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ESTUDOS
ARTICLES

WHO IS COUNTING? APPRECIATING THE PEER, DESPISING THE OTHER.

Social relationships in Homeric
Communities from an alterity study*

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Abstract

In this work, we aim to study different scenes within the Iliad and the Odyssey in order to understand what kind of relationships appear governing connections with the “contemporaneous others”: those with whom the heroes share time and community, whether one understands this as a small-scale local group or in a broader sense as the whole group of Achaeans. We also question what sorts of formerly unrecognized groups can constitute “Others” in Homer. First, analyzing how members of the aristocratic warrior group related to each other. Secondly, focusing on the relationship between the aristocratic social group and the commoners, known as *ἄλλοι*. Throughout a detailed analysis of different episodes

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of the Iliad and the Odyssey, we show how the relationships among characters reveal a hierarchical and asymmetrical reality perfectly recognized by us, similar of that of many places in the world today.

Keywords

Homeric poems | alterity studies | asymmetry | social relationships

I - Introduction: theoretical considerations

In the world depicted in the Homeric poems,¹ the dominant identity resides in a particular group: those who are males and belong to the aristocratic warrior group.² They were the ones who took an active part in shaping Greek society, through their participation in the political body of each independent community, the assembly, as well as through their role as leaders during wartime. This participative power is what gave them the authority to shape their world and being, as those who had the power to take themselves as a universal human being paradigm.

The main goal of this paper is to study the relationships among these aristocratic men themselves, as well as relationships with those that did not belong to that dominant identity: the commoners – beggars and day laborers too. The aristocratic group³ shared with them two characteristics, namely being free males and Achaeans, though they belonged to a distinctly separate group.

To analyze these relationships, I make use of the theoretical framework developed by the Spanish philosopher G. Bello Reguera,⁴ very close to Levinas'

1 The issue about the composition of Homeric poems has been broadly discussed. A complete analysis of this question could be found in the work of I. Morris, "The use and abuse of Homer". I consider that Morris (1986) is right when he says that Homer must have been describing his own society rather than an ideal past. According to him, this society must be dated in the eight century B.C. The contrary opinion is maintained by Cartledge (2009, 32), who following mainly Myres and Snodgrass, points out that the world depicted in the Homeric poems could have never existed outside the poet's imagination.

2 See Redfield 1975, 99: "Thus heroism is for Homer a definite social task, and the heroes are a definite social stratum. [...] This is the Homeric governing class, the propertied class, and also the class on which the burden falls of maintaining the community".

3 I will avoid, as much as possible, the use of the term "class" to refer to social groups depicted in the Homeric poems. For a further reading of this topic, see, for instance, Calhoun 1934, Thalmann 1998, and Rose 2012.

4 For more information about the different kinds of temporal relationships with the "Other", see Bello Reguera

ethical thought. In his framework, there are four main concepts: symmetry/asymmetry and positive/negative. By conjugating these terms, we obtain a complex and theoretical framework which shows four possible sorts of relationship with the contemporary Other.⁵

The first one is the symmetrical-positive relationship, this is the relation between two Selves who recognize each other as equals and neither tries to dominate the Other.

The second kind of relationship is due to symmetrical but negative criteria and arises when two Selves fight in order to impose their own identity and dominate the other.

The third concept is the asymmetrical-negative relationship that occurs when a Self takes its own identity as normative and tries to impose it as the universal identity. In this sort of relationship there are usually two kinds of approaches or treatments towards the Other: in one, the Other is excluded from the dominant identity by dehumanizing it socially and politically, or in the second approach, the Other is pressured to assimilate into the main identity, by denying the Other its own.

Finally, there is the asymmetrical-positive relationship between a Self and the Other. The former, realizing the vulnerability of the Other, assumes responsibility for the Other. The last kind of relationship with the Other is what the Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas considered as the ethical approach towards the Other. According to Levinas, the relationships with the Other should be based on the responsibility of the I with the Other and not in the domination (the I over the Other).⁶ Using the work of G. Bello Reguera and E. Levinas as a theoretical framework, I study different scenes of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*⁷ to see 1) how are dominant groups related to those characterized by otherness? 2) which role did the different males in the poems play?

2011a, 62-64. A deep study about alterity could be found in Bello Reguera 2006, Bello Reguera 2011b.

5 “Contemporaneous Others” are those with whom the heroes share time and community, whether one understands this as a small-scale local group or in a broader sense as the whole group of Achaeans. This kind of Others is significantly different from the way we usually think of the Other. Namely, as an outsider, as who exists outside the group whether culturally, geographically or due to gender restrictions, etc. Given the setting of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, one may expect the foreigners to be the Others par excellence. They, of course, are. Nevertheless, analyzing the relationship with the Others as foreigners is not the aim of this article.

6 In relation to the Other in Levinas’ thought see, for instance, Levinas 1979, 1998 and 2003.

7 English translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are from Lattimore’s version, *The Iliad of Homer*, and *The Odyssey of Homer*.

It is fair to advise that the present approach is Levinasian, namely analyzing the relationships among Homeric characters using the lens of Levinas' ethical thought. Levinas proposes an ethics of the alterity, an ethic that pays attention to the relationship between human beings, face-to-face. This paper analyzes those relationships, not only among peers – thus, among members of an aristocratic warrior group –, but also among these people and their inferior ones – the commoners: beggars and day laborers.

For the Lithuanian philosopher, relations among people have always been characterized by domination. Since the beginning of the history of mankind, human beings wished to see the world and discover or learn what they did not already know. For Levinas, this human tendency hides a malicious intent: the domination of the unknown. The knowledge of the “Other” implies a negative comprehension – as domination. According to Levinas, the “I” implies a particular way of thinking that presupposes to identify everything that surrounds it, namely, to appropriate it. In this sense, we could not agree more with Rose, stating on Homer's poems that:

Our perceptions of the world are to a significant degree shaped by the literary forms we have inherited from Greece, one of the symbolic systems through which we organize our social relations. To the extent that, as anthropologists insist, we are human by virtue of our dependence on specific systems of symbolization, the study of ideology reveals the play of fundamental social conflicts in those systems, of which literature is a major one.⁸

This essay is organized into two central parts: first, the aristocratic warrior group related with each other; then the relationship between the aristocratic social group and the commoners, known as *kakoi*.

Homeric communities are divided into two main categories *kakoi* (commoners) and *kaloi* (nobles)⁹. Since Homeric society is a warring one, there are situations in which the warriors go to fight under the king's commands (or prince, if his father is too old to fight effectively, as in Achilles' situation). In

8 Rose 2012, 107. For Rose (2012, 108), upon analyzing the world portrayed in the Homeric epics, the scholar can discover “ideological constructs” behind it.

9 Both terms are illustrative of the conceptions the Homeric Greeks had of the two groups: *kaloi* means, literally, “good” and “handsome”, whereas *kakoi* means “bad”. Occasionally, aristocratic people are also called *aristoi*, or “the best”, and the commoners are referred to as *cheroi*, “inferior” (see *Od.* 15.324). The fact that the words used in the poems to refer to common people have pejorative connotations, unlike those used for the aristocratic people, is clearly indicative that the aristocratic group were the ones with the power to define, build and label. They classified those who were not part of their group as being inherently “bad” or “inferior” to themselves.

these circumstances, the hierarchy remains identical to what is established in the homeland community: each contingent has its own king as marshal, and some noble warriors subordinate to him. While the common soldiers constitute what is called *laoi*, “people”, who in the *Iliad* are depicted as a mass without real individuals (with the notable exception of Thersites), these people are defined by their relationship with the chief, who is referred to as the ‘shepherd’ or even the “driver” of the people. As Benveniste and Haubold¹⁰ have put it, *laoi* are like the cattle, which are herded and cared by a shepherd, who is, in this context, the chief.

II - Relationships among *Kaloi*

The clash between power and value.

The ideal hero must have, mainly, two essential qualities: being excellent in the battle and at the assembly.¹¹ When communities are in peace, excellence in the battlefield moved to prowess in athletic competitions. These were typical only among the nobility,¹² and they were an external symbol of high lineage.¹³ What was at stake in these competitions was fame and glory, *kleos*, something that the commoners did not have, because they were not allowed to take part in them. There are two passages in the poems in which athletic competitions are described: *Il.* 23.262-896 and *Od.* 8.98 et sq.

For participants, it was a great honor to stand out in any of the competitions and get some material prize, an external token of honor and worthy of the winner. A good proof of the importance this kind of competition had is found in two episodes: the first is in the detailed description that Homer gives of Nestor’s instructions to

10 Benveniste 1973, 371-76; Haubold 2000, 14, 47.

11 *Il.* 18.250-253, 19.216-219.

12 For instance, in *Od.* 8.159-164, the Phaiakians organize a competition in honor of Odysseus. Odysseus refuses to play, arguing that he is tired, but one of the Phaiakians accuses him of lying and says that his reason for not wanting to race is because he is a commoner, or that Odysseus does not know how to. The ability to participate in competitions is a recognizable symbol of belonging to the aristocracy.

