. On the Greek side, cf. Macareus' incest with his sister, Canace, in Euripides' *Aeolus*, criticized by Aristophanes in *Clouds* 1371-72 and *Frogs* 849-50, and the inadvertent incestuous union of Oedipus with Jocasta. The incestuous relationships of Aeolus' children are also referred to at *Odyssey* 10.7. In Menander's *Samia*, Nikeratus claims that Moschion has made the incestuous affairs of Thyestes, Oedipus and the Thracian Tereus look comparatively small (495-7). On incest in Greek myth see Hyginus *Fabulae* 253 and J.P. Guépin (1968). *The Tragic Paradox: Myth and Ritual in Greek Tragedy* (Amsterdam).

273-276.

32 Cf. Andromache's words about Thracian polygamy in 215-8, Herodotus 5.5 and Menander fr.794-5.

of kin, Orestes, who appears as the perpetrator of matricide in this very drama, is the most notorious case.<sup>33</sup> Hermione herself belongs to a house the ancestors of which have engaged in murdering each other for several generations (beginning with the crime of Pelops). Even though the mythical past of the house of the Atreids is not recounted in the play, it is so well-known that it must make Hermione's accusations somewhat ironic. Besides these extra-dramatic elements, Hermione's accusations are further undermined by the simple fact that Andromache, like all female victims of war, was forced by her captor, Neoptolemus, to become his slave and concubine. Neoptolemus' choice to have two women in his household, in its turn, though not constituting polygamy, is condemned by Greek characters in the play (Chorus [465-70] and Orestes [909]).

Again, in response to Andromache's enumeration of all the constituents of her predicament that make her helpless and harmless, and her exposition of an ideal wife's virtues (183-231),<sup>34</sup> Hermione flatly declares that "Greeks do not live according to the barbarians' laws" (243). This comes as a reply to Andromache's mention of Hector's infidelities and her own acceptance of them (222-7). In a way, Hermione is now in a similar position because of Neoptolemus' choice to have a concubine in his house, but her reaction is significantly different from that of Andromache. Hermione presents herself as a representative of the Hellenic laws, according to which women do not (allegedly) tolerate infidelities, yet in her attempt to conform to these Hellenic laws, she transgresses others. On the other hand, Andromache's universalist comment that "immorality is shameful everywhere" (242), instead

---

33 Alcmaeon also murdered his mother, Eriphyle, a story narrated in Euripides' fragmentary play *Alcmaeon*. Other cases include Oedipus and Althaea.

34 Cf. *Troades* 667-680. The detail of Hector's infidelities, non-compatible with his representation in the *Iliad*, is perhaps a reproduction of Adenor's story in the epic (5.69-71) or an *ad hoc* point intended to stress further Hermione's inappropriate attitude.

of being met by Hermione's insistence on the great gulf that separates the moral Greeks from the lawless barbarians, is followed by the latter's (emphatic) recognition of the Asian's good sense (245), which is nevertheless not enough to save her from death. On the whole, Hermione's dismissal of the moral status of the entire barbarian world is ironically framed and is subverted by her own threat to violate a suppliant's rights,<sup>35</sup> her association of material abundance with freedom of speech and authority, Orestes' matricide and Neoptolemus' choice to have two women in his house. In the mouth of Hermione, and under the given circumstances, barbarism and its demeaning connotations seem to be employed as a rhetorical means for justifying, however unconvincingly, transgressive (Greek) patterns of behaviour.

Menelaus' *agon* with Andromache is not so obviously concerned with the latter's foreignness; like Hermione, Menelaus does not really respond to Andromache's points regarding the dark future that awaits both himself and Hermione if they decide to carry out their murderous plot (333-63) or regarding Andromache's own innocence (387-405), but remains firm in his decision to avenge his enemies. Menelaus' single argument that hints at the difference in ethnicity, or rather refers to it only to overcome and undermine it, is his statement that "both in Troy and in Greece one avenges his enemy" (438). Menelaus' overall rhetoric focuses on the friendship versus enmity pattern and the obligations deriving from it, which, according to him, apply equally to both Greeks and foreigners.<sup>36</sup> In short, Andromache and her son have to be killed because they are both the Greeks' and his household's enemies, which means that they are also dangerous.

---

35 Cf. *Heracleidae* 131, and 69-72, 79, 102, 106, 112, 127 on the Argive herald's impiety towards the suppliants.

36 Contrast Menelaus' words in *Orestes* 486, where honouring or helping one's kin is said to be something distinctively Greek. This remarkable contrast illustrates the varying (or contradictory) uses to which poets can put such notions.

The theme of barbarism as a status carrying strong implications of inferiority reappears in the *agon* between two Greeks, Peleus and Menelaus. Peleus immediately refers to *dikē* (550), reinforcing Andromache's earlier request to be tried by Neoptolemus and provoking her fresh complaint regarding the lack of a trial (567); Peleus goes on to attack the moral quality of both Helen, who let herself be abducted by a Phrygian and thus offended *Phlios* Zeus, and Menelaus, who led the bloody expedition against Troy in fear of being deprived of an unworthy woman (592-609). Peleus goes so far as to argue that he considers Menelaus the murderer of Achilles (614-15). Menelaus' guilt is even greater than that, since, instead of killing Helen after he had seized her, he let himself be defeated and enchanted by Cypris (627-31). Peleus' speech ends with a general moral statement about the superiority of a poor but noble to a rich but base friend (639-41), bringing to mind the luxurious image of Hermione and the hint at Sparta's and Menelaus' wealth -- and also tragic contexts underlining the superiority of nature/ character to wealth or social position (e.g. the Euripidean *Electra* [367-90] or *Alexandros*). Peleus' approach challenges commonly assumed boundaries and distinctions, just as his defence of Andromache challenges the boundaries between Greek and Barbarian.

