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'Concealment of What is Closed': Western Necrocivilization in David Greig's Version of Aeschylus's *The Suppliant Women*

UK crises of hospitality, feminism, and democracy are as acute as ever despite ostensible commitment to the values that foster them. This article examines David Greig's 2016 Edinburgh version of Aeschylus's *Suppliants* as it attempts to expand spaces of democracy into the theatre, and investigates the foundations of democratic institutions. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's formulation of necropolitics and Elaine Scarry's theorization of civilization, it highlights necrocivilizational elements in the production's premise and reception. It argues that Greig's presentation of Aeschylus's play presents a more complex engagement with western democracy, asylum, theatre, and civilization than commentators have acknowledged. Rather than primarily opening up new spaces of negotiation among asylum-seekers and citizens in the community, *The Suppliant Women* foregrounds the exclusionary discursive tactics operating under the auspices of civilization that leave the logics underpinning the UK's asylum policy largely untroubled. Sarah Stewart is an independent researcher whose work centres on the relationships forged between asylum-seekers, members of the theatre establishment, and citizen communities within and beyond the performance space. She holds a PhD in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh.

Key terms: asylum-seekers, refugee theatre, democracy, citizenship, community theatre, integration.

IN MARCH 2021, the UK Home Office published its 'New Plan for Immigration', proposing significant advances to a long-standing practice of limiting asylum-seekers' access to protection in the UK. Hostile Environment policies have long drawn on and fed into discourses fortifying an antagonistic asylum system, from Tony Blair's narrow depictions of 'acceptable' asylum-seekers using 'the correct channels', to today's Home Secretary Priti Patel's current project to further reduce those channels.[1] These policies, and the possibilities that they both enable and foreclose, are not confined to Conservative and New Labour-style rhetoric and policy. As UK theatre-makers respond to an increasingly inimical asylum regime, many productions and critics struggle with what could be radical challenges to hostility towards asylum-seekers.

Ostensibly exploring the beginnings of civilizational institutions in the West, the staging of Ancient Greek plays has emerged as a prominent strand of theatrical inquiry into asylum in Europe. In the same month that the Home Office released the 'New Plan for Immigration', Out of Chaos presented a virtual performance of Aeschylus's *The Suppliants.* Typical of these adaptations, the company used language loaded with reference to the current 'refugee crisis', describing the play as 'a tragedy about immigration and asylum.'[2] S. E. Wilmer dedicates an entire chapter to adaptations of Ancient Greek dramas in *Performing Statelessness in Europe* as classics scholars and theatre-makers respond to renewed interest in staging the ancient theatrical canon to explore forced displacement, hospitality, and war.[3] These explorations can be fruitful, but the present examination of David Greig's 2016 production of *The Suppliant Women* at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh recommends

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caution. While deft and impressively executed, Greig's 'machine for manufacturing empathy on an industrial scale' also illustrates the need for a more critical space and vocabulary, especially where the driving affective identification belongs to asylum-seekers and their role in the West's origin stories.[4]

The Lyceum's 2016 programme emphasizes that Aeschylus's *Hiketides* (to give it its original title), one of the oldest plays in existence, depicts asylum as the catalyst for democracy.[5] The play recounts the myth of the Danaïds, fifty young women fleeing forced marriage to their Aegyptid cousins in Egypt. They request sanctuary of the King of Argos, Pelasgos, who puts the question to a vote, and the Argives agree to grant the women asylum. In the Danaïd trilogy's now lost plays, the Aegyptids attack and defeat the Argives, then force the Danaïds to marry them, but, on their wedding night, forty-nine of the Danaïds kill their husbands. The trilogy concludes with the trial of Hypermnestra, the Danaïd who, impressed by her husband's respect of her will, helps him escape. Aphrodite intervenes, the Danaïd is released, and her union with her Aegyptid husband founds a royal line of Argos. Greig's version does not offer the trilogy's closure beyond including plotlines from the lost plays in the programme, but pointedly begins and ends with conflict unresolved.