13 As Thalmann 1998, 121 maintains, competition can take place only between equals: “only between equals can a challenge be taken up and answered in a competitive and communicative way”.

his son in order for him to win the chariot race in the funeral games in honor of Patroclus;¹⁴ the second is the serious dispute between Menelaus and Antilochus on who won the race and, therefore, deserved the award.¹⁵ In these kinds of intense competitions, the honor and reputation of each athlete was at stake, and when things were not clear about who was the winner, or if someone had cheated, the debate was fierce and some men were even willing to defend their prize fighting.

It was usual that the above-mentioned qualities – namely, being excellent on the battlefield and in the assembly, come with another one: beauty. According to Muñoz Llamosas,¹⁶ in the world depicted by Homer, beauty usually was linked to noble birth and wealth, and all the heroes were known for their physical appearance. Therefore, the disparity produced by the Trojan prince Paris is particularly noteworthy. He is described as a handsome man, but his external appearance and beauty do not fit with his worth as a warrior at all, as Paris behaves cowardly throughout the *Iliad*.¹⁷ In Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Paris intends to solve the conflict between Greeks and Trojans by fighting with Menelaus, husband of Helen and principal victim of the capture igniting the conflict between Trojans and Greeks. However, it is curious that it is precisely Paris who makes the proposal, as just verses before Homer had shown Paris retreating in the battle, until being confused with the bulk of the Trojan troops just because he had seen Menelaus.¹⁸ This gesture of Paris provokes the recriminations of his brother Hector,¹⁹ who insults Paris, addressing him as “cajoling” (*ēperopētes*), “beautiful” (*eidos ariste*) and “woman-crazy” (*gynaimanes*).²⁰ In addition, Hector also remarks that the cowardly gesture of Paris should be provoking laughter among the Achaeans, as these people must have assumed he was a hero – because of his beautiful face and lineage – but, upon seeing him stepped back, they should have thought the opposite:

Surely now the flowing-haired Achaeans laugh at us,
thinking you are our bravest champion, only because your
looks are handsome, but there is no strength in your heart, no courage.²¹

14 *Il.* 23.306-348.

15 *Il.* 23.570-610.

16 Llamosas 2002, 34.

17 *Il.* 6.350, 11.390.

18 *Il.* 3.20-35

19 *Il.* 3.38-58

20 *Il.* 3.39

21 *Il.* 3.43-45. See *Il.* 13.769.

The world of the *Iliad* links a beautiful body and face to the bravery and martial dominance, and in doing so it seems that a graceful appearance was an external symbol of the hero's own worth, to the point that Paris was somewhat disgraced as, in his case, such conception did not prove true. In contrast, nobles, and especially the main leaders, are described as having excellent physical qualities, which are closely linked to their great skills as warriors. For example, when Priam watches Agamemnon from the wall of Troy, he says about him: "these eyes have never yet looked on a man so splendid"²².

Hence, it is only necessary to take a look at any younger man's appearance to know whether or not he belongs to an aristocratic family. As Menelaus said to Telemachus and Pisistratus when both resort to him looking for news about Odysseus:

We shall ask you who among
men you are, for the stock of your parents can be no lost one,
but you are of the race of men who are kings, whom Zeus sustains,
who bear scepters; no mean men (*kakoi*) could have sons such as you are²³.

In *Iliad* 14.472 there appears something similar when Aias says that Poulydamas does not look either as a commoner or descendent of commoners:

οὐ μὲν μοι κακὸς εἶδεται οὐδὲ κακῶν ἐξ.

On the other hand, wisdom, intelligence, and eloquence do not maintain the same relationship with physical beauty that courage does. Firstly, because these mostly belong to the domain of the elderly, but are also qualities that can be commonly found in men whose appearance does not correspond to the aesthetic ideals of the Homeric world. In this regard, a passage from *Od.* 8.161-164 is significant, in which Odysseus is accused by a young Phaiakian of being a merchant, and not the nobleman who he claims to be (as he does not appear to be an athlete). With this episode, we see that despite the fact that, in the social world of Homer, beauty and grandeur usually join each other and belong to an aristocratic warrior group, there are prominent exceptions.²⁴ Indeed, as Odysseus

²² *Il.* 3.169

²³ *Od.* 4.61-64.

²⁴ As De Jong (2001, 438) has pointed out, speaking of the beggar Irus, there is a confrontation between

maintains in response to the accusations in *Od.* 8.166-179, there are cases in which a noble does not have a graceful appearance but, instead, he is gifted with eloquence and his arguments are always successful, giving him the admiration of the people. It can also occur that a handsome man is, in fact, a fool and a coward or behave as such.

Regarding hierarchy among the nobles, in the society of the poems there is a fundamental political division mainly given by birth: the one that separates a king from the rest of the nobles.²⁵ However, this sort of mixture can lead to conflict, as it is exemplified in the *Iliad* through the relationship between Agamemnon and Achilles, depicted as a clash between personal worth as a warrior (in the sense of *aristeia* “courage in the war”) and political power or status. In the Achaean camp, Agamemnon is defined as “king of kings”, the unquestioned authority to whom the other leaders are subjected. According to Rose:

What provokes Achilles’ tragedy is the gap opened by Agamemnon’s *hybris* between, on the one hand, the utopian ideal of heroic society as perfect meritocracy (e.g., 12.310-21) with democratic reciprocity under the ultimate control of the whole (male) community and, on the other, the reality of greedy exploitation by the relatively cowardly beneficiary of inherited wealth and power.²⁶

He reads the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon as a struggle between two ideologies: the meritocratic versus that which defends the authority and prestige inherited.²⁷ Hammer understood the conflict within the political field as well (since it began as a “public discussion”, which started in a public space, about how to put an end to Apollo’s wrath). However, unlike Rose, he maintains that the notion of

the outward appearance and the inner quality. She maintains that “the norm in the Homeric epics is that outward appearance and inner quality match, both positively (good-looking people are also brave and just) and negatively (a hunchback like Thersites also has bad character); but there are also mismatches, and in the *Odyssey* increasingly so”.

25 Nevertheless, occasionally, the status of a king is also achieved by a marriage. For instance, there is the case of Menelaus of Sparta, who inherited the throne from his father-in-law.

26 Rose 2012, 117.

27 Rose 2012, 132. Rose (2012, 133 n. 90) has put it that, following Williams’s interpretation of the poem, we could see “three simultaneous levels of ideology, we may say that Achilles’ backward-looking idealization of the Dark Age meritocratic social and political regime is “residual”, and that the presentation of the reality of a social order successfully dominated by Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Nestor’s *de facto* collective leadership points to the poet’s own time, whereas the protest of Thersites and the muted voice of the destroyed *laos* analyzed by Haubold, and the violation of the ‘sacred’ city emphasized by Scully illustrate a ‘structure of feeling’ that will assert itself in future class struggles”.

the best man, the one who must rule, rests on a “collective notion of leadership”.²⁸

As is well known, in the *Iliad* the main purpose of the war is to obtain spoils of war. This plunder, *geras* or “sign of honor”,²⁹ is pooled and then divided according to the established hierarchy. One of the privileges of Agamemnon as supreme leader is to receive a greater share of *geras* than the rest, apart from being the one responsible for properly allocating the rest of the spoils among other kings and nobles. The term *geras* refers to both the material plunder and honor as a warrior, since it is the outward symbol of status or rank of each individual in the social hierarchy. The poet dedicates the entirety of Book 1 of the *Iliad* to describe the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles. Achilles rebels against the situation that dishonors himself (*atimos*) by refusing to continue accumulating loot and wealth for a chief who is not a good warrior; Achilles even brands Agamemnon as a coward.³⁰ Agamemnon is also accused of abuse of power, grabbing an extra share of the loot from anyone who dares to confront him.³¹ Achilles accuses him of being a “king who feed on your people” (*dēmoboros*),³² which is a clear insult showing what a king should not do in the Homeric world.³³ Besides, Achilles adds that he does it as others are weak and will not stop him: “since you rule nonentities” (*ἐπεὶ οὐ τιδανοῖσιν ἀνάσσεις*).³⁴ In this sense, we would stress, once again, Rose’s interpretation of this episode:

(...) it is this passivity of the army over their own ultimate control of the hierarchy of power in their society that wins Achilles’ scornful characterization of them as “nobodies” who allow their king to “feed” on them.³⁵

28 Hammer 2002, 223 no. 5.

29 Benveniste 1973, 334.

30 *Il.* 1.226-229.

31 *Il.* 1.228-230.

32 *Il.* 1.231. It is found in Hes. *Op.*, 260-4 a similar critique to “gift-eating kings” so it appears a *topos* in the contemporary critique towards leaders.

