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**XENOI AND GREEKS BETWEEN OPPOSITION AND ‘HYBRIDIZATION’.
SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE LEXICON OF THE OTHERNESS IN
AESCHYLUS’ SURVIVED TRAGEDIES**

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Artigo submetido a 13-07-2018 e aprovado a 02-10-2018

Abstract

The paper examines the opposition between Greeks and the so-called Others (foreigners, barbarians, etc.) as represented in Aeschylus’ surviving plays. This antithesis has become a major focus of scholarly interest not only in philological studies, but also in the modern historical, philosophical and political thought, where it corresponds to the radical opposition between ‘Greekness’ and ‘Otherness’, as well as between West and East. By focusing on this topic, the paper presents an innovative interpretation of some aeschylean texts taken from Suppliants, Agamemnon and Seven against Thebes, looking at foreign characters such as Suppliants’ Egyptian herald or Agamemnon’s Cassandra, but also at ethnically hybrid characters (the Danaids’ Chorus of the Suppliants, whose ancient bond with the Argive land is explicit, and Polynices’ army, described as an external foreign enemy). The aim of the texts’ selection is to capture the interest on Aeschylus’ lexis related to the semantic sphere of the foreigner. The assumption is that a methodology based on semantic values (especially of the terms ξένος or ξενόω, and of some compounds such as ἀστόξενος and ἐχθρόξενος) well witnesses how the Aeschylean lexicon maintains the broad semantic spectrum of the term ξένος, with the frequent co-presence of the meaning of ‘guest’ alongside that of ‘foreigner’. The argument is that in Aeschylean theatre the Greek/Others polarity is presented not only in terms of a contrast/opposition with Greekness (with the positive element of the pair destined to predominate over the Otherness), but also in terms of intermingling/confusion.

Aeschylus is not only the poet of the conflict between Greeks and Barbarians, but also the inventor of collective characters in which Greek and foreign elements constantly co-exist, in order to determine hybrid identities.

Keywords: Aeschylus; *xenos*; *Agamemnon*; *Septem contra Thebes*; *Supplices*.

Introduction

Among all the opposing polarities that characterize Aeschylus' theatre (man *vs.* woman, *polis vs. ghenos*, old *vs.* young, parents *vs.* children, ancient divinities *vs.* new gods, etc.) the contraposition between Greeks and the so-called *Others* (foreigners, barbarians, etc.) plays a particularly meaningful role. This antithesis has gained – and continues to gain – considerable importance, not only in literature, but also in the modern¹ historical, philosophical and political thought. For instance, it is certainly no coincidence that in his famous volume *Orientalism* E. Said points out that in Aeschylus' *Persians* we find the first portrayal of an Asia that “speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination, which is depicted as victorious over Asia, that hostile ‘other’ world beyond the seas. To Asia are given the feelings of emptiness, loss, and disaster that seem thereafter to reward Oriental challenges to the West (...)”². However, Said himself highlights how “as early as Aeschylus’s play *The Persians* the Orient is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar (in Aeschylus’s case, grieving Asiatic women)”³. As the scholar underlines⁴, Aeschylus first would depict Asia as a distant and hostile alterity, then as a closer and more familiar reality, which could effectively indicate that the *limen* in Aeschylus’ poetry is a permeable and accessible reality, rather than a clear separation between

¹ Considering the extensive bibliography on this subject, only a small selection of significant titles that is – by no means – exhaustive is mentioned here. The following references mainly focus on Aeschylus’ theatre: Kranz 1933: 77-78; Lattimore 1943: 82-93; Broadhead 1960: xvi-xx, xxviii-xxxii; Diller 1962: 37-68; Clifton 1963: 111-117; Hall 1989: 76-100; Georges 1994: 86, 102-109; Hutzfeldt 1999: 62-69, 79-81; Tuplin 1999; Gehrke 2000: 85-86; Harrison 2000: 51-115; Hall 2002: 176-177; Isaac 2004: 257-83; Kantzios 2004: 3-19; Garvie 2009: xx-xxii; Gruen 2011: 9-21; Futo Kennedy 2013: 64-68.

² Said 1979: 56.

³ Said 1979: 21.

⁴ With concerns to the debate, often of a critical nature, on standpoints taken by Said and on his possible contradictions, especially with reference to the Aeschylean work cf. Varisco 2007: 27; Skinner 2012: 44-50; Van Steen 2017: 248-250 in part. 248-249 n. 27.

the opposite terms of the East/West pair – as it actually should be. As an example, we should bear in mind that in Atossa’s dream in the *Persians* (frequently portrayed as the work with the most radical opposition between the Greek and the Barbarian worlds⁵), Greece and Persia are depicted as two sisters of the same race, sharing the fate of living apart on opposite lands of the *oikoumene* (*Pers.* 185-187)⁶.

That being said, there are further considerations to make on Aeschylus’ use of certain elements, especially lexical ones, that lead us to the opposing Greek/non-Greek terms. An example can be found in the surviving tragedies, when Greeks and foreigners interact and communicate on stage.