Menelaus' response to Peleus' attack plays with the idea of the barbarians' hostility towards and inferiority to the Greeks, even though his major point is again reduced to one's obligation to support his friends and punish his enemies. According to Menelaus, Peleus ought never to have accepted Andromache in his house, since she comes from Asia, a land in which so many Achaeans met their death, and, through her kinship with Paris, she shares in Achilles' death (652-60) -- in sharp contrast with Peleus' view of Menelaus as the murderer of Achilles. This argument does not fit in very well with Menelaus' later eulogy of Helen and, by extension, the Trojan war, as something that offered the Greeks great glory and experience in fighting (681-3). This idea is expressed even more emphatically by Helen in *Troades* (932-9),

where the heroine argues that she had rescued the Greeks from becoming subjects of barbarian, tyrannical rule and goes so far as to claim that her achievement resembles that of an Olympic victor (937). A similar view is uttered by Helen in the eponymous tragedy, connected with what Menelaus claims later in *Andromache* about the servile status of barbarians (*Helen* 277). The belief that barbarians are (or should be) the Greeks' slaves is most manifestly reflected in Iphigeneia's speech, in which the heroine announces her decision to be sacrificed for Greece (*IA* 1400-1). Both these references foreshadow the fourth-century political discourse on Panhellenism (especially of Isocrates)<sup>37</sup> and Aristotle's well-known views on the natural slavery of barbarians.<sup>38</sup>

To return to *Andromache*, Menelaus rebukes Peleus for insulting him for the sake of “a barbarian woman” (648-54) and wonders whether Peleus would allow barbarians to rule over Greeks (664-6). This last aspect of Menelaus' argument appears to be at least sounder, being also seen in the light of the superiority of a lawful to a bastard descendant. However, this is met by Peleus' emphasis on Hermione's childlessness (709-12), equivalent to the extinction of the house, and does not seem to register as such a strong case as one might expect -- after all, the child of Andromache is also the son of Neoptolemus, the great conqueror of Troy. His status is similar to that of Teucer, the son of Telamon and Hesione, and a precious fighter in the Trojan war. It is interesting to consider here the latter's treatment in *Ajax*, and, more specifically, the flexibility and relative value of ethnic boundaries that Teucer's *agon* with the Atreids illustrates. Peleus more crucially proclaims that he will make Andromache's son a great enemy to the Spartans (723-6). This statement is the culmination of

---

37 See also Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.6.7 and 6.5.33-49. Cf. Gorgias *Olympic Oration* T 1 DK ii.272.4-7. Cf. also Thucydides 4.20.4, 5.29.3 and *Lysistrata* 1123-56. On Panhellenism and the Barbarian see Mitchell (2007). *Panhellenism and the Barbarian in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Swansea).

38 E.g. *Politics* 1252b5-9, 1255a28-1255b4.

the major divisions operating in the Greek community. The clash between Peleus and Menelaus makes clear that on major moral issues -- here not only that of a foreign slave's fate but also the justice of the Trojan war itself-- opinions and interests can differ substantially, even among people of the same ethnic group. For Peleus, it is not Asia or Paris but Menelaus, and by extension the Greeks, who started the war in the name of a woman most unworthy, killed his son and inflicted such great misfortune on all of Greece. Peleus considers the Asian Andromache his friend, while condemning his Greek compatriots as his enemies. E. Hall (1989:213) remarks that "the plays where Greeks are shown in an inferior light are always concerned not with Athenians but with their enemies in the Peloponnesian war."<sup>39</sup> The strong anti-Spartan colouring of *Andromache* (445-53, uttered by the barbarian Andromache herself, 595-600)<sup>40</sup> is suggestive of alternative views and forms of Otherness, which is frequently irrelevant to ethnicity, kinship or bonds of blood. Despite the substantial involvement of the foreigner Andromache and the whole debate over her individual lot, the major clash of the play seems to concern Greek affairs and discrepancies, which correspond to or spring from current developments in the ongoing civil war. Within the frame of the drama, the differing perspectives of the family of Peleus and that of Menelaus, and their resulting confrontation, bring about the major disaster of the play, that is the murder of Neoptolemus. In the same way, it was the intra-familial conflict in the house of

---

39 We should here take into account that only four extant tragedies are set on Athenian soil (*Eumenides*, *OC*, *Heracleidae*, Euripides' *Suppliants*). Of these four, three have Athenian protagonists. On the whole, then, Athenian dramatic characters are very few in number. By contrast with Aristophanic comedy, most Greeks presented in an inferior light in tragedy are non-Athenians; but they do not necessarily belong among the enemies of Athens in the Peloponnesian war. Other tragic plays might be implicitly related to or influenced by the Athenians' conduct during the war (e.g. *Troades*, presumably produced in the same year as the massacre of Melos, on which see Thucydides 5.84-116).

40 Cf. *Troades* 234. See also H.D.F. Kitto (1961). *Greek Tragedy: a Literary Study*<sup>3</sup> (London) 230-236 and P. Stevens (1971). Euripides: *Andromache* (Oxford) 11-16.

Agamemnon (though again related to broader issues, such as the justice of the Trojan war and its conduct) that triggered a chain of crimes among the closest kin. Just as the Trojan Cassandra was a witness and also fell victim to that conflict in *Agamemnon*, Andromache here witnesses and is threatened by tensions primarily operating in Greek affairs.