33 Haubold (2000) wrote an interesting study about what a king should do and what his role in Homeric societies was. He writes a deep analysis about the relationship between the leader and the formulaic phrase “shepherd of the people”. According to Haubold, the chieftain or marshal is cast as the herdsman of *laoi*, and his glory and his failure depends on the welfare of his people. He analyzes two kinds of leaders: on the one hand, there is Agamemnon, who is portrayed in the *Iliad* as a bad leader. On the other, there Hector, who represents what it is to be a good leader, demonstrates the shared identity between *laoi* and city; defending the city is the same as defending the people who live there. The good king should act with responsibility towards their people, as I will analyze in this paper as well. Being a good king or a bad king depends on the survival of the ruled subjects.

34 *Il.* 1.231.

35 Rose 2012, 118.

In the return journey from Troy to Ithaca, Odysseus is the chief of his contingent, made up of twelve ships. During the journey, he and his men carry out several sieges, whose plunder are divided among all. In the episode of Goat Island, close to Cyclops land, Odysseus tells how they distributed the animals hunted that day. Each ship received nine goats, which were supposed to have been distributed equally among the crew, but Odysseus says: “but I alone had ten for my portion”.³⁶ These guidelines are always respected, which does not mean that problems among subordinates or situations of jealousy do not happen. An example of the former can be seen in the *Odyssey* when the main character and his companions meet up with Aeolus, Keeper of the Winds. Aeolus helped them with their voyage to Ithaca, and, being guests, gave them a friendship gift.³⁷ Odysseus received a closed bag full of the winds, and only Zephyrus, the west wind, is left free in order to help the crew to reach Ithaca’s shore³⁸. But Odysseus’ companions, when they see the coast of Ithaca, feel jealous of all that the hero brings with himself to his homeland, while they, who have suffered as he did, return home with nothing.³⁹ Eventually, dying of curiosity, they decided to open the bag, but what they found in it was not treasure, as they had anticipated, but the Winds, escaping violently from the container. In doing so, they caused the ship to go off its course and move away from Ithaca’s shore.⁴⁰

Homeric *agogē*: a symmetrical space?

In the world depicted by Homer, we find two kinds of assembly: on the one hand, the assembly of chiefs⁴¹, namely, of important aristocratic males, also known as *geroi*. The other type of assembly was for the whole group of males⁴², where both chiefs and people (*laos*) gather.⁴³

Although the king occupied the highest position in the political and social

36 *Od.* 9.160.

37 *Od.* 10.14-17.

38 *Od.* 10.19-26.

39 *Od.* 10.38-42.

40 *Od.* 10.46-49.

41 See for example, *Il.* 2.54, *Il.* 9.17;90, and *Od.* 1.273.

42 See for example, *Il.* 1.54. and *Il.* 2.88.

43 Finley (1954, 84) observes that the *laoi* could acclaim proposals or express dissent but they never made

hierarchy, actions to be carried out by the community were expected to be discussed at the assembly. Here the noblemen discuss the most important issues or the most imminent decisions. Even though the king has the final word, it appears that he must be guided by a council, especially by those who are older and more experienced. Thus, in Book 9 of the *Iliad*, the oldest of the Achaean kings who have come to Troy, Nestor of Pylos, and in the course of an assembly, asserts that a king (although he has in his hands the power of making decisions for the good of the community⁴⁴) must listen to the opinions of the others, and, where appropriate, take the best proposals.⁴⁵

The internal work of the assembly seems to be as follows: the participants stand in a circle, leaving room in the middle for the speaker. Those who wish to speak must take their turn in standing at the center,⁴⁶ where a scepter stood,⁴⁷ a symbol of power or, as Easterling maintains, a symbol of *themis*, authority⁴⁸. Each speaker grabs it during his speech and it was left on the ground after its conclusion, for the next man to wield during his own. In Vernant's interpretation, the circle symbolizes the collective and impersonal space and the scepter could be seen as representing the equal right of every man to speak.⁴⁹

Despite Vernant's reading, the Homeric assembly has actual little symmetry. It is true that aristocrats are allowed to talk and give their opinion, but it stands that not all opinions are equal; depending on what is said and to whom it is said, those who hold on to power may take steps against people who have expressed views contradictory to their own. An example of this can be found in the first assembly depicted in the *Iliad*: the seer, Kalchas, before explaining in the assembly what

proposals themselves. Aristocratic men were the only ones who had the power of speaking: "the people acclaimed or dissented as they listened, they did not themselves make proposals".

44 Nestor says: "son of Atreus, take command, since you are our kingliest" (*Il.* 9.69).

45 *Il.* 9.96-102

46 A notable exception to this rule is found in Book 19 of the *Iliad*, in the assembly in which Achilles and Agamemnon make peace. When the latter speaks, he does not stand, but speaks while sitting (*Il.* 19.76-78). Edwards (1991, 243-44) has interpreted this attitude as the last implied reproach from Agamemnon to Achilles. Agamemnon does not stand up because he is injured, so with that gesture he intends to indicate to Achilles that, while he was safe in his tent, Agamemnon was fighting for the honor of the Achaeans.

47 According to Easterling 1989, 104, "scepter" would be a bad translation for *skeptron*, and he prefers not to translate that word.

48 "The *skeptron* was used not only as a symbol (of *themis*, authority, etc.), but also as a rhetorical marker of the things being said, and we might perhaps see it as a metaphorically functioning in this way within the poem". Easterling 1989, 115.

49 Vernant 2004, 84-86.

Apollus' wrath was due to, makes Achilles swear that he – Achilles – will defend him – Kalchas – even by force, since he knows his words will cause offense to one very important Greek.⁵⁰ Kalchas further states that a king is someone who is too powerful when he gets angry with an inferior man.⁵¹ Only the protection of a warrior's strength gives the seer the security to speak his true mind. Agamemnon's response to Kalchas' words is harsh, but it could have been even worse had he not the protection of Achilles, the finest Achaean warrior⁵². This episode is pretty similar to one in Book 2 of the *Odyssey*: since the suitors do not like what is said by the seer Halitherses, one of them, Eurymachus, threatens and addresses him as a crazy old man.⁵³

Nevertheless, things change when the speaker is one of the most important nobles, who has more power and standing than the majority at the assembly. This is the case of Diomedes' intervention at the counsel in Book 9 of the *Iliad*. His speech is specifically directed against Agamemnon, but Diomedes, who knows the character of the king of kings, takes precautions in advance, remembering the purpose and legitimacy of the speeches in the assembly before exposing his point of view carefully:

Son of Atreus: I will be first to fight with your folly
as is my right, lord, in this assembly: then do not be angered.⁵⁴

His words to Agamemnon underline something discussed above: the dysfunction that exists between the rank occupied by Agamemnon – the highest of all – and his personal worth as warrior, which is not above others. Social status runs counter to or does not match with what is considered to be the highest virtue a warrior must have. Despite this accusation of cowardice towards Agamemnon, he does not respond to the accusations, and does not even answer. This lack of reaction to such accusations collides with the character of Agamemnon,⁵⁵ but Diomedes, besides being a great fighter, is also

50 *Il.* 1.76-77.

51 *Il.* 1.80: Κρείσσων γὰρ βασιλεὺς ὅτε χόσεται ἀνδρὶ χέρονι.

52 *Il.* 1.101-109.

53 *Od.* 2.178-192.

54 *Il.* 9.32-33.

55 It is necessary to remember that at the beginning of this Book, when Agamemnon summons the assembly he is "shedding tears" (*Il.* 9.14) and considers even leaving Troy and abandoning the conflict. It is understandable that, in such a psychological state, he would rather not answer a great warrior who also enjoys the approval of the majority present in the assembly.

famous for the quality of his oratory and his good judgment. When Diomedes finishes his speech, he is applauded by the other Achaeans.⁵⁶

Thus, it could be said that in the assembly prevails a kind of *magister dixit* (appeal to authority): depending on who makes an assessment, it will be considered valid or invalid by the assembly. For instance, when Agamemnon summons the elders to tell the dream that Zeus had sent to him,⁵⁷ Nestor responds that if that dream had been told by any other, he would not have believed it, but as the man who speaks “claims to be the best of the Achaians”,⁵⁸ he is worthy of being taken into account.

The strict hierarchy that dominates on the Achaean side, with Agamemnon as a supreme leader whose decisions prevail over the others, is shown at the very beginning of the *Iliad*. When Crises begs for his daughter, every Achaean approved by acclamation that the priest should be respected and his daughter returned, in exchange for a ransom.⁵⁹ But Agamemnon, against the majority, decides not only to deny hearing the request of the priest⁶⁰, but even openly scorns him. The opinion of the group is worthless against the will of its chieftain. As Finley has put it:

The assembly neither voted nor decided. Its function was twofold: to mobilize the arguments pro and con, and to show the king or field commander how sentiment lay. The sole measure of opinion was by acclamation, not infrequently in less orderly forms, like the shouting down of an unpopular presentation. The king was free to ignore the expression of sentiment and go his own way.⁶¹

There is another similar and interesting episode, in which the Trojan hero Polydamas, before telling Hector that Zeus has sent an unfavorable omen for the Trojans, clarifies:

Hektor, somehow in assembly you move ever against me
though I speak excellently, since indeed there is no good reason
for you, in your skill, to argue wrong, neither in the councils
nor in the fighting, and ever to be upholding your own cause.⁶²

56 *Il.* 9.50-51.