More specifically, our aim is to understand whether Aeschylus’ lexis for the semantic sphere of the foreigner⁷ (especially the ξένος) has a mainly negative connotation to enhance the superiority of the Greeks over the non-Greeks, or it flexibly adapts to different dramatic contexts of use⁸.

The true foreigners

H. Bacon pointed out that Aeschylus puts a foreign character on stage and deliberately distinguishes them as “consistently foreign”, from which we understand how “foreignness is part of the characterization and the poet constantly reminds us of this”⁹. However, if we only consider the surviving tragedies (referring, for reasons of both space and opportunity, to a possible subsequent contribution to the analysis of the *unicum* represented by the *Persians*¹⁰), we can see that the foreign component of Aeschylus’ theatre reduces to only two entirely foreign characters: the Egyptian herald in the

⁵ Cf. e.g. Hall 1989: 93.

⁶ Cf. Citti 1996: 72; Garvie 2009: 117 on ll. 185-6; Citti 2011: 29 and 33-34.

⁷ For an overview on the use of the foreigner’s language by the playwright cf. the summary table of the lexicographic findings in Yziquel 2002: 343.

⁸ Cf. Lomiento 2017: 181.

⁹ Bacon 1961: 63.

¹⁰ Given its Susa-based setting, in the *Persians*, the Athenian public considers all the protagonists to be of foreign origin, yet there is a lack of a true Greek counterpart that allows an interaction and a direct confrontation on stage between Greekness and otherness. Moreover, it is not by chance, that in relation to the Greek/others polarity, the *Persians* provides a substantially different lexical overview when compared with the other tragedies: ten attestations of the term βάρβαρος – against only four that can be seen in the other surviving tragedies (*Ag.* 919 and 1051; *Suppl.* 235; *Sept.* 463) – show the total absence of occurrences of the term ξένος (as well as others relating to it). Cf. Yziquel 2002: 333-334.

Suppliants (a tragedy in which Danaus and his daughters – despite being Egyptians – express their ancient bond with the city of Argos on several occasions¹¹: cf. *infra*) and Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*¹². I believe it would be appropriate to begin precisely from these two ξένοι that the playwright sets in a Greek environment (in both cases, the setting is the previously-mentioned *polis* of Argos) and in an atmosphere marked by an extremely evident or ill-concealed hostility toward ‘the newcomer’.

The Egyptian herald and the good foreigner

In the *Suppliants*, the on-stage presence of the herald, whose arrival is announced by Danaus after sighting the Egyptian fleet, consists of two moments: the first is a violent clash with the Danaids (ll. 825-910), who attempt to drag them away from the altars and to force them to embark on their own ships, followed by an intense confrontation with Pelasgus (ll. 911-953), king of Argos, who intervenes to protect the Danaids. During the exchange of words between the herald and the Chorus, there is no reference to the ethnic theme, considering that the Egyptian man does not know that the maidens have been granted asylum in the Greek *polis* and that he only wants to reaffirm male dominance over women. On the contrary, in the vigorous debate between the *kerux* and the Argive sovereign, the confrontation concerns the claims made by the Egyptians (that are initially considered plausible by Pelasgus himself: cf. ll. 387-391) and what had been established by the votes of the town Assembly (the hosting of the maidens in the city: ll. 605 ss.) and applied by the *basileus*¹³. From a lexical point of view, in the *kerux vs* Danaids dialogue, this results in a lack of terms

¹¹ Cf. Kurke 1999: 320-322; Vasunia 2001: 40-43; Yziquel 2002: 333-334; Mitchell 2006: 210-218; Mitchell 2007: 124-126; Gruen 2011: 229-233; Papadodima 2014: 258.

¹² As regards the contingent of foreign characters in Aeschylus’ theatre surviving to date, cf. De Luna 2003: 82. The Aeschylean text appears to be reticent as concerns the identity of the Chorus of the *Libation-Bearers*, often identified with Trojan prisoners such as Cassandra: nowhere in the work is the origins of these slaves explicitly mentioned. In this regard cf. among the others, Garvie 1986: 53-54 on ll. 22-83; Cantilena 2000: 149 n. 1; McCall, 1990: 17-30; Amendola 2006: 34-37, Centanni 2012: 359-367.

¹³ Cf. Sommerstein 2013: 291: “... when he confronts the Egyptian herald, Pelasgus speaks and acts as one who has a popular mandate for war. ... Pelasgus refuses to give his name (938) because he is speaking for his entire people who are solidly determined not to hand over the women without their consent (942-9)”.

related to the semantic sphere of the ξένος, terms that, on the other hand, appear rather frequently in the clash between the Egyptian man and the Sovereign of Argos¹⁴, starting with the initial words that Pelasgus speak to his interlocutor:

Suppl. 911-917

Pelasgus: Here, you, what are you doing? What's your idea in insulting this land of Pelasgian men? Do you really think you've come to a city of women? For a barbarian (κάρβανος) you are showing an unduly arrogant attitude towards Greeks; you have made a great mistake, and your mind has gone far astray.