Unresolved, but the decision to close the production with the Danaïds demanding 'equal power to women' aligns forcefully with the values of a modern liberal western audience.[6] The prevailing implication, supported by the audience and critical response to the production, is that true democracy means justice. By situating the play within an Ancient Athens-inspired ritualized context of state offering to the gods, Greig's version emphasizes that the Argive vote to grant asylum constitutes a founding moment for western democracy. However, while the production foregrounds a compelling link between civilization and asylum, Greig's theatre of amplified civics does not acknowledge the exclusionary logics that underpin the UK's western liberal asylum system. For instance, both the programme and Ramin Gray's 'Director's Note' in the published script make much of the fact that Aeschylus's play offers the first recorded use of the word 'democracy'.[7] Nowhere do they mention, however, that this play also contains the first surviving appearance of the term *metic*: that is, a permanent resident foreigner not entitled to the full rights of citizenship.[8] This elision suggests that, rather than opening up equitable grounds of shelter negotiation among asylum-seekers and citizens, Greig's production and its audiences uncritically reinforce exclusionary narratives that circulate under the auspices of civilization. The logics dividing the deserving asylum-seeker (who espouses the approved values and uses the ever dwindling 'correct channels') from the bogus one (who does not) also go unchallenged here.[9]

Elaine Scarry's definition of civilization can be placed in conjunction with my opposing term 'necrocivilization' to show how democracy and civilization are not inextricable. Scarry states:

> In normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within; like the body, its walls put boundaries around the self preventing undifferentiated contact with the world, yet in its windows and doors, crude versions of the senses, it enables the self to move out into the world and allows that world to enter.[10]

This action of the room's walls preserving integrity while facilitating transformation in conversation with the world '[realizes] the human being's impulse to project himself out into a space beyond the boundaries of the body in acts of making, either physical or verbal, that once multiplied, collected, and shared are called civilization'.[11] Scarry's civilization is the key protective product resulting from the agency to change and be changed in relationship with the world. It is the result of projection and negotiation 'into a space beyond the boundaries of the body'.[12] Civilization is thus the outcome of a constant, ongoing negotiation for shelter. While this does not preclude the existence of those denied the means to negotiate as full agents,

Scarry's emphasis on co-creation for protection and meaning invites expansion. Her definition grounds civilization in the reciprocity of hospitality.

The expansive negotiation that Scarry's premise enables might seem to align well with Greig's theatre-cum-civic space. However, the production centres democracy as an emblem of civilization at the expense of questioning what part democracy plays in producing a modern day *metic.* Despite its technically agonistic nature, the production and its reception downplay the play's potential to highlight the discursive mechanisms of a UK state that is not so much civilized in Scarry's sense as it is necrocivilized.[13] Necrocivilization highlights Achille Mbembe's seminal expansion of Michel Foucault's biopolitics. While Foucault stipulates that modern sovereign power consists in the ability to divide those who deserve life from those who do not, Mbembe's term 'necropolitics' incorporates 'the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective'.[14] Mbembe argues that sovereignty is not simply about choosing who will be saved, but a matter of actively shoring up power by producing and targeting 'others' and 'otherness' for annihilation in tangible ways.

Greig explains that 'a play is, in essence, a machine for manufacturing empathy on an industrial scale', and continues: 'Unless we are able to encounter each other within art, then any vote taken is taken in ignorance. Democracy becomes mob rule. Without the constructed space to restore us to humanity, democracy merely becomes another form of violence.'[15] Yet, affective alignment also works in *The Suppliant Women* as a guise that continues to enable a thriving necrocivilization. Greig presents an encounter, but not one predicated on shelters that foster reciprocity within and beyond the 'constructed' theatre space. Roundly identifying with asylum-seekers on the stage can also fortify the annihilating cells, both material and discursive, that stifle what Scarry describes as the shelter's generative give and take.

The affective orientations a state and society deploy to move through this crisis of hospitality form and reform the foundations upon which inhabitants build their own shelter and confinement. Scarry's definition, if applied to Greig's *The Suppliant Women*, shows how concepts understood culturally as civilizational can also operate in necrocivilizational ways. If the production aims to help reinvigorate civilizational processes in the UK, then it is crucial to acknowledge that, despite its enormous potential, democracy – and what has been read as feminism – do not necessarily or uncomplicatedly deliver civilization in *The Suppliant Women.* Indeed, as unscrutinized emblems enveloped in affect, they often prove uncommonly effective foils to the expansion of Scarry's 'civilization'. Greig's production of Aeschylus's play is a much more complex and troubling engagement with the underpinnings of western democracy, theatre, and civilization than has been so far acknowledged.