Despite the drama's title and the frequent, pejorative references to Andromache's barbarian origin, what is disputed in *Andromache* evidently exceeds the limits of an argument concerning the value of barbarians. Peleus' tender sympathy for Andromache and her child is in direct contrast with the two Spartans' disposition. It is clear that, at least in Hermione's case, it is because of her personal (rather than ethnic/collective or patriotic) interests that this hate is born, even though Andromache had no control over her fate anyway. The fact that both Hermione and Menelaus are reluctant to wait for Neoptolemus in order to settle the issue through trial but choose to act rapidly and stealthily instead is suggestive of a general idea of lawlessness. The threat that Andromache poses sounds itself rather ironic, given her status and, above all, the "male" hostilities and clashes or crimes of the play (which in their turn extend to and reflect intra-ethnic clashes). More importantly, Andromache's specific and skilfully constructed arguments are not even taken into account by the two members of the house, who mostly respond with generalized and unsustainable aphorisms against barbarians, until Peleus appears as a compassionate and prudent saviour -- who is, however, largely motivated by personal motives/hostilities as well. Hermione realizes her mistake (after having been displeased with Menelaus herself [854-5]) and flees with Orestes, who has his own reasons to be hostile towards both Menelaus and Neoptolemus.

After Andromache's salvation, the theme of barbarism no longer occupies the scene. The second part of the drama focuses on Hermione's predicament, her flight with Orestes and the news of Neoptolemus' murder in Delphi. Thetis' epilogue foreshadows the

prosperous future of Andromache and her son, since “neither the stock of Greece nor that of Troy is to be extinguished” (1250-52) -- another expression of unity and equality rather than discrimination of the two ethnic groups. The salvation of Andromache might be viewed in connection with the hypothetical reversal of roles that Hermione has envisaged, i.e. her becoming the slave of her own, present slave. Apart from revealing the fragile nature of socially constructed frontiers, this worry might subtly imply that the fear of Menelaus about barbarians ruling over Greeks, which he states only as a non-case, might not be such an unrealistic scenario, at least in the domain of this οἴκος. In the end, Hermione indeed secretly flees the palace with Orestes as a refugee (though certainly not a slave), Menelaus is forced to go back to Sparta, having displeased both Hermione and Orestes as well as Peleus, and the trapped Neoptolemus dies at the hands of the people of Delphi as a result of Orestes' plot, whereas Peleus is destined to be deified and Andromache and her child to live a royal life.

#### **IV. Orestes**

Things are very different in *Orestes*, a late play, in which the depiction of the barbarian world is unusual in many respects. Its most evident feature is that it lacks the subtlety and variety of the other Euripidean dramas representing foreigners, but this is probably not surprising given the particular identity of the foreigner it employs and his rather comic colouring. *Orestes* brings on stage Helen's Phrygian slave, a highly caricatured figure, whose monologue abounds in (self-referential) points of description of and comment on his foreign origin and everything that that entails. The Trojan slave repeatedly refers to his physical appearance as an ethnic designation and, even more emphatically, his cowardice and complete lack of heroism. At the same time, the Greek world is not presented in a favourable or elevating light, being predominantly marked by violent and cunning instincts. The whole plot consists of a chain of acts of or intentions for vengeance by various agents; the proposed killing of Orestes, Electra and Pylades by the

majority of the Argives, the attempted murder of Helen, the abduction and intended murder of Hermione and the burning down of the royal palace. Emphasis is placed on the manifestations and effects of the characters' moral degradation, which are primarily the result of long-lasting violence. The play explores the consequences of that prolonged aggression, which are not confined to the house of Atreus but extend to the entire city of Argos. In response to such violence, any sort of judicial arrangement or any attempted definition of what is just seem to fail. By contrast with previous treatments of Orestes' myth, the drama presupposes the existence of public justice, but this is not enough to secure the well-being of the *polis* and the social structure.

The employment of the theme of barbarism is not confined to the slave's presence; even before his entrance, there are relevant references made by Greek characters, in contexts in which they are engaged in a confrontation with one another. In accord with the representation of the Phrygian slave, these passages depict barbarians as lawless, luxurious and cowardly.

The first such point is found in Tyndareus' attack on Menelaus, motivated by the latter's resolution to support Orestes despite the fact that he had committed the most unholy crime, matricide.<sup>41</sup> In response to Menelaus' point that he and Orestes are tied by bonds of kinship, Tyndareus claims that Menelaus' long stay among barbarians has changed him into one (485).<sup>42</sup>

---

41 A fact that is constantly kept in the picture through the recurring characterization of Orestes as μητροκτόνος or μητροφόντης (also by the Phrygian slave in 1424).

42 This is the single point in tragedy at which such an idea is expressed. In relation to this line, Hall (1989:204) argues that "any behaviour suggesting that someone was breaking 'the laws of Hellas', transgressing their socially authorized role, or was in danger of committing hubris, could now be defined as 'notGreek.'" This is true for the specific context and, more precisely, as regards Tyndareus' point of view, but it would be misleading to turn this into a generalization. Committing *hubris* in particular is far from being treated as something unGreek in classical literature. On the (different) use of the verb

Tyndareus argues that Menelaus does not behave like a proper Greek by supporting the matricide Orestes, for the latter is said to have violated a common law of Hellas by not having his mother banished but killing her instead (500-2). Even though condemnation of matricide is presented as a universal law (as opposed to a law of Hellas) in classical literature, it seems that, in Tyndareus' view, the power of a judicial system, coming to replace retributive justice or precise retaliation, defines and distinguishes the Hellenic world only. Tyndareus then sets up a polarity between Greeks and barbarians through his reference to both the barbarization of Menelaus and the particular law of Hellas which regulates proper penalties for bloodshed (ἀματος δίκην) -- and through the association of the two. The idea of barbarism as some sort of contaminating disease or transmittable state reinforces the notion of clear boundaries, the transgression of which brings about grave or dangerous results. Even though Greeks and barbarians are clearly distinguished in this context, Greekness does not seem to be something innate, constant and permanent that cannot be jeopardized, questioned or "lost".