57 *Il.* 2.54.

58 *Il.* 2.82.

59 *Il.* 1.22-23.

60 Agamemnon's behavior is morally reprehensible, first, because it is an offense against a god, Apollo, and second, because he does not respect the elderly age of the priest who begs.

61 Finley 1954, 82.

62 *Il.* 12.211-214

Although not all speeches are taken into equal consideration, they are heard. From Polydamas' words it can be inferred that, even though he owes obedience to the king, he has the right to speak in the assembly and, although he had good judgment, Hector does not agree with the opinions he offered. In the Homeric assembly, all speeches must be heard; of course, that is, all the speeches from the males who constituted the *kaloi*.

From this, it follows that one of the most important features in a hero, besides his worth as a warrior, is his ability to speak – and do it well – in public. The importance of oratory is perfectly understandable in a society that depended almost entirely on oral communication: its literature, its laws, and its whole culture are created and transmitted orally which consequentially shapes the social and political institutions of this society. The necessity of being heard and understood through the use of language and oral expression is a vital necessity among the nobles. For this reason, the young aristocrats were trained in rhetoric⁶³ not only by listening to others speak in public but with their own instructors or teachers, as Phoenix had taught Achilles.⁶⁴ Commoners lacked such training and they were never taught how to speak in public. This is demonstrated in an episode that occurs in Book 2 of the *Iliad*: Thersites, a commoner, “a nobody from nowhere”, as Cartledge describes him⁶⁵, speaks at the assembly to criticize Agamemnon. The description of his speech represents the essence of all that Homer considered negative in a speaker.⁶⁶ He is impertinent, he yells in a reckless and disorderly way, and he is called “Thersites of the endless speech” (*ametroepēs*),⁶⁷ mocked by the poet for the length of his oratory.

63 See, for instance, the case of Thoas (*Il.* 15.283-284).

64 See *Il.* 9.434 et sq.

65 Cartledge 2009, 33.

66 *Il.* 2.211-215.

67 *Il.* 2.212.

Shame and acknowledgment

Two concepts, from our point of view, seem to shape the relationship with the contemporary Other without mattering whether it is a male or a female: shame and acknowledgment. One of the main drivers for action to Homeric heroes is *aidōs*, meaning “shame” as well as “respect”, in regard to a feeling directed outside, towards the “Others”. Dodds was the first to show that the society depicted in Homeric poems could be understood as a “shame-culture”, as opposed to a later “guilt-culture”.⁶⁸ Later, Redfield defined *aidōs* as “the most pervasive ethical emotion in Homeric society; it is basically a “responsiveness to social situations and to the judgments of others”.⁶⁹ Indeed, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* there are many episodes in which this feeling of shame towards the Other is exemplified, as when Menelaus tells his warriors:

Be men now, dear friends, and take up the heart of courage
and⁷⁰ have consideration for each other (*adeisthe*) in the strong encounters,
since more come alive when men consider each other (*aidomenōn*)
and there is no glory when they give way, nor warcraft either.⁷¹

There are also several episodes where the chieftains appeal to *aidōs* in order to inspire the warlike zeal to their people. The hero must fight in a noble manner if he does not want to suffer the disapproval of the Other that sullies his own name⁷². In *Il.* 13.122 *aidōs* is mentioned along with *nemesis*⁷³ when Poseidon encourages the Achaeans to fight. According to Redfield, *aidōs* and *nemesis* “are a reflexive pair”⁷⁴. He further defines *nemesis* as “an invasive passion that drives one to intervene in the affairs of the others”.⁷⁵ In turn, Williams understood *nemesis* as “a reaction that can

68 Dodds 1951.

69 Redfield 1975, 115.

70 The following formulaic sentence is repeated by Telamonian Aias in *Il.* 15.562-564.

71 *Il.* 5.529-532.

72 Cf. *Il.* 5.887, *Il.* 15.657-658, *Il.* 15.661-662, etc. As usual, Homer makes to the Trojan warriors feel this sense of shame. Thus, in *Il.* 6.442 Hector says he would be ashamed (*aidomai*) before the Trojans and the Trojan women if he did not act as he should and was a coward. In *Il.* 21.104-108 Hector once again says that if he failed after so many Trojans died, it would bring shame upon him.

73 According to Williams (1993, 80), *nemesis* in Homer is the reaction of someone “who has done something that shame should have prevented”.

74 Redfield 1975, 116.

75 Redfield 1975, 115.

be understood, according to the context, as ranging from shock, contempt, and malice to righteous rage and indignation”.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, *nemesis* also connects with *aidōs* since: “(*nemesis*) is a reaction, and what it psychologically consists of properly depends on what particular violation of *aidōs* it is a reaction to”.⁷⁷ In any case, both *aidōs* and *nemesis* are concepts linked to social relationships.

There are also several episodes in the *Odyssey* where the sense of shame⁷⁸ to the Other contemporary acts as a regulator of behavior and as a feeling that appeals to the responsibility towards that Other. In *Od.* 18.220-225 Penelope reprimands her son Telemachus for mistreating the guest and says: “That must be your outrage and shame (*aischos*) as people see it”.⁷⁹ Other examples include when Odysseus hopes that the gods punish the suitors for mistreating the beggars without even showing an iota of shame (*aidōs*);⁸⁰ or when Telemachus expresses the shame that he would feel (*aideomai*) if he expelled her mother from home against her will.⁸¹

The sense of shame affects not only males but also women. For instance, in *Il.* 3.410-412 Helena refuses to sleep with Paris due to the shame (*nemesētos*) she would feel if the Trojan women found out. In *Od.* 6.281-288 Nausicaa changes her behavior depending on what the other members of the community would say if they saw her committing certain actions. In *Od.* 16.73-75 Telemachus says that his mother hesitated about whether to remarry or wait for Odysseus, keeping “faith with her husband’s bed, and regard the voice of the people” (εὐνήν τ’ αἰδομένη πόσιος δῆμοιό τε φῆμιν). This idea is repeated in *Od.* 19.526-527.

The former examples show the two sides of the sense of shame, it is a feeling of embarrassment but also a sense of respect and responsibility to the Other as well. Shame has an influence on people’s behavior who conduct themselves according to norms that would meet the approval of members in their group. Therefore, it is normal for military leaders to appeal to this concept to incite the people to fight with courage, or for a mother to use it to change her grown-up son’s behavior.

76 Williams 1993, 80.

77 Ibid.

78 In the poems, “shame” sometimes is named by “αἰδώς” and other times by “αἴσχος”.

79 *Od.* 18.225.

80 *Od.* 20.169-171.

81 *Od.* 20.343-344.

As with every moral term in Homer, *aidōs* is also a social one. For this (and the following) we are indebted to Benveniste⁸², stating that within a community *aidōs* defines, for example, the sense of responsibility that those who have a superior status have towards their social inferiors. The responsibility linked to *aidōs* is also shown in the episodes in which the warriors fight in order to get the armor or the body of fallen comrades: Homeric heroes are responsible for seeking an honorable burial to the dead, or to prevent the enemy's dead from staying with their armor. As told, *aidōs* always works toward the Other of the same group, with whom an identity is shared, but there is a peculiarity: the opinion of women also can produce *aidōs* in males, as we see in Hector's speech,⁸³ as another aspect of the responsibility of the superior to those who are their inferior. Or, as Altuna has put it,

(...) the person who fails to his duty – or what he considers as such – towards the Other or towards his community, can feel two kinds of frustration: first, the guilt, linked to the inner self, and the second one, the shame, closely linked to the outside, the public aspect of transgression⁸⁴

As I have mentioned above, following Dodds, Homeric characters do not feel fault, but only shame, namely, an external feeling which connected the people with their Others. Shame appears when the offense is seen by others and it is perpetuated if witnesses who spread it to the rest of the group. The social rejection that this generates is feared more than anything by the Homeric heroes, and it is what they want to avoid by all means. In addition, it is worth bringing into focus Williams' thoughts, who says that the sense of shame in Homeric world does not only imply the fear of being seen for the Other.⁸⁵ Williams proposes an interesting exercise: let's imagine that Achilles knew that nobody would find out if, in the evening, he went to Agamemnon's tent to steal all the treasures that Agamemnon had offered him through the embassy⁸⁶ and Achilles had refused. It is obvious that, given Achilles' character, he would have preferred dying rather than doing such dishonorable act; even though there would be no consequences for him and nobody

82 Benveniste 1973.

83 *Il.* 6.441-443, 22.104-106

84 Altuna 2010, 214; my translation.

85 Williams 1993, 81-82.

86 *Il.* 9.180 et sq.

would have known. According to Williams, that happens because the person would imagine the act under consideration as an inner Other would look at him. This Other would make feel him that his act is shameful and a violation of social norms. To sum up, Homeric heroes do not consider whether an action is good or bad depending on their own point of view, but, in any action, they imagine an inner Other as witness and judge, even for acts which nobody sees.