Theatre as a Civic Ritual Space

From the outset, Greig establishes the civilizational consequence of theatre within the liberal democratic state. *The Suppliant Women* begins with an overt reference to the material investment that state and civic bodies, as well as individuals, have made in the production. Thus he acknowledges the theatre as an active civic space and, perhaps more subtly, official locations of state business as spaces of ritualized theatre: that is, as an official and scripted performance with real-world consequences. Actor Omar Ebrahim opens the production with a speech on the importance of theatre in the civic life of Ancient Athens. In this framing sequence, a government representative then joins Ebrahim onstage to carry out an Ancient Athenian-style libation, the ritual pouring of wine in acknowledgement of the production's sponsors.[16] *The Suppliant Women* enlists overt ritual to show the real, civilizational weight of what circulates in this theatre space.

In linking the performance with the debates and policy of the state, the government representative acts as a reality claim that works against what Judith Butler observes as

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theatre's de-realization: 'In the theatre, one can say, "this is just an act", and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real . . . the various conventions which announce that "this is only a play" allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life.'[17] In reality theatre, however, 'bodies of evidence' from real events enter the room, intimating that this is *not* only a play.[18] The state official, and those acknowledged in the libation, constitute the 'bodies of evidence' in *The Suppliant Women*. They are real people who, as themselves, enable and take part in this ritual investigation into the origins of western democracy.

Another reality claim comes in the form of pointed translations and references to Syrian and North African asylum-seekers, which the production's marketing material frames with imagery of the current 'refugee crisis', such as orange life vests and crowded dinghies in open water. By hearkening back to the official and ritual function that theatre held in Ancient Athens, Greig calls into question the theatre space as one of superfluous entertainment. In a similar vein, the performer Reem in the 2016 production *Queens of Syria* proclaims: 'We are not here to entertain you.' Another Ancient Greek play, Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, frames *Queens of Syria*'s testimonies and provocations: Reem's declaration rings out amid the personal stories of war and exile in Jordan that she and twelve other Syrian refugee woman recount on stage along with the lamentations of their Trojan counterparts.[19] It is worth noting that ties between the state and the theatre have particular resonance in Edinburgh, the 'Athens of the North'. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the world's biggest annual arts festival. Deeply embedded in the operations and identity of the city, it contributes to intense artistic life and, in a sector that builds low wages and exploitation into its economic model, tremendous precarity.[20]

At a time when the Brexit referendum provided a salient example of an ever-narrowing political discourse that draws on and foments anti-migrant rhetoric, Greig and Gray frame *The Suppliant Women* as an exercise in examining the common foundations of western theatre, asylum, and democracy. The state official on the stage lists those who 'supported this play' as part of a dedication to the gods whose favour prominent citizens would curry in Ancient Athens.[21] Apart from the handful of paid artists, this government representative formally recognizes all those present in the theatre space – and the many taxpayers and state representatives not present – as patrons of the play's performance, noting their contribution down to the penny. These stakeholders included the chorus of volunteers who gave their time for free, the paying audience, the citizens of Scotland and England whose taxes supported the production, private donors and trusts, the residents of Edinburgh through the financial support of the City of Edinburgh District Council, and finally prospective theatre bar patrons. The production thus reveals the state and commercial apparatus behind large-scale cultural productions or 'acts of making' that are normally hidden, presenting it as a 'body of evidence'. With this ritual, Greig also exposes the investment needed for such a production while asking implicitly: What do these stakeholders gain by it?