After Menelaus' counter-response that honour rendered to one's kin is something Greek (again implying a generic difference from foreigners),<sup>43</sup> Tyndareus juxtaposes the superior position of the law. The idea of law's power and absolute necessity for the well-being of the social structure actually permeates the entire play, resurfacing primarily in relation (or contrast) to the power of retributive justice. The emphasis placed on the law's value echoes the doctrines of Protagoras -- as expressed e.g. in Plato's *Protagoras* 322c-d, where Zeus appears to bestow respect and right among men for the best function of human cities/societies. Menelaus, on the other hand, responds that for the wise men everything that is imposed by necessity (here in connection to law) is considered to be slavish (488). Despite his idealized attachment

---

βαρβαρόω in other contexts see Saïd (2002) 100, n. 219.

43 This point of differentiation is not supported in tragedy.

to a judicial system that poses certain limits to crime's punishment, however, towards the end of his speech Tyndareus proposes that Orestes should be stoned to death and, later, during the assembly of the Argives, keeps insisting that the siblings should be executed (536, 613ff., 914-6). Thus, Tyndareus' unconditional respect for the common laws is soon overshadowed and replaced by his own desire for (precise) retaliation. In this context, then, there is a clear tension between conflicting values upheld (and practised) by Greeks, who at the same time tend to present Greece as a unified and distinct world as to its moral imperatives and social expectations. Tyndareus anachronistically upholds the power of legal customs, while Menelaus appeals to duties imposed by kinship adding that excessive obedience to law is slavish, despite the fact that after the abduction of Hermione, he stresses that Orestes has brought about pollution by shedding his mother's blood (1623-24). Orestes, in his turn, had acted in accordance with the principle of retributive justice, a familiar part of the traditional heroic code, which was moreover dictated by Apollo.<sup>44</sup> In this context, not only are we dealing with multiple clashing values, but each of these values can be marked by great perplexities or paradoxes when put into practice, as the case of Tyndareus suggests.

---

44 Apollo's command is openly criticized by most characters, and his very *dike* is put into question -- at least prior to his epiphany. Apollo's command is characterized as *adikia* by Electra, who adds that there is no point in criticizing it (28), and later, in response to the Chorus' remark that the matricide was just, she clarifies that it was not well done (194-5). Apollo is called *amathesteros tou kalou kai tes dikes* by Menelaus (417, "most ignorant of what is fair and just"), to which Orestes simply responds that mortals are slaves to the gods, whoever these may be (418). Orestes, however, has already explicitly blamed Apollo for urging him on to do a deed most unholy, adding that had Agamemnon been alive he would have entreated him not to slay his mother (285-93). Orestes even claims that Apollo should be found guilty of the crime and slain, since it was he who committed a transgression (595-6). In the end of the play, Apollo explicitly states that he forced Orestes to murder his mother (1665). On the unsatisfactory behaviour of Apollo in tragedy see K.V. Hartigan (1991). *Ambiguity and Self-Deception: The Apollo and Artemis Plays of Euripides* (Frankfurt).

All these principles (and pertinent inconsistencies) apply to representatives of the Greek world, the first two being also presented as Greek, thus highlighting two things which have a complicating effect when viewed in relation to one another: a) the difference between Greeks and barbarians and b) the perplexing and often contradictory nature of values operating within Greek culture. Greeks might be said to be different from foreigners in connection with certain principles, but at the same time Greek ethnicity or culture is not so unified, consistent and fixed when it comes to the acting out of these principles; when it comes to major moral dilemmas and active choice is required there does not seem to be a single answer or a single/consistent “Greek” outlook.

The attack on barbarians gradually becomes all the more specific; while planning Helen's murder, and in response to Orestes' reminder that their future victim is guarded by barbarian slaves, Pylades states that he fears no Phrygian (1110-12), for “the race of slaves is nothing compared to the free” (1115). There is also a hint in this passage at the Trojans' luxuriousness, made again by Pylades (1113), in response to Orestes' description of those slaves' tasks, which they nonetheless perform in Argos; Helen has adopted this luxuriousness. Later, Electra too juxtaposes “the cowardly Phrygians” with Orestes and Pylades, who are “real men” (1351). Thus, barbarians are depicted by the trio as effeminate, cowardly slaves; but the barbarian characters of the play are such by definition, since the only Trojan males involved are Helen's servants, who are also most probably eunuchs (1528).<sup>45</sup> That detail presumably reflects elements of Persian ethnography (like fr. 620 of Sophocles' *Troilus*).