Altuna, in her study of moral categories of the human face, speaks about the connection between shame and honor:

If the honor, the fact of having a good reputation, a good name, implies to walk tall with the head up high, the opposite, namely dishonor, bad reputation or the loss of the good name, implies to look down, unable to look the eyes of the Other.⁸⁷

As said at the beginning of this section, acknowledgment is another category on which the relationship with the contemporaneous Other is based. But what does this ‘acknowledgment’ mean? The Homeric man finds himself in the Other, he needs the the Other to recognize because it is the only way to truly know himself. As Vernant pinpointed, the Other works as a mirror in which each person recognizes himself, in the same way that the disapproval of the Other can cause a sense of shame.⁸⁸ Acknowledgment and shame are both external categories, which rely on the perception and approval of others. Sartre had seen this connection between both, writing that:

I am ashamed of what I am. (...) I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other (...) Shame is shame of oneself before the Other; these two structures are inseparable. (...) Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me.⁸⁹

Homeric heroes seek this recognition both through their heroic deeds – told by the aedos – as well as through the collection of wealth, which are just the external symbol of their success as warriors, and guarantee them the respect of others in their communities.

In this sense, acknowledgment could be also understood as “public honor

⁸⁷ Altuna 2010, 214; my translation.

⁸⁸ Vernant 1989, 118-19.

⁸⁹ Sartre 1943, 301-2.

for the living hero”, as *time*.⁹⁰ It is the lack of acknowledgment from Achilles’ companions (especially, Agamemnon) that makes him, the best of the Achaeans, refuse to continue fighting in the war. Acknowledgment by others is necessary for a hero in order to keep his fame and in order for this fame to be sung by the aedos, which makes him immortal.⁹¹ Thus, in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, the hero, even though his comrades insist that he should not be provocative to the cyclops, does not hesitate to affirm his identity to Polyphemus, and he does that, precisely, in order for his feat to be remembered for posterity:

Cyclops, if any mortal man even asks you who it was
that inflicted upon your eye this shameful blinding,
tell him that you were blinded by Odysseus, sacker of cities.
Laertes is his father, and he makes his home in Ithaka.⁹²

If he had not identified himself, his deed would not have been associated with his legacy, it would have fallen into oblivion, and that means death.

To sum up, acknowledgment appears through the prizes of war or the memories their deeds cement in their reputations and legacies. Still, it depends on the Other. At the same time, acknowledgment is also useful for the hero in order to know who he is: by what the Others say about him, he can recognize himself. The former is explained by Redfield:

Nor can the two kinds of reward be set in the simple contrast of the social versus the material: the prize itself may have *kleos* and confer a *kleos*, and a man is famous both for what he is and for what he has.⁹³

90 Rose 2012, 121.

91 “The hero is between god and man. Men die, while the gods live forever: the hero, however, does both. After death he is immortal in two different senses: immortal in cult and immortal in song. He receives *time*, cultic observance, and *kleos*, the fame of those whose stories are told by the bards”, Redfield’s foreword to Nagy 1979, x.

92 *Od.* 9.502-505.

93 Redfield 1975, 33.

III - The relationships with *kakoi* and their role in Homeric communities

There are other groups of males who also lived within communities but, because of their birth, did not belong to the dominant aristocratic warrior group. These are free men, but they do not have the right to speak at the assembly. In war times, they belonged to *laoi*, who are also excluded from making decisions and are suppressed by the authority of the *kaloi*. The one attempt to break the rule, the above-mentioned case of Thersites in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, ends with an injured and publicly ridiculed commoner.⁹⁴

As the Homeric poems center on heroic deeds, the portrait of the *kakoi* is slanted and incomplete, because they are only mentioned as long as they take part in the life of the noblemen. An interesting passage describing the lives of commoners is found in Book 15 of the *Odyssey*. The hero, dressed up as a beggar, says to Eumaeus that he is good at rekindling the fire, burning wood, grilling and carving the meat, pouring, etc. and concludes: “for all such work as meaner men (*chērēes*) bestow on their betters.”⁹⁵

Physical appearance and how a man dressed were distinguishing marks that separated commoners from nobles. Only the wealthy could afford to wear luxurious clothes, which were highly valued and often exchanged as gifts. There was a kind of linen cloak called a *pharos*, used only by the aristocratic group. For instance, Agamemnon wears such a cloak in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, it is mentioned amongst the treasures that King Priam collects for the ransom of Hector’s corpse, and is present among the guest-friendship gifts.⁹⁶ But, above all, the physique of *kakoi* is described in Homer in opposition to that of the *kaloi* one, so if the latter look beautiful, *kakoi* are described as the opposite. As Zanker maintains,

(...) the Greeks tended to dismiss the unpopular, the marginalized, and the dissident as physically defective and ugly. [...] For the Greeks, this kind of ridicule was from the very

⁹⁴ See, for example, Cartledge 2009, 34-36.

⁹⁵ *Od.* 15.324.

⁹⁶ *Il.* 2.41-44, 24.231, 24.277.

beginning a form of social discrimination and moral condemnation, for in the ideology of *kalokagathia* a man's virtues and his noble heritage were expressed in the physical perfection of his body.⁹⁷

A clear example of this is depicted in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, in which Thersites begins to speak at the assembly to criticize the main chieftain, Agamemnon. Homer depicted Thersites in this way:

This was the ugliest man who came beneath Ilion. He was bandy-legged and went lame of one foot, with shoulder stooped and drawn together over this chest, and above this his skull went up to a point with the wool grown sparsely upon it.⁹⁸

Some lines above, as noted, he had been called, *ametroepēs*, and several times it is said that he shouts. In short, Thersites is the antithesis of a Homeric hero.

Nevertheless, the most characteristic feature used in the poems to distinguish between *kaloi* and *kakoi* is a man's value in battle. Only aristocratic group were taught to be eloquent – hence, they are the ones with the right to speak in assembly –, and likewise, only they receive individual training as warriors. In Iliadic war scenes, *kakoi* always appear fighting in a group, never in a hand to hand combat, and unlike the aristocratic warrior, no man ever stands out as the result of an individual deed⁹⁹.

To sum up, noblemen in the poems consider themselves to be the best, first because of their birth, and second, because of their great deeds. Therefore, according to their way of thinking, they should not treat as an equal someone whom they consider being worst, by birth or measured in deeds. An example of the former is found in a battle scene in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, when Odysseus changes his words and tone of voice depending on to whom he speaks; as he expresses which kind of behavior is expected from each group:

Whenever he [Odysseus] encountered some king, or man of influence he would stand beside him and with soft words try to restrain him:
“Excellency! It does not become you to be frightened like any

97 Zanker 1995, 32.

98 *Il.* 2.216-219

99 Yet, that does not mean that “cowardice” is a trait belonging to only *kakoi*, as we can see in *Il.* 8.80, when Odysseus runs away without helping Nestor or in the several episodes where Paris is accused of being, precisely, a coward (for instance, *Il.* 3.43-45, *Il.* 6.350, *Il.* 11.390).

coward. Rather hold fast and check the rest of the people.
 You do not yet clearly understand the purpose of Atrides.
 Now he makes trial, but soon will bear hard on the sons of the Achaians.
 Did we not all hear what he was saying in the council?
 May he not in anger do some harm to the sons of the Achaians!
 For the anger of god-supported kings is a big matter,
 to whom honor and love are given from Zeus of the counsels.”
 When he saw some man of the people who was shouting,
 “Excellency! Sit still and listen to what others tell you,
 to those who are better men than you, you skulker and coward
 and thing of no account whatever in battle or council.
 Surely not all of us Achaians can be as king here.
 Lordship for many is no good thing. Let there be one ruler,
 one king, to whom the son of devious-devising Kronos
 gives the scepter and right of judgment, to watch over his people.”¹⁰⁰

Odysseus’ speech shows how *kakoi* are depicted as cowardly and inexperienced in warfare. In addition, he says that their opinions are not taken into account either in battle or assembly, but they must obey the king’s commands. At the same time, Odysseus treats these people with contempt, in a way very different from how he treats his peers.

Commoners, as free Achaean males, had the right to attend assembly – except for those only attended by the elderly and kings, as abovementioned –, but they could not directly participate by speaking. According to Finley¹⁰¹, as I have already mentioned, the people only could express their opinions by shouting, showing their agreement or disapproval of a particular proposal.