Although faithful to the source script, reminders of the current political crises of asylum are apparent throughout the play. Original references to Syria and anti-migrant sentiments are loaded: Syrians are the largest forcibly displaced population of the current crisis, and UK politicians and the media continue to link immigration with threat. Ultimately successful Brexit campaigners and news outlets, for instance, frequently used images showing racialized asylum-seekers purportedly streaming into the UK as a result of EU membership.[22] If acts of making are fundamentally a 'wrestling with the environment to make it yield the means of life', as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has observed, then these supporters are producing an investigation into a founding moment in their political make-up that might reveal something about its opportunities and limitations in the face of the current crises that cut to its heart.[23] The play certainly has the potential for provoking cultural self-examination, which Greig preserves and enhances. However, the production also encourages the audience to identify with the monolithic chorus of asylum-seekers. This

identification is so overwhelming that it effectively sweeps away much opportunity for insight beyond broad commitments to women's empowerment and asylum for those genuinely in need of help. These commitments are already prominent in the public discourse, and yet the UK continues to find itself in acute crisis on both fronts.

It is significant that an investigation into democratic political traditions celebrates its expansiveness without bringing its simultaneous exclusivity into the discussion. Despite being financially supported by virtually every Edinburgh resident, this space is permeable only to those with the capital to access it and to feel sufficiently welcome and identified. Although ostensibly a production for the community outside the Edinburgh Festival season, tickets ranged in price from £10 to £30.50, and was, furthermore, presented in the Royal Lyceum Theatre, a famously elegant venue in Scotland's capital.[24] While anyone can technically pay to enter the space, the idea that this theatre space is open to everyone in the Edinburgh community is an illusion that caters to those who are habitually welcome, able, and willing to participate in a performance of this nature.

Despite its ambitions, the production's ability to amplify civic spaces is still limited in important ways by the very performance of reverence to democratic institutions it openly cultivates. Where Aeschylus's play itself presents a more complex picture of group negotiations, Greig's production's laudable acknowledgement of who funds prestigious and large-scale 'acts of making' also goes a long way towards covering up the extent to which it filters people out. This is an important parallel with Greig and Gray's failure to discuss the *metic*, the acknowledgement of which would yield a more subtle and useful picture of the possibility and challenge of democracy in the UK.

In *The Suppliant Women*, the central symbol of democracy's theatrical link and civilizational function is the suppliant branch, a sacred bough, often wound with white wool, that identifies people supplicating power to request assistance. In addition to the large and ever-present branches that the chorus wield, the marketing material for the production echoes the suppliant branch with a 2015 photograph by Thomas Campean in Lesbos, Greece. In the photograph, the viewer sees the back of a volunteer with a long, blonde ponytail and high-viz jacket standing waist-deep in water. They hold a long branch in their left hand and with the other signal to a crowded dinghy in the distance.[25] In place of the suppliant branch's traditional white wool waves an orange life vest, the now ubiquitous symbol of the 'refugee crisis'. The published script's cover underscores this connection: a dinghy full of women appears in black on an orange background with life vests coloured white like the wool of the suppliant branches.[26] However, the branch bearer in the image on the programme is not the petitioner but the petitioned.

A similar reversal occurs in the description of the play on the Lyceum Theatre's website: 'Part play, part ritual, part theatrical archaeology, it offers an electric connection to the deepest and most mysterious ideas of the [*sic*] humanity – who are we, where do we belong and if all goes wrong – who will take us in?'[27] This framing positions the citizen audience member, indeed all of humanity, as a potential asylum-seeking petitioner and, simultaneously, as the offerer of succour for whom civilization is based on compassion for the weak. The suppliant branch activates a sheltering dynamic and assigns roles in a civilizational script that the production overtly links to the emergence of democracy.

Greig's return to Aeschylus's *Hiketides* becomes an exploration of democracy via the suppliant branch and how this espoused emblem of civilization functions in practice in the UK's current liberal democratic political arrangement. Just as Scarry's 'acts of making' are verbal as well as material, the civilization-enabling 'room' is physical as well as discursive.[28] The suppliant branch is the central conceptual and material shelter around which civilization both coalesces and is challenged in the play. Greig underscores this point with the long branches bedecked in white dominating the dark stage and backdrop. Acting in a similar way to performances of diminishment such as hunger strikes, the branch is an