The Phrygian slave, who enters shortly afterwards, functions as the living embodiment of these accusations. The entire

---

45 On eunuchs in Greek theatre see Guyot (1980). *Eunuchen als Sklaven und Freigelassene in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart) 71-72.

scene abounds in references to barbarian features,<sup>46</sup> such as the slave's cries and mourning (1385 [*barbarō boai*] and 1395-97 [*ailinon ailinon archan thanatou / barbaroi legousin, aiai, Asiadi phōnai*])<sup>47</sup> and the act of prostration (1507). It is characteristic that the Phrygian does not omit to point out that custom's barbarian origin. Even more significantly, he explicitly contrasts Phrygian cowardice and servility with Greek heroism. The slave's very first words emphasize his barbarian flight (1374 [*barbarois drasmois*]) and the juxtaposition of his barbaric sandals (1370-71)<sup>48</sup> with Orestes' Mycenaean ones (1470) as well as the juxtaposition of his own sneaky flight with the Argive sword (1369-71). Furthermore, the Phrygian's desire to flee through the sky or the Ocean, though a commonplace in tragedy, is typical of female Choruses' reactions.

The ensuing monologue highlights the bravery and intelligence of the Greek pair and the terror and havoc it caused to the Phrygian slaves, who, shortly before the attack, were wandering around the house (1416-17, 1419-24).<sup>49</sup> The Phrygian himself was fanning Helen -- a certainly exotic scene-- in accordance with barbarian custom (1426-30).<sup>50</sup> Helen was busy weaving veils from her Phrygian spoils (1434). On the actual attack of the Argives, the Phrygians' inferiority to "the Greek spear" is manifestly expressed (1483-85),<sup>51</sup> a statement which is

---

46 These features are framed and emphasized by the slave's extensive commemoration of his homeland (1381-92).

47 "Ah, for Linus! Ah, for Linus! Alas, this is what barbarians say, in their Asiatic tongue as a prelude to death". The exclamation *ailinon*, however, is uttered by Greek characters as well, without being characterized as foreign. See *Agamemnon* 138, *Heracleidae* 172 and *Phoenissae* 1519. The Phrygian's actual speech does not seem to be distinguished by any non-Greek linguistic features, despite the slave's declarations to the contrary.

48 On distinctive barbarian costume and illustrations from vase-paintings see M. Miller (1997). *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge) especially Chs. 7 and 8.

49 Cf. *Helen* 1549-52.

50 Notice the repetition: *Phrugioisi nomois ... barbarois nomoisin*.

51 According to Saïd (2002:82-83): "The 'Greek spear', which has no business here since the two heroes are both armed with a sword, reminds us of

further elaborated in the description of the Phrygians' panic-stricken, cowardly reactions (1486-89 [some of them fleeing, others being wounded or killed, others begging for their lives or seeking a hiding place]) and final defeat. The Phrygian slave himself was busy finding a way of sneaking away from the house (1498-99).

So far, the Phrygian has offered a full view of his archetypically unmanly behaviour. But equally one-sided and exaggerated is his depiction of Greek heroism. Orestes and Pylades are described as twin lions (1401)<sup>52</sup> and wild boar of the mountains (1460), but also as Bacchants falling upon a young, defenceless animal (1492-93). This last comparison stresses the disproportionate strength of the two conflicting parties.<sup>53</sup> Pylades is compared to unquestionably glorious Homeric heroes, both Achaeans and Trojans, namely Ajax and Hector (1479-81), but also to Odysseus, who is not sketched in the most flattering manner in the play, the emphasis being placed on his skill in silent trickery (1404). The Argives are also marked by remarkable calmness (1407) and skill in carrying out their strictly calculated plot, while the Trojan servants are totally disorganized and unable to defend themselves (or Helen) by acting collectively. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the Greeks' treachery would be successful in the first place, given the status but also the particular condition of their opponents at the time of the attack. The Greek pair, being their victim's kin and pretending to be her suppliants (1408-15) and being, more importantly, armed (their swords concealed in their

---

the contrast which Aeschylus' *Persians* made between Persian bow and Greek spear (146-9), and the barbarians' inferiority from the point of view of courage, implicitly compared with their superiority in numbers and riches, constantly crops up in the descriptions of the combats that had set a handful of Greeks against the hordes of the Persian empire." This parallelism is rather far-fetched, given the nature of the 'battle' in *Orestes*.

52 In connection to the pair, Menelaus employs the lion-imagery as well (contrasting lions with humans) and speaks about a savagery unsuited to human beings (1554-55). Cf. *Rhesus* 56-7, *Iliad* 12.37-50 and 15.592-3.

53 Cf. *Hecuba* 1076.

clothing [1457-58]) have to confront a woman and her slaves, whose “armour” and skills are confined to mirrors, perfumes and fans (1112, 1426-30). Thus, the very nature of the deed (attempted murder of a woman) as well as the particular way of its carrying out are far from being parallel to either epic achievements or, more broadly, heroic actions. The overall atmosphere of *Orestes* is far from echoing the heroic climate of the (Iliadic) Trojan war; this reality impacts decisively on the tragic figures’ characterization.

In Orestes’ presence the Phrygian slave reconfirms the dominant aspects of his self-presentation so far; his reactions before the armed Orestes (1506) consist in barbarian prostration and entreaty (1507), admission of Helen's guilt and just punishment (1513,<sup>54</sup> 1515), and declarations about the supreme value of human life (1509, 1521, 1523). These elements do certainly point to barbarian cowardice, servility and disgracefulness, as Orestes himself repeatedly suggests (1514, 1518, 1522, 1528). Yet, the manner of those traits' presentation is so exaggerated (as is the portrayal of the Phrygian as a whole) that they are hard to take seriously and read as reliable designators of truthful patterns of barbarian behaviour. The comic effects produced by the caricatured slave<sup>55</sup> seem to be at the expense of realism.