Herald: In what respect have I erred in doing this, or acted without right?

Pelasgus: In the first place, you do not know how an alien should behave (ξένος μὲν εἶναι πρῶτον οὐκ ἐπίστασαι). [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

In the first two interventions of the king, the syntagmas κάρβανος¹⁵ ὄν and ξένος μὲν εἶναι appear with a reference to the interlocutor's unfamiliarity with the Greek world: the sovereign, however, does not accuse the Egyptian of being a barbarian/foreigner, he does not hold his other identity against him, as he rather blames the inappropriate, insolent and foolish behaviour of the herald, who does not behave as a ξένος should (ξένος μὲν εἶναι πρῶτον οὐκ ἐπίστασαι), despite him being a barbarian (κάρβανος) and a foreigner himself. The herald, in fact, offends the *polis* he is hosted by and does not respect its rules and religiousness¹⁶. Being a good ξένος is a theme that has already been dealt with in the *Suppliants*; in ll. 191-203¹⁷ (Danaus' first speech), for example when the father shows his daughters the proper behaviour to adopt by those who are exiled and are seeking for asylum and protection:

Danaus: But come as quickly as you can; hold reverently in your left hands your white-wreathed suppliant-branches, sacred emblems of Zeus the enforcer of respect, and answer the natives in words that display respect, sorrow and need, as it is proper for aliens to do (...) Let your speech, in the first place,

¹⁴ Papadopoulou 2014: 72: "The confrontation between Pelasgus and the Egyptian herald stresses the polarity between Greeks and barbarians". Cf. also Hall 1989, 121 ss.; Saïd 2002: 88.

¹⁵ As regards the Aeschylean use of the term especially in relation to the foreign characters' speeches (see also *Ag.* 1061 with reference to Cassandra) cf. McNelis-Sens 2016: 163 on *Lyc.* 1387.

¹⁶ Hall 1989: 199; Lomiento 2017: 183-184.

¹⁷ Cf. Friis Johansen-Whittle 1980: III 234 on l. 915

not be accompanied by arrogance, and let it emerge from your disciplined faces and your calm eyes that you are free of wantonness (...) Remember to be yielding - you are a needy foreign refugee (...).¹⁸ [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

This paternal exhortation will not be dropped by the Chorus, as Danaus himself shows by praising his daughters at the end of the blessing hymn sung by the youths in the city that had just accepted them (*Suppl.* 710: εὐχὰς μὲν αἰνῶ τάσδε σώφρονας, φίλοι): thanks to their prayer (ll. 625 ff.), the maidens show that they possessed *sophrosyne*¹⁹, a kind of wisdom that, in reality, coincides with the acceptance and sharing of the *poliad* values just quoted in the choral singing, and that allows the foreigners to enter the *polis*. On the other hand, moderation and poise are qualities that are totally absent in the Egyptian herald, who has already shown violence and impiety in the clash with the maidens. This is what causes Pelasgus' hostility and not simply the herald being κάρβανος and ξένοσ. Although he is a foreigner, the herald does not find it difficult to listen and understand the king's speech, which he defines far from being hospitable:

Suppl. 926

Herald: I hear what you say; it's far from hospitable. [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

Here it seems that, in an entirely instrumental manner, the Egyptian wants to recover the same rhetorical strategy used in the first part of the tragedy of the Danaids²⁰, who, on several occasions, explained to the king (who did not know whether to accept or not their request for asylum) that a possible refusal would be an offence to Zeus *Xenios*, an ungodly act with serious consequences for the city. However, the Argive king, strengthened by the 'popular' vote in favour of the maidens, has no hesitation in responding to the accusation made by the Egyptian:

Suppl. 927

PELASGUS. I don't extend hospitality (ξενοῦμαι) to those who rob the gods. [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

¹⁸ Cf. Baslez 1984: 36.

¹⁹ This virtue, prior to the great prayer of the second stasimon, appears to be possessed only by Danaus, while the only wisdom of the maidens seems to be found in the listening to their father's advice and instructions (cf. e.g. *Suppl.* 176-177).

²⁰ Cf. Friis Johansen-Whittle 1980: III 239 on ll. 925-927.

Also in this case, the lack of hospitality toward the Egyptians is not the result of a preconceived closure of the king and the *polis* toward the foreigners (as the reception that had just been granted to the maidens proves), but it derives from the fact that these ones, despite being foreigners, do not know how to act as ξένοι, 'guests': in fact, they show themselves as τούς θεῶν συλήτορας²¹. These ungodly ways of being and acting, and not their foreign origins, mean that the Egyptian demands could not be heard and accepted in the Greek *polis*, unlike the case of the sensible requests made by Danaus and his daughters.