We recall again Thersites’ episode in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, as the single case of a commoner addressed by his name when taking part in the assembly. The episode also shows what kind of relationship existed between the aristocratic warrior group and their “contemporary Others”, with whom they shared the same social space,¹⁰² in this occasion represented by those males who were not their equals (because they belonged to the lower strata of society) but they were free males – not slaves.

100 *Il.* 2.188-206.

101 Finley 1954, 82.

102 Social space is the place where social groups develop and coexist within the same community or society. These groups differ from each other according to the role that they play in that community – using Bordieu’s (1989) point of view.

In this scene, the Achaeans convene an assembly at the initiative of Agamemnon, who wishes to hear the beliefs of his people. Before the misguided Thersites' intervention, Homer had already said about him:

Thersites of the endless speech, [...] who knew within his head many words, but disorderly; vain, and without decency, to quarrel with the princes with any word he thought might be amusing to the Argives.¹⁰³

In his speech, Thersites insults and criticizes the chiefs, mainly Agamemnon, and is silenced by Odysseus who calls him *akritomythos*,¹⁰⁴ and his speech is described as “ill-considered”. Odysseus also says that “there is no worse man” than Thersites, while threatening to undress, beat the man and take him to the ships.¹⁰⁵ In fact, Odysseus finishes his speech beating Thersites' back with a scepter until he bleeds.¹⁰⁶ Eventually, Thersites leaves, crying and injured, making the other Achaeans laugh at his plight.¹⁰⁷

It is clear this reaction towards Thersites would not have happened if it had been a noble who had spoken at assembly instead. The society depicted in the poems not only was stratified, it was static. Thus the fact that a commoner dared to cross the border among strata meant he must face the consequences; often in the form of hostile acts – physically or verbally – towards this inferior Other. Rose has interpreted both episodes, namely Odysseus' and Thersites', as a token of the incipient class struggle in the poem – unlike other scholars who tend to see these episodes as conflicts among people from different social strata, pinpointing:

If a major theme of the *Iliad* is a nostalgic evocation of the passing of the meritocratic, egalitarian political structure of the earlier Dark Age, this brutal silence of a man of the demos [Thersites] functions for some of the audience as a marker of how much has changed.¹⁰⁸

103 *Il.* 2.212-215.

104 *Il.* 2.246.

105 *Il.* 2.248, 2.261-264.

106 This scene shows that Thersites had not even grabbed the scepter, the “magic wand,” in Finley's (1954, 82) words, that allows men to take part into the assembly.

107 *Il.* 2.265-270, 2.273-277.

108 Rose 2012, 119, no. 65. Rose also further studies in an essay (Rose 1988) the classical approaches to Thersites episode – namely, empiricist, “purely” literary, analyst and neoanalyst and ideological.

Another group inside the *kekoi* is the *thētes*, “day laborers”. There are only a few cases in the poems¹⁰⁹ where they are mentioned directly, as happens with all the groups that make up the *kekoi*. It seems that *thētes* were free men; not being property owners, they had no choice but to work for noblemen¹¹⁰ in exchange for a salary, as the verb *thētenō* (“to be paid by the day”) shows. In the Homeric poems, *thētes* are depicted as one of the lowest groups in the Achaean community and, therefore, have fewer rights than most others. Considering the importance of having property and family links to the construction of the collective identity in the world depicted by Homer¹¹¹, a *thēs*, not owning any fortune that connects him to a particular place, is completely disassociated and without social bonds on which rely. As Finley indicates:

The authoritarian household, the *oikos*, was the center around which life was organized. (...) The *oikos* was not merely the family, it was all the people of the household and its goods. (...) Just what it means, in terms of customary or legal obligation and in a man’s own family life, to be a permanent but free member of the *oikos* of another is by no means clear. Negatively it meant considerable loss of freedom of choice and of mobility. They were retainers (*therapontes*), exchanging their service for a proper place in the basic social unit, the household. (...) A *thes* in Ithaca might even have been an Ithacan, not an outsider. But he was no part of an *oikos*, and in this respect, even the slave was better off”¹¹²

In the *Iliad* there is a great meaningful episode about *thētes* position. Even though it is described in Trojan territory and in a past time, we could infer that it is representative of the vulnerable *thētes* position. In *Il.* 21.442-457 it is said that the gods Apollo and Poseidon – disguised as men – had to work as day laborers for Priam’s father, Laomedon. When they finished their job, which lasted a year,¹¹³ Laomedon not

109 See *Il.* 21.444, *Od.* 4.644, *Od.* 11.498 & *Od.* 18.354.

110 As inferred from *Il.* 21.445-450, the jobs that they did were linked to the world of construction and agriculture, i.e., with tasks that required great physical effort.

111 As Vernant (2004, 88; my translation) has put it, Homeric characters are identified through social categories: “When he [Odysseus] says: “I am Odysseus, Laertes is my father, and I make my home in Ithaca” he places himself, according to the customary use, within all relationships that define him, and therefore, all social values that he embodies”. Therefore, the features that define the basic identity in Homer are (besides the gender) the community to which each one belongs by birth, which identifies that person as Achaean or not Achaean, and the family (marked by the father), which define him as noble or commoner. Besides, the dominant identity in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is formed by an Achaean aristocratic warrior group, whose superiority is given to them by the fact that they are the only ones who have the right to make decisions at assembly (always on their own land, as outside it they turn into outsiders), and to exercise leadership in the war. In addition, they own material possessions that ratify and symbolize their position in the community.

112 Finley 1954, 54-55.

113 cf. *Il.* 21.444.

only refused to pay them, but also chased them out of their properties:

For he threatened to hobble our feet and to bind our arms,
to carry us away for slaves in the far-lying islands.
He was even going to strip with the bronze the ears from both of us.¹¹⁴

According to this episode, it seems that the salary of the day labors was guaranteed by no one, and they had to trust the good intentions of whoever hired them, and that the agreement would be honored.

In the *Odyssey* there is another significant episode when Eurymachos – one of Penelope’s suitors – makes the following “job” offer to Odysseus (disguised as a beggar):

Stranger, if I were to take you up, would you be willing
to work for me (*thēteuemen*) on my outer estate – I would give you adequate
pay (*μισθὸς δέ τοι ἄρμιος ἔσται*) – assembling stones for fences, and growing the tall trees?
There I would provide you with an allowance of victuals,
and give you shoes to wear on your feet, and clothing to put on.¹¹⁵

Eurymachos’ speech makes the other suitors laugh out loud.¹¹⁶ According to Finley¹¹⁷, that is why Eurymachos’ words are a mockery towards the beggar: there is no such guarantee for a *thēs* about his salary. Eurymachos, by saying “you can be sure of pay”, is pulling the beggar’s leg, as “no *thēs* could be sure”. Laomedon’s episode offers support for this point. Denying a *thēs*’ salary must have happened fairly often and the day labors could not do anything meaningful about it.

On the other hand, Vidal-Naquet reads this episode in a different way.¹¹⁸ According to him, Eurymachos’ proposal means that, in the world depicted by Homer, working as a *thēs* is better than begging. Finley compares the *thēs*’ job¹¹⁹ with the role of a slave, while Vidal-Naquet does it with the beggar. Regardless, the three mentioned groups – day labors, beggars, and slaves – were subject to the aristocratic

114 *Il.* 21.453-455.

115 *Od.* 18.357-361.

116 *Od.* 18.350.

117 Finley 1954, 53.

118 Vidal-Naquet 2000, 123-36.

119 Finley (1954, 54) considers that *thēs* is the lowest member of the social hierarchy, and he uses the episode of *Od.* 11.489-492 to support this thesis.

warrior group, and together constituted a vulnerable and marginalized group.

Another episode allowing us to see the conditions of the day laborers is founded in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, when Homer turns his attention to the well-known voyage of the hero to the land of the dead. Achilles' ghost tells Odysseus that he prefers working as a day laborer to another man, even if that man is a poor one without lands – which implies that his salary would be quite low or even nonexistent – than being the King of the land of the dead.¹²⁰ His point is that it is better to belong to the lowest stratum of the society than residing in the land of the death. Eventually, in Book 17 of this poem, it is said that the fate of a *thētes*, once he gets too old, is to become a beggar, as his lack of strength makes it impossible to continue working. Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, says to Telemachus:

A beggar is better begging his dinner in the city
than in the country. Whoever wants to will give me something;
for I am no longer the right age to stay on the farms, the right age
to carry out any task the foreman imposes on me.¹²¹

The third group of free men who had few or no rights within Homeric communities was formed by the beggars, *ptōkboi*.¹²² In the poems, it appears there are two kinds of mendicancy. First, there is a kind of begging which is directly linked to being an outsider. These beggars were men who were born free (some even belonging to an aristocratic family) but were forced to leave their community and eventually turned into beggars, wandering from place to place supporting themselves seeking support. The other kind of beggar maintained a fixed residence in a particular community, where their presence was tolerated. This second kind of mendicancy appears in the *Odyssey*: he is Iros, a beggar of Ithaca, about whom Homer says he was *pandēmios*,¹²³ who lives in Ithaca. Homer does not specify the circumstances that turned Iros into a beggar, but the poet does say that he gets alms and sometimes runs errands in exchange for money – hence, his nickname is

120 *Od.* 11.489-492.