In addition, examination of the broader dramatic context reveals that a predominant aspect of the Phrygian's attitude is not so extravagantly different or, to put it more precisely, so extravagantly unGreek. Orestes' statements and course of action have made clear, even before the entrance of the slave, that he too

---

54 Cf. Orestes’ expression in 1512.

55 See e.g. Wolff (1968). ‘*Orestes*’ in E. Segal (ed.), *Euripides* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.) 132-149, Seidensticker (1982). *Palintonos Harmonia: Studien zu den komischen Elementen in der griechischen Tragödie*, Mnem. IV 40 (Göttingen) 101-106 and M. West (1987). *Euripides: Orestes* (Warminster) 277.

values survival over anything else (644-5,<sup>56</sup> 679); Orestes, in fact, explicitly approves of the slave's own view that his life is his greatest possession, despite the latter's servile status (1524). In his struggle to save his life, Orestes too had agreed to become Helen's (i.e. his enemy's) suppliant (though deceitfully) and indeed begged her for his salvation (1408-15). Earlier, he had entreated Menelaus as well (671-3), being careful to rule out in advance any suspicion of flattery on his part (670<sup>57</sup>), and had even implored him in Helen's name (669-71).

In conclusion, the Phrygians depicted in the drama are (literally) effeminate slaves, totally unrelated to the traditional Trojan warriors; among other elements, this is suggested by the Phrygian's own commemoration of his compatriot, Hector, as the archetype of valour (1479-80). In this light, the attributes or stereotypes attached to them by the Greek protagonists -- mostly that of cowardice-- are neither surprising nor hard to explain or justify. The Phrygian is a slave living in the palace of Argos, his duties being confined to assisting Helen in her feminine business; he has nothing to do with affairs outside the *oikos*, the typically male spheres of activity (war, politics etc.). Thus, he is fundamentally different from and essentially not comparable to not only the Greek male heroes of the play but also his own compatriot-warriors, like Hector and other glorious fighters of the Trojan war, which are praised in this very play (e.g. 1479-81). Even though the Phrygian is the embodiment of every heroic anti-value -- even more than any Greek or foreign slave in tragedy-- his qualities, as laid out in the play, cannot (and are not meant to) be taken as a generalized, realistic or even serious statement about the Trojan community and its collective bravery or heroism. This is strengthened by the play's repeated references to the destructive outcome of the Trojan war for not only the conquered Trojans but also the Achaean victors (e.g. 1361-65). The war is by no means

---

56 These lines are deleted by Diggle (OCT 1994).

57 Contrast Orestes' corresponding accusation against the Phrygian in 1514.

presented as an easy or trivial affair and, by extension, the Achaeans' rivals are far from being sketched as minor or contemptible targets. The comic touch of the scene involving the Phrygian contributes to and to some extent explains his hyperbolically crude image. In parallel, the Greek protagonists' characterization and the situations they get themselves into are themselves far from echoing the greatness of the epic warriors. The picture of the heroic world as a whole is degenerate and distorted in all directions; in fact, the degradation of the Greek royal family (composed of prominent figures of the Trojan saga) is far more startling than the (more or less expected) baseness of the Trojan slaves, precisely because of the grave reversal of the former's status. The Greek side is marked by particularly hostile relationships, criminal intentions and cunning instincts. Euripides does not seem to spare (or flatter) any of his characters, even less on the basis of ethnic or social distinctions.

#### **V. *Heracleidae***

*Heracleidae* does not involve foreigners. The play explores the reality of intra-ethnic conflict and competition; Athens' superiority to the rest of the Greek world is stressed in relation to a common motif, that of suppliants seeking refuge away from home -- but also in relation to its restrained treatment of its enemy, Eurystheus. The play at the same time retains a strong mythical colouring through its association with Heracles and his legendary achievements. *Heracleidae* evolves into a patriotic drama that praises Athenian ideals<sup>58</sup> while in parallel exploiting the consequences of war and civil conflict -- and several pertinent issues, such as the proper use of power, the limits of revenge and the treatment of prisoners of war.<sup>59</sup> Viewed within its historical

---

58 The Chorus of Marathonian elders and the supplication to Zeus Agoraios strengthen this patriotic force. See further W. Allan (2001). Euripides: *The Children of Heracles* (Warminster) 48-49.

59 As revealed in the Alcmene-Eurystheus episode, in which broader moral dilemmas or complications regarding revenge and justice arise.

context (around 427 BC), the play might be read as a comment on the Peloponnesian war and everything it generated for Greek life.<sup>60</sup>

The encomium of Athens is triggered by the city's response to the noble suppliants who had been expelled from their homeland by Eurystheus. Demophon<sup>61</sup> offers what other Greek cities had refused, that is just treatment (305-6). The three fundamental principles that are said to pervade the Athenian way of life are democracy (423-4), freedom (62, 113, 198, 244-5, 286-7, 423-4, 957) and justice (e.g. 329-32, 901-9). In this context, the Athenian side, represented chiefly by Demophon, is directly contrasted with the Argive, represented by the herald and Eurystheus, and the Athenian king employs the theme of barbarism in order to illustrate that intra-state difference.

Firstly, Demophon characterizes the Argive herald as a barbarian or rather as someone who acts like a barbarian despite his -- costume<sup>62</sup>-- being Greek (130-1). In this context, barbarism is used figuratively as a broader term carrying moral connotations.<sup>63</sup> The king's exclamation is triggered by the Greek

---

60 See further Allan (2001) 43-46.

61 Demophon's name itself, meaning "the voice of the people", is suggestive of the democratic ideals of Athens. On Demophon and his affinities with both Theseus and Heracles see H. Avery (1971). "Euripides' *Heracleidae*" *AJP* 92:544-548.