Cassandra and the pact between 'foreigners' in Agamemnon's palace

The arrival of Cassandra in front of the palace of the Atrids has both a meaning and a function diametrically opposed to those of the Egyptian herald: if the latter arrives in Argos with the aim of taking back the young maidens who are considered his own property, Priam's daughter reaches the doors of Agamemnon's palace as the spoils of war. It is the Atrid's responsibility to introduce the young Trojan maiden who accompanies him on the chariot:

Ag. 950-955

AGAMEMNON. (...) This foreign woman - please welcome her kindly (τὴν ξένην δὲ πρεμμενῶς τήνδ' εἰσκόμζε). He who exercises power gently is regarded graciously by god from afar. No one wears the yoke of slavery (δουλίῳ ... ζυγῶ) willingly; and this woman has come with me as a gift from the army, the choice flower of its rich booty (...). [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

The sovereign defines the princess as a foreigner ξένη and a slave (δουλίῳ ... ζυγῶ). He justifies her presence by his side by including Cassandra in a specific Greek military code according to which the army acknowledged and paid homage to the value of its own commander, by awarding him with the finest prize²². Therefore, he asks his wife to kindly

²¹ Vasunia 2001: 58: "Their herald speaks in mocking tones to the king of Argos, and thereby refuses to adhere to the traditional obligations of the guest". As regards the different respect for the Greek religion that characterizes the Egyptian herald and the Danaids cf. e.g. Baslez 1984: 39-40; Mitchell 2006: 217. Unlike Hall 1989: 125 and n. 76.

²² Cf. Judet de la Combe 2001: I 363 on Il. 946-954; Rosenbloom 2006: 260; Medda 2017: 88 on Il. 954-5. Anderson 1997: 51: close to Cassandra's fate is that of

host the foreigner in their home²³ to obtain in exchange the favour of the god – perhaps identified as Zeus *Xenios* – toward a winner who is not cruel to the losers. Agamemnon’s speech not only is based on the *pietas* toward the foreigner/slave, but also appears to have a profound Greek nature: according to the ancient Greek military customs, Cassandra arrives in Argos as a prisoner, but she must be accepted with regard for the equally intense Greek religiousness, whose aim is to avoid divine retribution. Moreover, the king’s words effectively express the renewed wisdom, poise and religiousness that Agamemnon would take with him when going back to Argos. These are the qualities that had just made him condemn the rite prepared for him by his wife – the treading on the famous red textiles – as it is considered suitable only for a barbarian. On the other hand, the expression βαρβάρου φωτός (l. 919)²⁴, an evident reference to the Greek/barbarian dichotomy, is used here by Agamemnon to negatively describe the actions of a Greek woman, and not of a foreigner – actions judged as being both excessive and sacrilegious.

The Greek/barbarian contrast will characterize Clytemnestra’s subsequent interventions in a more marked way as she is annoyed by Cassandra’s obstinate silence, who does not obey the queen’s orders, as she remains still and silent:

Ag. 1050-1052

Clytaemestra. Well, unless she has some unintelligible barbarian language (φωνήν βάρβαρον), like the swallows do, what I say is getting inside her mind and my words are persuading her.

Ag. 1059-1061

Clytaemestra. If you want to take some part in this, don’t hang around. If you don’t understand my words and they’re not getting through to you, then instead of speaking, express yourself with gestures in the way foreigners do (σὺ δ’ ἀντι φωνῆς φράζε καρβάνῳ χερί). [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

Chryseis, captured during the sack of Thebes and destined to the same Agamemnon during the division of the spoils of war.

²³ Agamemnon’s invitation will be recalled by Clytemnestra in ll. 1035 ff.: cf. Judet de la Combe 2001: 412; Medda 2017: 87.

²⁴ Hereafter (*Ag.* 935) Clytemnestra will ask her husband how the Trojan king Priam would have behaved in case of victory: Fraenkel 1950: 425 highlights how Clytemnestra proposes Agamemnon a non-Greek model of a sovereign that her husband has already refused. Unlike Judet de la Combe 2001: 352-353 and Medda 2017: 77-78 on ll. 935-937.

As the lines above show, the queen offers – both to herself and to the Chorus – an explanation for the stillness and silence of the Trojan princess by frequently bringing into play a presumed impossibility of dialogue between Greeks and barbarians. She points out a linguistic obstacle that can be overcome either by passing to a non-verbal form of communication (use of gestures)²⁵ or by employing an interpreter evoked by the Chorus (ll. 1062-1063). In reality, the explanation that Clytemnestra invented is false, and so are almost all the reasoning and speeches used by the queen to attempt to successfully deceive her male interlocutors (the elderly members of the Chorus and her consort) as she progressively bends them to meet her needs. However, in this case – whether intentional or not – Clytemnestra's lies are revealed by Cassandra herself, the only character who has not been bent and outwitted by the Argive queen and who spontaneously and consciously surrenders to her fate – her death. In her long prophecy on Agamemnon's forthcoming assassination by his wife Cassandra, she claims