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instrument by which the vulnerable may compel the privileged to prevent annihilation. When protection is the bedrock of a civilization, crisis occurs whenever shelter is withheld. The Danaïd women present these stakes when they threaten King Pelasgos, maintaining that if they are not granted asylum, they will profane the temple by hanging themselves from the carvings of gods.[29] This act would mean the destruction of civilization's sheltering premise, which detained hunger strikers enact on their bodies, proclaiming that 'to be caged is to be robbed of food, bereft of voice'.[30]

In the 'Director's Note' to the published play, Gray concludes that:

> Given the current crisis of faith in our democratic institutions, in elections and referenda in particular, it is salutary to revisit the moment when these ideas were conceived and in the simplest of ways to start to renew our commitment to being together in a shared, civic space.[31]

Theatre plays an important role in civilization. However, the suppliant branch, like Scarry's four walls that often exist simultaneously as shelter and cell, shows how democratic institutions, even in their founding moments, are not unambiguously civilizational. Such ritual instruments, unifying asylum and western civilization, as the Danaïds' branches that lead King Pelasgos to trigger a vote represent the point upon which necrocivilization pivots in democracy. When the Danaïds threaten to hang themselves in the sacred temple if they are not given shelter, they openly place Argos's civilizational credentials in jeopardy.

Pelasgos conceives of the act as removing him from the solid ground that enables his life: 'Horror, horror, now like a wave / Sweeps me away to a bottomless ocean.'[32] The suppliant branch is a discursive and ritual mechanism that shrouds the fact that, in civilization conceived as the proliferation of shelter, the petitioned is simultaneously at the mercy of the petitioner. Campean's image, where the life vest replaces the traditional white wool at the end of the volunteer's branch, amply conveys this. The suppliants hold the lifeline to prevent the petitioned being swept 'away to a bottomless ocean'. That lifeline is an endorsement of the host's response as being ultimately life preserving and capable of extending civilization.[33] The suppliant branch yields an important social balance, but *The Suppliant Women* shows necrocivilization also thriving within democracy, as Pelasgos uses the vote to justify that whatever decision is taken is a fair response. Gray suggests that in order to restore civilization's shelter and solid ground, theatre should once again assume civilizational weight in democracy in order for both to be reinvigorated. However, explicitly uniting theatre and democracy, without also making plain their necrocivilizational potential, limits the civilizational merits of the production.

Choral Attunement and the Condition of Shelter

Both Greig's chorus and the audience's reaction to their compelling performance reveal how necrocivilization operates in the UK under the guise of civilization. This is evident first of all in how this prestigious production markets itself as inclusive without acknowledging how it is also exclusive. The State Official announces at the beginning of the play that the chorus of suppliant women are volunteers, 'as they would have been in Ancient Greece'.[34] Moreover, the official stipulates that the chorus is drawn from 'all over Edinburgh'.[35] *The Suppliant Women* also toured to Belfast, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, London, and Hong Kong, and in each of these locations recruited a local community chorus. In a play dealing explicitly with foreignness, as indicated not only by clothing but also – in a modern context – by skin colour, Edinburgh's suppliant chorus was composed almost exclusively of white and white-passing volunteers. While this was probably not by design (London's Young Vic chorus was visibly more diverse), the Edinburgh chorus members fail to mirror the broad local population of which they habitually form a part.

The apparent racial homogeneity of the chorus members could arguably highlight an aspect of the play's origins in an Ancient Athens where skin colour was not such a developed marker for oppression as it is today.[36]

However, as evidenced in the play's marketing material, the chorus is another instance that confounds understanding of the racialized asylum-seeker as 'the other' in a contemporary context. Greig's production mirrors audience members from the hegemonic group racially (and largely in terms of physical ability and appearance), while at the same time representing a group of women defined primarily by their evident outsider status.

Moreover, although King Pelasgos recognizes the women as foreign by their clothes rather than the colour of their skin, in Greig's version the chorus members dress in modern street clothes: T-shirts, jeans or colourful trousers, and trainers. Differences in ethnicity and dress emphasized in the text are conspicuously absent visually, emphasizing the discursive nature of these markers of difference. This is not to say that the play erases the meaning that hegemonic discourse binds to such aspects of the physical body as skin colour, which other productions about asylum go to such lengths to highlight; nor is it as simple as encouraging audience members not to see difference. Rather, Greig's play shows on both the stage and in Edinburgh's Lyceum Theatre audiences the narrow group of people party to this ritual reflection on decisions about who will be admitted and on what terms.