62 Cf. *Hecuba* 734-5.

63 In this case, the term *barbaros* is used by the Greeks in order to denounce the behaviour of their compatriots, thus making clear that the term has acquired broader ethical implications, rather than merely referring to ethnic origin. There are three other examples of such expressions in Euripidean tragedy (*Hecuba* 1129, *Troades* 764 and *Helen* 501). In all of them, barbarism is virtually used as a synonym for "brutality" or "pitilessness". During the 'trial' between Hecuba and Polymestor in *Hecuba*, Agamemnon urges the latter to "drive barbarism from his heart" (*to barbaron*). More impressively, there is a single occasion on which a barbarian accuses Greeks of barbarism, understood as savagery; Andromache's emphatic denunciation of Greek cruelty -- in reference to the army's resolution to murder Astyanax-- in *Troades* consists in its characterization as barbarous. Greeks are characterized as "inventors of

herald's impious attempt violently to seize the suppliants from the altars (69-72, 79, 102, 106, 112, 127). The similarity to the Egyptian herald's attitude in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* is obvious.<sup>64</sup> Yet, the Argive origin of the suppliant in this case produces different effects and is suggestive of Euripides' freedom and creativity in reprocessing seemingly established contrasts. After the confrontation with the herald, and based upon his handling of the demand for a human sacrifice, Demophon claims that his rule is not that of a barbarian, meaning that his rule is founded on democratic as opposed to despotic principles (423-4). Both these references are indeed suggestive of an evaluative difference between Greeks and non-Greeks and reflect popular views about the despotism and lawlessness of foreign communities. Yet, the fact that the anti-ideals which particularly the first point underlines are not represented by a foreign ethnic group that threatens the Greek way of life but rather by Greek people is a testimony to the fact that ethnicity in itself is not synonymous, or even causally connected, with moral quality. Demophon's explicit assimilation of the Argive attitude to a non-Greek one makes clear that Greekness is not treated as a fixed condition or an inherent quality of Greece's inhabitants, just as barbarism (understood in this wider ethical sense) is not a fixed, predetermined condition of non-Greek people; barbarism is rather understood as a general concept that embraces patterns of behaviour which violate certain -- universal rather than ethnic-- norms. The universality of human nature and the complications involved are made evident through the seeming interpretation on Demophon's part of Greekness as lawfulness and

---

barbarous evils" by Andromache. Upon hearing that the king of Egypt does not welcome guests in *Helen*, Menelaus exclaims that no-one can be that "barbarous" or "barbarian as to his mind". The fact that this particular use of the term is not always combined with the physical presence of foreigners -- i.e. that it can be said among Greek people as well-- and that it appears only in Euripidean plays probably reveals the late fifth century's reflective mood and openness in the exploration of new meanings, ideas and connotations.

<sup>64</sup> The Egyptian herald's conduct, also recognized as manifestly impious by the Egyptian Danaids (e.g. 904), triggers the expression of the most explicit Hellenocentric sentiments in the play (914, 921, 927).

barbarism as lawlessness and its simultaneous blurring or reversal.

The exchange between Eurystheus and Alcmena, after the former's defeat, even though not including allusions to barbarism, explores the tension between conflicting values or imperatives typical of Greek culture. The common rule or necessity of punishing one's enemies, which is Alcmena's only driving force at this stage (e.g. 965, 971), clashes with an established regional law - the Athenian code of conduct when it comes to proper treatment of prisoners of war. Building on the Servant's reference to Athenian legislation (967-8),<sup>65</sup> Eurystheus actually appeals to the "laws of the Hellenes" (1010-11), according to which his murder would bring about pollution since he had not been killed in battlefield.<sup>66</sup> Eurystheus explicitly juxtaposes the value that the city places on the god with the value that it places on the hatred for its enemy (1010-11). After his speech, the Chorus encourage Alcmena to spare him, not because they are persuaded by his arguments, but simply because this is the city's will (1018-19). Alcmena eventually manages to find a way of satisfying both her desire for vengeance and the requirements of civic law, by killing Eurystheus and giving his body over to the city -- and her allies, as

---

65 The Servant moreover expresses his hesitation at Alcmena's implicit suggestion that Hyllus should not have adhered to that law (967-8). The Servant adds that Alcmena will be much reproached if she proceeds with the deed (974).

66 Eurystheus' defence concentrates on divine coercion -- Hera is characteristically said to have inflicted a *nosos* on him (990, notice also 1037-40) -- and his securing of his own safety by destroying his enemies, as any reasonable man, and Alcmena at that, would do (995-1008). In that respect, Alcmena's and Eurystheus' reasoning is not significantly different; the prominence that Eurystheus attaches to the utter extinction of his (actual, potential or hypothetical) enemies is shared by Alcmena, who herself bases her determination to murder Eurystheus on the prospect that he will never be able to expel her from her homeland again. Eurystheus' hint at the Heracleidae's future betrayal of and attack on the Athenian people (1034-36) is another interesting point, which probably results in casting a shadow on the present request of the suppliants. Cf. the future crime of the Danaids, which is however not alluded to in the Aeschylean *Suppliants*.

well as Eurystheus himself,<sup>67</sup> are content with that arrangement (1053-55). While Eurystheus is driven off-stage to meet his death, the young boys-suppliants depart from the altar; both they and the city of Athens are freed. This liberation presupposes an act of murderous vengeance, committed by a non-Athenian female, which at first appears transgressive, risky and unacceptable but proves ultimately harmonized with the upholding of civic law and divine command.