Ag. 1254

CASSANDRA. And yet I know the Greek language ("Ἑλλην' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν"²⁶) all too well. [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

The phrase undoubtedly proves that the Trojan woman has voluntarily disobeyed Clytemnestra's previous orders and that her silence was the weapon used to frustrate the rhetoric capacities of the Argive queen²⁷: the foreigner not only speaks and knows – as per poetic convention – the Greek characters' language²⁸, but is also the only one who is able to interpret the discourse that the elderly members of the Chorus do not understand, or maybe just do not want to understand. Being ξένη does not prevent Aeschylus from making Cassandra the character who can better interpret and understand the reality that surrounds her. On the contrary, the playwright makes her the only one able to contrast – even if in vain – Clytemnestra's shrewdness and perverse intelligence, as well as the only one able to challenge the

²⁵ Cf. Judet de la Combe 2001: 425-426; De Luna 2003: 91.

²⁶ On the value of φάτις cf. Judet de la Combe 2001: 536.

²⁷ With regard to Cassandra's silence and the foreign woman's victory as well as Clytemnestra's rhetoric, persuasive power cf., among others, Pucci 1994: 103-104; McClure 1999: 93-94; Judet de la Combe 2001: II 410-411.

²⁸ Cf. De Luna 2003: 96.

Greek queen's primacy (also being aware of what is about to take place on the scene as the Trojan woman's prophetic, threnodic song anticipates²⁹).

Moreover, the foreign origins – for instance, being 'brought up overseas in a city where another language is spoken' (this is how the Trojan woman is defined by the coryphaeus in ll. 1200-1201³⁰) – do not isolate Cassandra, who seems to be able to establish a stable interaction with the Choreutes, who immediately declare their pity for the prisoner: the Trojan woman and the elderly members build their affective union by sharing certain feelings such as the affinity with Agamemnon, the horror for the bloody past of the royal palace and the hostility toward Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. With regards to the relationship that appears to connect Cassandra and the Argive elders, it is worth noting how in two occasions Priam's daughter addresses the Choreutes using the vocative ξένοι (ll. 1299 e 1315): this choice of words may not be banal as it might have the function of emphasizing the prophetess' synergy with the Argive Chorus. By using ξένοι, the Trojan woman not only recognizes the elderly Argives as her only true guests, but may also want to associate her condition of ξένη with the Chorus; a sacred allegiance between ξένοι is what Cassandra proposes to the elderly members of the Chorus while dying, as shown by the use of ἐπιξενοῦμαι in l. 1320:

Cassandra. As one about to die, I claim this as my guest-right (ἐπιξενοῦμαι³¹).
[Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

The gift that the foreigner asks her guests/ξένοι is to witness the final part of her prophecy: the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus at the hand of a man whom Cassandra describes not only as her mother's killer and her father's avenger (l. 1281), but also, above all, as an 'exile, a fugitive coming from afar' (l. 1282: φυγὰς δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος)³². It

²⁹ Cf. Knox 1979: 44, who underlines how Cassandra does not need an interpreter; in fact, she is the only person who can correctly interpret what is about to happen Cf. Medda 2017: 146 on ll. 1062-1063.

³⁰ Cf. Judet de la Combe 2001: 508-510

³¹ On the value of ἐπιξενοῦμαι cf. Fraenkel 1950: III 615-616; Judet de la Combe 2001: 570.

³² Cassandra's words are repeated by Orestes himself in *Ch.* 1042: cf. Fraenkel 1950: III 596.

will be Orestes, an ἀπόξενος (an Aeschylean *proton legomenon*)³³, to seek revenge for Agamemnon's and the ξένη's deaths (l. 1280: ἡμῶν ... τιμῆος). In the *Coephoroi*, the same Orestes deceives his mother by pretending to be a ξένος (a foreigner originating from Phocis: cf. e.g. *Ch.* 562, 657, 674, 730) to satisfy his thirst for vengeance. Finally, being a foreigner – like Cassandra – coincides with being a stranger and hostile toward the subversive control that Clytemnestra has over the royal palace and being close to who (Orestes) will bring justice to Agamemnon's palace.

The Danaids: foreign and 'Argive migrants'

The particular condition of Danaus' daughters in the *Suppliants* has already been mentioned: a group that, from its very exterior appearance, can be qualified as foreign, but in its interaction with king Pelasgus reveals and emphasizes several times its ancient bond with the Argive land that now hosts them, and to which they beg for hospitality and shelter in the name of the lineage from Io. This dual nature in which Greekness and otherness are not overlapped but constantly flank and almost merge, characterizes the Chorus since from the anapests of the parade, which act as a document declaring the identity of the Choreutes. In fact, in the very first lines of the tragedy, the following information is revealed: 1) the place of departure of the young maidens (Africa and Egypt: ll. 2-4); 2) the reason for their migration (a voluntary exile to flee from having to wed the sons of Egypt and not proclaimed by an unidentified city due to some fault of the young maidens: ll. 6-10); and, finally, 3) their destination land (the Greek city of Argos: l. 15). However, in ll. 15-17, the young maidens identify Argos not only as the region in which they have recently arrived, but also as their homeland of the lineage to which they belong to. This is the lineage of Io, the heifer-woman renowned for having fled in the exactly opposite direction (from Argos to Egypt) compared with that of her descendants. This complex identity, in which the point of origin and the point of destination coincide with Argos itself, is mentioned also in the first of the refrains that punctuates the young maidens' song:

³³ The term is an Aeschylean *proton legomenon*, used also in *Ch.* 1042 by Orestes himself, who by this time has become a matricide and ready to leave Argos: the repetition of these words effectively highlights the fulfillment of Cassandra's prophecy.