To the modern liberal, western ear, the united voices of so many women roundly rejecting age-old convention by refusing to marry feels liberating. That current of righteous energy dominates the reviews as well, with commentators describing the show as feminist. Irene Brown in the *Edinburgh Guide* calls the governing chorus 'fiercely feminist', and *The Scotsman* lauded the show's 'dream of radical feminism that seems bold even by twenty-first-century standards'.[37] The *Guardian*'s Mark Fisher hailed the production as 'epic, feminist protest song', even describing Aeschylus as the 'father' of feminist protest.[38] In the liberal West, which still struggles to provide safe, legal, and accessible abortion, and where gender-based violence is a constant reality, the presentation of Aeschylus's asylum-seekers as feminist trailblazers forcefully articulating their demand for a different kind of life without marriage or children is thrilling. Western audience members are invited to feel attuned to these women defying their persecutors, prepared to risk war rather than abide an oppressive peace. Their vehement demand for shelter drives the affect of the play: they flip the script from the plight of Argos as civilizational stronghold to the rights of the Danaïds as an embodiment of civilizational values.

Yet the positioning of the women's father, Danaos, as the protector and mastermind of the moving Danaïd chorus unsettled Edinburgh audiences. During a panel session on the production, some audience members asked whether Greig's play could not have been made more progressive by removing the figure of the male guardian, a question that was later echoed on Twitter.[39] In his review for *The List*, Gareth Vile sidesteps the discomfort by interpreting the source text's 'ambivalence towards foreigners' and its 'disturbingly patriarchal' aspects as part of a number of 'alienating' elements of Ancient Greek culture deliberately included in this new production.[40] Seen through the lens of civilization and necrocivilization, however, Greig's decision to remain faithful to Aeschylus's original, and even underscoring the Danaïd connection to the invading force by having Ebrahim play both Danaos and the Egyptian Herald, uncovers an unacknowledged necrocivilizational bent in contemporary liberal discourse. The Danaïds become suspect and less worthy of civilization when seen to be united by a totalitarian force; that is, when they do not embody the audience's espoused values wholeheartedly.

Scarry's 'civilization' involves a continual two-way discourse that works to fulfil the evolving needs of all parties to the societal conversation. Necrocivilization, posing as civilization, filters out inconvenient claims and embodiments in order to respond to its own discursive projections. The production's largely homogeneous casting and modern wardrobe show that, for Greig's audience, the Danaïds' otherness and their voices' unified power lie in the women's unquestioning and steadfast allegiance to their father. When the band of women raising their voices in unison is brought together by a male

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commander, the impulse is not to accept that the Danaïds are patriarchal and admit them to the civilizational negotiation anyway. Audiences and commentators instead separate the women's allegiance to patriarchy from the demands that chime with contemporary liberal sensibilities.

As Sara Ahmed states, 'We need to think about the political effects of this hierarchy between open and closed cultures and show how the constitution of open cultures involves the projection of what is closed on to others, and hence the concealment of what is closed and contained "at home".'[41] Liberal audience members and theatre critics are intensely attuned to the Danaïds' demands of the Argives, who, although they vote to shelter the women, continue to be suspicious and pressure them to marry Argive citizens. Uncritical attunement proliferates necrocivilization's annihilating cells by disguising them as shelter-enabling rooms. A person may be trapped in the category of 'asylum-seeker', for instance, which is ostensibly a category of protection but affords them little agency in shelter building and even attracts open hostility. Attributing a wholly positive and agreeable affect to that category does not create more openness. Rather, this binary serves to exclude complicated human beings who can never be wholly agreeable. Without recognizing how necrocivilization works under a cover of righteousness, the audience's overwhelming attunement passes for civilizational protection.