121 *Od.* 17.18-21.

122 It is worth mentioning that the Greek noun *πτῶχος* is semantically related to the verb *πτήσω*, particularly in its passive sense of “get scared, be terrified” and to *πτόσω*, “run away, seeking refuge, dodge”, see Chantraine (1984), *s.v.* *πτήσω*. The beggar is a frightened person, who must seek refuge, and thus becomes miserable and dependent on the charity of others.

123 *Od.* 18.1.

“Iros”, which comes from Iris, the messenger of the gods. Homer describes Iros in a negative way, as a person without strength¹²⁴ despite his body, which was quite big and says that he was

known to fame for his ravenous belly
and appetite for eating and drinking.¹²⁵

With the arrival of a foreign beggar to the palace (Odysseus in disguise), Iros feels threatened by the possibility of having to share alms with the newcomer, which is why Iros insults Odysseus and even wants to fight against him, so the winner will get the status of “(official) beggar of the palace”.¹²⁶ What I would like to highlight in this episode is that Iros does not feel any kind of emphatic feeling towards Odysseus, who is supposedly an older beggar and, therefore, even more vulnerable than himself. Instead, he gloats about the Other’s misfortune – *Schadenfreude* – (even if it is a misfortune that he himself shares).

Beggars, as well as guests, were considered to be protected by Zeus. It is shown, for instance, in a phrase said by the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa, first, and then by Eumaeus:

all strangers and wanderers (or vagabonds)
are sacred in the sight of Zeus¹²⁷

This aphorism could be understood as an expression of the ideal behavior towards beggars and foreign people – one of the most vulnerable groups – that Homer wants to transmit to his audience as part of the “tribal encyclopedia”, using Havelock’s terminology.¹²⁸ What is considered proper behavior and sanctioned by the gods is to maintain an asymmetrical but positive relationship with the beggar, showing a responsible behavior towards him, and bearing some responsibility to feed and clothe them. In addition, there is an episode which portrays how a wealthier man should behave towards a beggar in Book 14 of *Odyssey*. In this

124 *Od.* 18.3-4.

125 *Od.* 18.2-3.

126 *Od.* 18.36-39.

127 *Od.* 6.207-208 & 14.57-58

128 Havelock 1963.

passage, Eumaeus takes into his shelter a beggar¹²⁹ – without knowing that it is Odysseus yet –, he sacrifices the best of his pigs, prays for a safe return for the man to his homeland, and gives him the best pieces of meat, which causes Odysseus to offer his thanks:

I wish, Eumaios, you could be as dear to our father
Zeus as to me, when I am so poor, but you grace me with good things.¹³⁰

Eumaeus also prepares for him a fur bed to keep him warm during the night, and the next day he walks with the beggar to the palace, giving him good pieces of advice along the way as well.

On the other hand, when one of Penelope's female slaves, Melantho, speaks with Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, she says to him that he is mad if he wants to spend the night inside the palace instead of going to the blacksmith's or to the public refuge. From these words, it could be deducted that beggars used a blacksmith's forge to keep warm, and there was also some kind of building (*lesche*) in the towns to shelter wandering people, which shows a social concern about these people.

However, although the ideal behavior towards beggars is described above, the relations and treatment to them in the poem are not always proper. An example of the former is shown in the episodes where the poet features both Penelope's suitors and those who are on their side in the palace in a very negative way, showing how their behavior is evil and impious towards the vulnerable Other. At the same time, Homer is teaching his audience what they should not do. For instance, Melantho, who is on the suitor's side, calls Odysseus a "wretched stranger"¹³¹ and warns him to be careful, as someone stronger could beat him, a not so subtle threat. This conversation allows us to see the plight of beggars and the helplessness to which they were exposed if they could not count on the good will of more prosperous people¹³². Thus, Dolios – goatherd of Odysseus, who is presented by the poet in very negative ways as well – also insults the beggar, calling him "bothersome",

129 It is worth remembering that the swineherd is Odysseus' slave.

130 *Od.* 14.440-441.

131 *Od.* 18.327.

132 *Od.* 18.328-336.

among other insults, and he even mistreats him physically, kicking Odysseus' hip.¹³³ Lastly, the vulnerability of the beggars is shown as well when Eumaeus advises Odysseus not to stay alone outside the palace

or someone here outside, seeing you
might strike you, or throw something.¹³⁴

As mentioned above, in all these examples the beggar is mistreated by a person of a higher social station, although it is also made clear that such behavior is considered improper. Their conduct is, in fact, one of the features that the poet uses to portray them as despicable people.

The last books of the *Odyssey* acquire a dramatic tone when Odysseus is in his palace and the suitors are devouring his property, taking advantage of his slaves¹³⁵ and courting his wife. Throughout the poem, Homer has highlighted the impropriety and shameless attitude of the suitors, portraying Odysseus as the hero. But the action that Odysseus will carry out as his revenge is so brutal¹³⁶ that the poet needs to give him even more reasons for it. His intention is to create such an atmosphere of hatred that the audience wishes the deaths of all the suitors and supports Odysseus violent retribution.¹³⁷ To achieve this, the poet plays one last trick: he simply turns Odysseus into a beggar seeking charity in the palace. The actions that the suitors commit against the beggar contribute to increasing

133 *Od.* 17.217-233.

134 *Od.* 17.278-279.

135 It does not matter whether they express consent or not. Female slavers (and males too) are the property of their owner, and must sleep with him or whomever he allows. For further information about slavery in Homer societies, see for instance: Austin and Vidal-Naquet 1977, Finley 1980, Graziosi and Haubold 2008, 95-119; Henry 2011, 14-33; Harris 2012.

136 The group of suitors is formed by young aristocrats from Ithaca and surrounding islands (Same, Dulichium and Zante). After Odysseus murders them their parents will be expected to take an active part in the assembly and will cry for revenge, forcing the expatriation of the murderer. Odysseus, who is perfectly aware of this, tells his son after killing the suitors: "For when one has killed only one man in a community, / and then there are not many avengers to follow, even / so, he flees into exile, leaving kinsmen and country. / But we have killed what held the city together, the finest / young men in Ithaka" (*Od.* 223, 118-122).

137 One of the worst crimes within Homeric communities is to kill anyone who belongs to the same community. The punishment was also the worst: exile. Common law established that the victim's family had the right to take revenge on the murderer or to demand a compensatory payment – agreed between both sides –, which avoided the persecution and exile of the murderer. However, the injured family could refuse to accept the payment, and sometimes the murderer could not afford the payment. In such a case, the criminal left his home, trying to escape from the possibility of violent revenge. In the event that the victim and the murderer belonged to the same family, there was no such financial arrangement, and the murderer had no alternative but exile. In the poems, these exiles are termed *metanastês*, meaning "migrated". For further information about the role of the *metanastês* in the poems, see Alden 2012, 115-31.

Odysseus' reasons to kill them and reveal their despicable nature. Beggars are protected by Zeus, and therefore the suitors do not respect the gods. These actions are demonstrated by Antinous, the leader of the group, who does not give him even a crust of bread when they are eating in the palace, whereas the other suitors do.¹³⁸ It not only shows Antinous not giving any charity to the needy but also that he does not hesitate to insult the poor – calling Odysseus a “pain”, a “shameless beggar”,¹³⁹ and bullies him.¹⁴⁰ Given the cruelty and shameful acts of Antinous, even his own comrades reprimand him for his attitude, saying that it is wrong to mistreat foreigners, especially when they are starving.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the reasons to reprehend Antinous are neither solidarity nor empathy towards the vulnerable, but fear of retribution, as they fear that the beggar could be a disguised god.¹⁴² It is Penelope who shows that the suitors' treatment of the beggar is reprehensible itself, in a speech which I have already mentioned above, and she scolds her son due to his passivity when confronted with the suitors' treatment of the stranger.¹⁴³ The beggar is under protection at Telemachus' home, as he has gone to him as a supplicant in need of help. The fact that the owner of the house allows his guest to be mistreated can bring shame to his family. Throughout the Homeric poems, the criticism of peers appears several times in the poems as a way to regulate behavior.¹⁴⁴

138 *Od.* 17.411.

139 *Od.* 17.447-450.

140 *Od.* 17.462-463.

141 *Od.* 17.473-474.

142 *Od.* 17.485-487. Kapuscinski 2005, 9. states that “People thus had three choices when they encountered the Other: they could choose war, they could build a wall around themselves, or they could enter into dialogue”. The philosopher associates this last choice with societies that held anthropomorphic beliefs, as was the Greek one: “Then, you could never tell whether the approaching wanderer, traveler, or newcomer was a person, or a god in human guise. That uncertainty, that fascinating ambivalence, was one of the roots of the culture of hospitality that mandated showing all kindness to the newcomer, that ultimately unknowable being”.