Suppl. 117-122 = 128-133

Chorus: I appeal for the favour of the hilly land of Apia - you understand well, O land, my barbaric speech (καρβᾶνα ... ἀδᾶν) and I repeatedly fall upon my Sidonian veil (Σιδονία καλύπτρα) (...) tearing its linen to rags. [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

Here, the Argive land - recalled through the allusive expression Ἀπίαν βοῶνιν³⁴ - is presented by the Danaids as being able to listen and understand a voice³⁵ that only externally and apparently is barbarian, but that actually originates from a group that has Argive roots, despite them wearing eastern garments (Sidonia's veil)³⁶. This reference to the garments as an element of separation between the Greek and the oriental types³⁷ is also mentioned when comparing the Danaids and Pelasgus: in fact, the Argive sovereign asks the most common question addressed to a foreign group ('From what place does this company come ...?': l. 234, trans. Sommerstein 2008), as he is driven by the exterior appearance of the Danaids as well as by the garments they wore – proofs of the non-Greek but barbarian identity of the maidens ('... in un-Greek garb, wearing luxurious barbarian robes and headbands? The dress of these women is not from the Argive region, nor from any place in Greece,; ll. 234-237, trans. Sommerstein 2008)³⁸. However, in Pelasgus' reasoning, this distinctive and separative element is immediately flanked and confused with something that, on the contrary, recalls Greece: the branches that the young maidens have put on gods' altars (the ritual of supplication) belong to a rite that the sovereign acknowledges as being entirely Greek, in accordance with Argive traditions (ll. 241-244)³⁹. Initially the coryphaeus can only confirm Pelasgus' deductions about the young maidens' clothing (l. 246); but when the king changes his question and asks from which lineage (l. 272) the Danaids descend, the maidens strongly emphasizes their

³⁴ Friis Johansen-Whittle 1980: II 104-105 perceives a contemporary reference to Io in the syntagma – and therefore to the Argive origins of the Chorus – and to Hapis, the Egyptian god often associated with Epaphus.

³⁵ Cf. De Luna 2003: 85-86. With regards to the need to understand and translate the noun as voice, pronunciation or sound, but not language. Cf. also Judet de la Combe 1988: 210.

³⁶ Cf. Fraenkel 1950: III 484-485 who places near the passage of the *Suppliants* to Ag. Sandin 2003: 105-106.

³⁷ Cf. Bacon 1961: 26-27; Cf. De Luna 2003: 82.

³⁸ Citti 1996: 71.

³⁹ Cf. Baslez 1984: 36.

Argive origins (‘... We declare that we are Argive by race, the offspring of the cow that bore a fine child’: Il. 274-275, trans. Sommerstein 2008). This peremptory claim of being Argive put forward by the young women does not immediately convince Pelasgus, who, after having expressed his surprise, goes back to examine the external appearance of his female interlocutors. His aim is evidently to obtain a new confirmation of their barbarian origins, comparable with those of the Ethiopians, the Indians or even the Amazons, and deny the Argive origins they claim to have (Il. 277-290)⁴⁰. Only the subsequent references made by the coryphaeus to the myth of Io and the lineage of Epaphus (Il. 291-324) convince the sovereign to recognize the peculiar identity of the Chorus, and to consequently suspend the questioning about the geographical and biological origins of the maidens, to investigate the reasons that have driven them to reach Argos (Il. 326-327).

The Danaids’ particular identity (foreigners with Argive origins) cannot but have an influence also on Aeschylus’ choice of words: for Danaus’ daughters, king Pelasgus, struggling on the asylum request received, coins the term ἀστοξένων, a compound word devised by the poet and subsequently reclaimed only by grammarians and lexicographers, that in an almost oxymoronic way, encapsulates the entire story of the maidens⁴¹:

Suppl. 356-358

PELASGUS. May the business of these citizen-strangers not prove ruinous, and may this event, never expected or planned for, not bring strife to the community: the city doesn’t need that! ⁴². [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

The *hapax* efficiently expresses Pelasgus’ amazement who, after his confrontation with the maidens, cannot but recognize the just mentioned link with Argos and admit the extraordinary nature of their *status*, both inside and outside the *polis*⁴³. Later in the tragedy (Il. 618-620), Pelasgus himself transforms the fear previously perceived due to the hybrid nature of the women into an effective rhetorical device, as he persuades the Argive assembly to grant asylum to the Danaids by informing his fellow citizens of the potential risk of a double *miasma* – a doubly lethal threat for the

⁴⁰ De Luna 2003: 83; Bakewell 2013: 68-73.