## VI. Conclusion

Extant Euripidean tragedy contains a variety of forms of interaction between Greeks and barbarians. Representatives of various ethnic groups occur in widely different situations; their particular identity or position are likewise highly varied, ranging from slaves of war or foreign suppliants to monarchs and religious worshippers, as is their relation to the Greek world or among themselves. Partly as a result of the larger number of barbarian figures and the variety of situations, Euripidean tragedy abounds in anti-barbarian statements and pro-Greek remarks, and is more generally marked by a strong interest in ethnic and social distinctions. This interest in the exploration of boundaries often results in the blurring or undermining of established polarities, and notably the Greek/barbarian polarity, even in cases in which an evaluative Greek/non-Greek contrast is seemingly set up and stressed.

Two of the major ways in which the Greek/barbarian antithesis is complicated or blurred are: 1) the employment of textual or other dramatic elements that emphasize the assimilation of Greek and barbarian types of behaviour, particularly in contexts where strong anti-barbarian remarks are also expressed or the theme of ethnicity comes to the foreground, and 2) the emphasis on

---

<sup>67</sup> Eurystheus accepts his fate and decides to resist no longer due to a Delphic oracle he suddenly remembered (1026, 1045-49).

intra-Hellenic hostilities, discrepancies and contradictions, the tension between conflicting values, moral principles or interests operating within Greek culture and often resulting in armed strife or criminal acts. This emphasis on contradictory Greek values is itself often detected in contexts where Greeks are said to be united and distinguished from barbarians on the basis of these very values. Both these mechanisms are evident in the plays discussed.

In the light of Troy's traditional fall, the defeated Trojans depicted in Euripidean plays (*Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Trojan Women*, *Orestes*) are almost entirely defined by their status as victims of war fighting for their survival within the hostile and threatening environment of their Achaean masters. Their status as slaves immediately deprives them of any substantial authority or power and places them in a crucially inferior position. That said, evaluative references to barbarians' non-Greek ethnicity are to be found, always in the frame of their confrontation with a Greek figure of authority. These references, which could indeed testify to a chauvinistic or Hellenocentric outlook when viewed in isolation, are placed in a substantially different perspective when examined in both the immediate and broader dramatic context. This is particularly evident in *Andromache*, where the Spartan protagonists engage in a string of anti-barbarian attacks, which however prove unsustainable. At the same time, the drama brings to light the tensions and hostilities among Greek cities, in the middle of the Peloponnesian war. Even though certain barbarian figures in the Trojan plays of Euripides are beyond doubt poorly depicted in their own right (notably Polymestor in *Hecuba* and the Phrygian slave in *Orestes*), most of the derogatory references to barbarism are made in contexts in which Achaean patterns of conduct of doubtful righteousness (as a rule crimes or criminal intentions) are to be excused, explained or interpreted. The more important dramatic focus rests on the way in which Greeks deal with these barbarian individuals or Greeks react among themselves, rather than on the Greek/barbarian contrast itself.

Another factor that more implicitly complicates the evaluative Greek/non-Greek contrast is the city-centric perspective of several Euripidean tragedies (not only those mentioned in group three but also *Andromache* and *Phoenissae*) -- the focus on intra-state discrepancies and, more generally, place of birth and the power of citizenship. This perspective highlights the heterogeneity of the Hellenic world and the complexity of boundaries, especially when it gets intertwined with other major oppositions or polarities, such as that between Greeks and non-Greeks, and with genealogies. This perspective can take various forms, ranging from emphasis on Athenian autochthony, which allegedly excludes or denigrates non-natives (especially in *Ion*), or Athens' special position in the Hellenic world primarily in regard to its treatment of the afflicted (*Heracleidae*, *Suppliants*) to the history of cities such as Thebes, whose founder was of foreign descent (*Phoenissae*, *Bacchae*). The ethnic ambivalence of figures such as Cadmus or the Phoenician women is used to blur or obliterate rather than underline the boundaries between Greeks and foreigners. In rare cases, on the other hand, place of birth combined with genealogies result in the questioning of the Greekness of famous Hellenic figures, namely the Atreids. This questioning creates ironic effects, since it is incorporated into contexts in which barbarian individuals or barbarians as a whole are attacked by the Atreids themselves merely on the grounds of their origin.

There no doubt existed a popular conception of the inferiority of barbarians (militarily and morally), especially shortly after the victory in the Persian wars; yet, this popular conception is not adopted or promoted as a norm in tragedy. On several occasions, the expression of belief in Hellenic superiority seems uncomplicated. On many occasions, though, it only appears uncomplicated, and a more attentive analysis of the context reveals the dangers of relying too much on isolated expressions, however strong or absolute they might seem to be, and of ascribing expressions of tragic characters to the dramatist or the collective

culture to which he belongs. At the same time, the restriction of the Greek/barbarian interaction in tragedy to a construction or deconstruction of the Greek/barbarian polarity (as if barbarians are put on stage only in order to be contrasted or compared to Greeks) does not do justice to the complexity of the plays or the complexity of barbarian figures themselves, such as Hecuba, Medea or the Persian Chorus. The flexibility of barbarism's (and Greekness') function as a literary theme reveals tragedy's tendency to put to the test, or simply to explore more deeply, commonly accepted or predominant premises and distinctions.

Dr Efi Papadodima  
efipapa@uop.gr  
University of Peloponnese  
Department of History and Archaeology