143 *Od.* 18.221-225.

144 As told before, one of the most important regulators of behavior was the concern with reputation. People sought to do what they thought would give them a good reputation. Sometimes the opinion of the gods is also taken into account, but this notion largely exists in the background. Often the characters commit evil actions even suspecting (by omens or predictions) or knowing that that action is something the gods oppose.

IV - Conclusions

Nothing after the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* so profoundly imposed itself on the consciousness of the Greeks¹⁴⁵.

Throughout this paper, i have studied the relationships amongst men in the world depicted in the Homeric poems: 1) the aristocratic warrior group (noblemen who belonged to the Achaean group and shared a temporal space) and 2) free males who belong to the lower strata of the communities (*kakoi*, or commoners, *thētes*, or day labors, and *ptōkhoi*, or beggars).

At the beginning, i studied what sort of relationship the aristocratic warrior group had amongst themselves, as shown at the assembly. That is the place where each member of the group had the right to give their own opinion. However, we had the opportunity to observe that hierarchy also prevailed there. The king, or if he does not attend, the highest authority in the group, can do what he wished, without taking into serious account the other nobles' opinions. So his decisions turn into commands, which can be a source of conflict sometimes.¹⁴⁶

To frame my analysis, as told above, i made use of the typology of the alterity of the Spanish philosopher, Gabriel Bello Reguera, who builds a theoretical framework to show the different kinds of relationships between identity and alterity, and the ethical thought of Levinas. In this sense, the relationship that the Achaean nobles maintain among themselves could be understood as a symmetrical and positive one, since they recognize themselves as equals, and – as a general rule – there is no inclination towards domination. Nevertheless, the king or chieftain maintains with the others a relationship, which is sometimes asymmetric and can even be considered as negative, when he is opposed to the majority opinion and imposes his one. Despite the fact that the Achaean warrior group recognize each other as equals, due to their shared status acquired by lineage, the relationships among themselves are not always symmetrical. Social hierarchy is also shown among upper-class members, as there is a king or marshal in every community who can

145 Rose 2012, 112, n. 50.

146 Cf. for instance, *Il.* 1.22-24.

impose his opinion (whether at assemblies, during peacetime, or during times of war. These relationships are not always cordial, mainly due to the clash between value and status. An example of this conflict is the one between Agamemnon and Achilles, which could be read as a symmetrical but negative relationship, if it is understood as the clash of two dominant identities (the one that defends the hierarchy, and the other that challenges it) with each trying to impose their own way of thinking on the other. Therefore, in the *Iliad*, the main conflicts among members of the aristocratic warrior group have to do with the distribution of prizes of war. I have already mentioned that *geras* is the external symbol of the honor of each man, but these “gifts of honor”, rather than being shared according to the personal worth of each man, are shared according to the status that they hold in the hierarchy. However, when status and a warrior’s worth do not go hand in hand, the superiority of those who are the best in the battle do not think they are sufficiently rewarded.

Apart from these conflicts based on the desire of acknowledgment, something to be expected from a group formed by men who do not have all the same power or status, there is another kind of relationship based on the sense of shame (*aidōs*) and respect among Homeric warrior group, which is also extendable to other members of society¹⁴⁷. Warriors must feel *aidōs* in order to obtain the glory and, at the same time, to avoid blame and criticism in the look of the “Other”. Heroes seek to be recognized as heroes, so that their deeds and their name will not be forgotten, as in the Homeric world “oblivion” meant “death”.¹⁴⁸ Vernant sums up the main and final purpose in the relationship between the hero and the Others of their same community:

In a culture like that of ancient Greece, where everyone exists in function of the other, through the eyes and look at others, the real and only death is the oblivion, the silence, the dark unworthiness. To exist, whether living or dead, is to be recognized, dear, honored; it is, above all, be glorified, be the subject of a word of praise, becoming *aoidimos*, to be worthy of a song. The hero [...] inscribed in the social collective memory his reality of individual subject expressed in a biography that death [...] turns into unchanging. The structural

147 As I have already mentioned, shame is not only a male attribute.

148 It is interesting to mention that even in cases in which Homer presents to the heroes fighting to recover the armor of a companion, or episodes in which the chieftains appeal to *aidōs* to arouse bravery amongst their warriors, in which it might be seen that there is some kind of altruistic feeling and the Other is considered as an equal, there is a strong underlying sense of individualism. This individualism is propagated by the need for one’s actions survive the man himself and form a legacy.

relationships among the excellence, the short life, the beautiful death, and glory are not understood but in the context of an oral poetry; poetry that celebrate the deed of past men [...] and doing so constitute the collective past in which a community is recognized itself and find its roots in the continuity and permanence of values.¹⁴⁹

The relationships between the aristocratic warrior group and the members of the lowest strata of society were, not surprisingly, asymmetric and negative. It is worth remembering that the nouns themselves used to refer to common people implied this kind of relationship. Homeric nobles, as the holders of power, also had the power to draw the boundaries within their own society, which is reflected in the labels they used to designate the members of the lower strata of communities, who are called in Greek *kakoi* (originally “bad”) and *cheirones* (literally “the worst”). Language is not neutral, and according to Hartog¹⁵⁰:

Ever since the narrative of Genesis it has been clear that naming involves a degree of mastery. By naming God’s creatures, Adam proclaims his preeminence over them. [...] Giving names or knowing names thus implies a measure of power. A name is always more than the mere sound of it.¹⁵¹

On the other hand, we saw that Homeric nobles described themselves as *kaloi* (“good” and “handsome”) and *aristoi* (“the best”). Besides, the *aristeia* is transmitted by birth, and because of that the difference among groups was considered natural, which implies the impossibility of an ascendant move from the lower strata to the upper one (whereas the descendant move was possible, as in the case of an outcast, for instance).

Associated with this was the conception that physical ugliness and immorality defined commoners, while physical beauty and moral goodness attributes of the upper classes. It is interesting to point out that this relationship between internal and external features has been maintained throughout the history of Western thought¹⁵² (in ancient Greek culture, its culmination was reached in Classical Greece with the

149 Vernant 1989, 53; my translation.

150 Hartog 1988, 242.

151 Vernant 1989, 53; my translation.

152 For a deeper study about the relationship between the external features of the body and the inner self, see Wright 2013, 47-78.

ideal of *kalos kai agathos*¹⁵³). An example of internal and external features being thought of as influencing each other comes from the 16th-century Italian architect Giacomo della Porta:

There is an old axiom that all who have written on Physiognomy: the willingness of the members of the body shows the willingness of the character. On the other hand, there is also a saying that is often used: Monster in body, soul of monster. Beauty, therefore, is the perfect and proportioned of members of the body, and that physical beauty is itself a reflection of the moral beauty.¹⁵⁴

Homer's description of Thersites and his behavior fits in this perception of "the worst" as the most unpleasant to look and to listen. Moral turpitude is manifested (and recognizable) in the face of the Others as a sort of Dorian Gray syndrome. In Homeric poems, the moral turpitude of certain individuals is translated into easily identifiable external symbols, which are also suggested by the words *cheirones* and *kakoi* with which they are described.

On the other hand, I have also shown that sometimes there are exceptions, in the sense that physical beauty is not accompanied by value or eloquence, and, conversely, that an ugly man can be admired for his rhetorical skills and good judgment.¹⁵⁵ However, it is worth noting that in the world depicted in the poems there is no bond between moral turpitude/ugly appearance and the enemy: every warrior, irrespective of the side they are, are equally beautiful (see, for example, the case of Paris¹⁵⁶) and potentially capable of excellence (for example, Hector). That is why all the warriors belong to the aristocratic family and, therefore, are members of the aristocratic warrior group, even though they are not Achaeans. In neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* appears what Altuna termed the "demonization of the enemy".¹⁵⁷

153 It is interesting Altuna's reading (2010, 162-67) of the problem of Socrates, in which Socrates is portrayed as an exception to *kalos kai agathos*: he is physically ugly but one of the most virtuous and men all time. The symmetry among beauty, objectivity, rationality and order was annulled in the person of Socrates.

154 Giovanni Battista della Porta, *Fisiognomia II*, 119, apud Altuna 2010, 168 (my translation).

155 cf., for instance, *Od.* 8.166-179.

156 As aforementioned, Paris is shown as a discrepancy: he does not have the moral values or courage which a beautiful man should posse (according to Homeric imaginary).

157 The demonization of the enemy is to mock him by exaggerating some feature of their physical appearance. According to Altuna (2010, 170; my translation), this is "deforming and drawing him ugly, to mock or denounce their moral defects through their physical ones".

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OBJECTIVOS E ÂMBITO

AIMS AND SCOPE

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