⁴¹ In this way, the *schol.* 356 (ed. Smith 1976) explains the compound word ἀστοξένων: τῶν νῦν μὲν ξένων, πρώην δὲ συνημμένων τῷ ἄστει.

⁴² Yziquel 2002: 335.

⁴³ Cf. Vasunia 2001: 40-43; Bakewell 2013: 28.

*polis*⁴⁴, both foreign and local (l. 618: ξενικὸν ἄστικόν θ' ἅμα⁴⁵) – in case the maidens were voted against.

Polynices and his champions: was this a Greek or a foreign army?

If in the *Suppliants*, as shown above, a seemingly foreign group carries an actual primary link with the *polis* that hosts it, in *Seven against Thebes*, it is Polynices who represents a two-fold threat for Thebes, inside and outside the *polis* at the same time, by marching his army on his home town. Although the tragedy takes place entirely inside Oedipus' cursed *ghenos*, the fratricidal battle between Eteocles and Polynices and, above all, the conflict between Thebans and Argives have been interpreted in the light of the Greek/Other dichotomy: Eteocles and his companions are supposed to represent the champions of Greekness, called upon to defend themselves against an external foreign enemy characterized by certain barbarian traits that are entirely incompatible with the civil context of a Greek *polis* (for example Tydeus' beastly violence or Capaneus' sacrilegious arrogance)⁴⁶. A similar interpretation of the drama is also based on the possible relationship between lines 71-73 – a text widely suspected by some editors⁴⁷ – where Eteocles prays to the gods and defines Thebes as Ἑλλάδος φθόγγον χέουσας, and line 170 of the parode, with the presence of the syntagm ἑτεροφώνῳ στρατῶ that the Theban women, involved in prayer as well, refer to Polynice's army. Closely linking the two mentioned passages shows that the Greek language belongs only to the Thebans as a distinctive trait, while the Argives speak another foreign language, causing them the exclusion from the Hellenic community⁴⁸. Thus, Aeschylus

⁴⁴ Cf. Yziquel 2002: 335 n. 14.

⁴⁵ Cf. *schol.* 618b (ed. Smith 1976): ὁ εἶπεν ἄνω ἄστοξένων, τοῦτο διαλελυμένως εἶπεν.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kranz 1933: 78; De Luna 2003: 105-107; Giordano 2006: 83; Torrance 2007: 88-91.

⁴⁷ Several editors and scholars consider the information provided by l. 73 to be entirely superfluous (Thebes that speaks greek language) and they propose either to correct or even to remove the line: cf. Dawe 1964: 180 (who considers the noun φθόγγον interpolated to counterpose the Greek language spoken by the Thebans with the presumed allogloss of the Argives, to which l. 170 would suggest); Hutchinson 1985: 54 on ll. 72 s.; Lupas-Petre 1981: 38; West 1998: 66. Conversely, Novelli 2005: 60-62 who rightly affirms that it is appropriate to preserve the text proposed by the manuscript tradition.

⁴⁸ Cf. Giordano 2006: 274-275. Judet de la Combe's interpretation (1988: 207-230) is to be preferred. Here, by re-examining the previous exegesis and highlighting the forcing present in the readings of those who closely link the two locations in which the tragedy

would have staged a battle between Greeks and barbarians also in *Seven against Thebes*, whose historical model is 'Greeks vs. Persians', while the legendary one is 'Greeks vs. Trojans'⁴⁹. However, it is the meager presence of terms belonging to the lexical field of the foreigner (for instance, the term ξένος that appears only three times throughout the entire tragedy) that casts a doubt on the fundamental role that the Greek/foreigner (or barbarian) dichotomy plays in this drama. In two cases (ll. 727 e 942) the term ξένος is used as the adjective 'foreign', describing the iron imported from the Chalybes, and also involved in the death of both Oedipus' sons; however, only in l. 924 it is used as a noun referring to the fallen Argives, opposed to the Theban citizens (πολίται)⁵⁰. Moreover, the compound word ἐχθρόξενος⁵¹ appears to be particularly significant as it is used twice by Eteocles in just 15 lines of the sovereign's intervention to Amphiaraios. The oracle is the only opponent to deserve a strongly positive portrait from both the messenger and the Theban sovereign, given that he clearly distances himself from the inhumane ferocity and pride of other warriors, particularly Tydeus and Polynices⁵². For Eteocles, the only fault attributed to a *very wise man who is also an excellent warrior* as well as *wise, just, valiant, pious, a great prophet* (l. 610) lies in his becoming friends with impious, violent and wicked individuals:

Sept. 605-608

ETEOCLES. (...) else an honest man in the company of fellow-citizens, men who hate foreigners and are unmindful of the gods (ἀνδράσιν ... ἐχθροξένοις τε καὶ θεῶν ἀμνήμοισιν), is caught unjustly in the same net as they, and is lashed and laid low, together with them all, by the scourge of god (...). [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

took place without considering the several dramatic contexts (cf. e.g. Diller 1962: 48), the paradox of a city of Argos being excluded from Greekness is avoided: «Argos n'est pas condamnée comme non grecque; si Thèbes représente par excellence l'hellénisme, il est suggéré qu'Argos s'est privée d'un trait qui lui est également essentiel: la monstruosité de son agression fait ressortir une valeur commune que Thèbes se trouve en situation de devoir défendre seule» (219). Moreover, cf. Novelli 2005: 61-62.

⁴⁹ Cf. Giordano 2006: 275.

⁵⁰ Cf. Centanni 2003: 849-850.

⁵¹ This Aeschylean neo-formation appears also in *PV* 727 and then in Eur. *Alc.* 558: cf. Citti 1994: 137-139.

⁵² With regard to Amphiaraios, who stands out from the other Argive warriors, cf. Rademaker 2005: 104; Giordano 2006: 283; Foster 2017: 151-155.

Although Eteocles still hopes for the just Amphiaraios' repentance that would discourage him from attacking the assigned port, he decides to oppose the Theban Lasthenes to him:

Sept. 620-624

Nevertheless we shall post a man against him, powerful Lasthenes, a gatekeeper hostile to intruders (ἐχθρόξενον), who has developed a mature mind but youthful flesh; his eye is swift, and in action he is not slow to seize with his spear on a spot exposed by a movement of the shield (...). [Trans. Sommerstein 2008]

By comparing the two passages given above, it is possible to highlight how the poet, despite using the same term, gives the compound word ἐχθρόξενος two different, or even diametrically opposed, values⁵³. In l. 606 the adjective negatively describes as 'hostile towards the guests' (as well as 'revilers of the gods') the companions that a fair man (Amphiaraios) surrounds himself with, causing his own ruin. In l. 621, instead, the term emphasizes a virtue of the Theban Lasthenes⁵⁴, who is not simply hostile toward foreigners, but – as already suggested by the scholiastic exegesis⁵⁵ – he is hostile toward the enemies or those who come from a foreign land to cause damage to the *polis*. Also in this case, it is not a foreigner *tout court* that Lasthenes has to fight and defeat, but the one who marches his army on the city that he has to defend. It is my contention that the double use of ἐχθρόξενος effectively shows how the Aeschylean lexicon maintains the broad semantic spectrum of the term ξένος, with the frequent co-presence of the meaning of 'guest' alongside that of 'foreigner' (and sometimes even 'enemy').

⁵³ Cf. Citti 1994: 138, who opportunely highlights the difference of the meanings of the adjective in the two different contexts: cf. Lupas-Petre 1981: 195 and 198. Conversely, Torrance 2007: 80, believes that the adjective brings Lasthenes closer to the Argive assailants detested by Amphiaraios, thus making the Theban a plausible rival for the Argive hero, given that the man indicated by Eteocles could attack the foreigner Amphiaraios and not the pious prophet. Even more different is the interpretation of the compound word given by Zeitlin 2009: 88-89: "but, as an exocentric compound, can also be divided into two parts, *echthròs xénos* (i.e., "the hostile stranger"). Thus, the defender Lasthenes, as the hostile stranger, with the traits of Oedipus, is set against his spatial double, Amphiaraios" (89).

⁵⁴ Cf. Hutchinson 1985: 141 on l. 621.

⁵⁵ Cf. *schol.* 621c, ed. Smith 1982 (ἐχθρόν τοῖς πολεμίοις) and *schol.* 620-621, ed. Smith 1982 (...ἄνδρα ἐχθρόξενον καὶ ἐχθρόν ὄντα τοῖς ἐξ ἀλλοδαπῆς ἐλθοῦσι πρὸς βλάβην ἡμῶν).

In conclusion, – albeit partial and certainly not exhaustive – the study about characters and dramatic situations in the Aeschylean theatre presents the Greek/Others polarity (in particular Greeks/Foreigners) not only in terms of a contrast/opposition with Greekness (the positive element of the pair bound to predominate over the Otherness), but also in terms of intermingling/confusion: if the Egyptian herald – definitely the most negatively non-Greek character described – is not opposed and rejected by Pelasgus for being a foreigner, but for his failure to respect civic and religious laws existing at that time in Argos; and if the Trojan Cassandra is considered the female character with a much positive connotation than the impious Clytemnestra⁵⁶; it is with the Danaids that Aeschylus provides his audience with a collective character in which Greek and foreign elements constantly co-exist, to determine a hybrid identity (both Greek and foreign at the same time) that only a neo-formation such as the oxymoronic ἀστόξευος can appropriately summarize.

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⁵⁶ Hall 1989: 211.

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