The issue is that this protection is conditional. The Danaïds' central demand is not unpalatable to the audience; only Danaos's leadership is. Audiences deal with this by suggesting his removal, or by identifying him as an archaic element of an ancient play. In this way, the expectations asylum-seekers must meet in order to receive shelter in western liberal democracies go unexamined. The Argives effectively put assimilative conditions (that they marry) on the Danaïds' shelter that go against the women's will, but so does the western liberal discourse circulating amongst Greig's audience (that they abandon their father). This dramatization of the implicit demands made of asylum-seekers shows Edinburgh audiences' readiness to champion what sounds like feminism, and discard the rest without acknowledging patriarchal and oppressive dynamics that remain central to mainstream UK society. In necrocivilization, worthiness of shelter becomes a demonstrable set of traits or values that are held to be necessary to civilization.

Scarry's 'civilization', however, flourishes as the evolving outcomes of a process and not as attributes: all parties must have sufficient autonomy and relationship to change and be changed by the world with the aim of mutual shelter. Gray's framing of *The Suppliant Women* as a healthy re-examination of 'the moment when [democracy and theatre] were conceived' is not, however, as concerned with how necrocivilization thrives in democracy as it is with reigniting enthusiasm for the western democratic establishment.[42] The united Danaïds do not automatically open up a civic space whence individuals and groups may feel out and negotiate more civilizational political relations. Rather, by identifying with Greig's suppliants and simultaneously attempting to unshackle them from what has come to signify unsavoury foreignness, Edinburgh audiences conceal 'what is closed and contained "at home".'[43]

The Birth of Western Democracy and the Elaboration of the Foreigner

Along with the state-associated libation, Gray's observation that the 'Athenians invented theatre and democracy in the same breath' gives civilizational weight to the *The Suppliant Women*.[44] However, these two framing mechanisms, namely the theatre or shared civic space and its overt state sponsorship, act as a platform for negotiating a third element that is not named explicitly: the foreigner. Along with democracy, Aeschylus's *The Suppliants* also contains the earliest use of the term *metic*, which became an official sub-citizen status for resident foreigners in Athens.[45] While neither the production nor its marketing material registers this alongside the emergence of theatre and democracy, the premise of the play itself is the production of and negotiation between citizens and non-citizens. Greig and

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Gray link theatre with democracy and then present the Argive vote to protect the women as an act that connects democracy's founding to the provision of asylum. The connection between democracy and the *metic* goes unexamined in the production and its commentary, though the play itself provides scope for such an investigation.

Tellingly, the democratic moment in *The Suppliant Women* arises not primarily as a means of Scarry's civilizational expansion, but as an attempt to retain kingly power in the face of the threat that the Danaïds bring. The most obvious risk for Argos is war with the Aegyptids, but aspects that read as 'other' about the Danaïds are also felt as fearful. The Danaïds' rejection of arranged marriage practised by both Argives and Aegyptids poses the original threat in Aeschylus's play. However, Rebecca Futo Kennedy's attribution of citizen fear to Danaos as potential foreign tyrant rather than the Danaïds' agency is more in keeping with the preoccupations of modern western audiences.[46] Edinburgh audience members' suggestion that Danaos be removed from the play is further evidence of this. The Danaïds' commitment to patriarchy in the form of Danaos, and (Kennedy notes) being at odds themselves with democratic principles in their view of Pelasgos's kingship as absolute, mark them out as potentially destructive and unworthy of civilization.[47] King Pelasgos is, in any case, unwilling to shoulder the responsibility for this decision and so puts a vote to the citizens of Argos. Pelasgos's democratic moment entails transferring the sovereign decision to the citizenry with a view to abdicating not power but responsibility for the consequences. Democracy, as Aeschylus frames it, does not preclude necrocivilization but, on the contrary, can provide the legitimacy for its flourishing.

Although Pelasgos speaks to the citizens in favour of sanctuary, this democratic shift means that the women must engage with the emotions, narratives, and expectations informing the Argives, in whose power their fate persists even after the vote to shelter them. The Greek ritual of the suppliant branch, which supplies the roles and script, demands of the Danaïds an attitude of submission and assimilation. Despite coming from elsewhere, the Danaïds must perform supplication to be considered 'Greek enough' for their sanctuary to ring legitimate. A central tenet of the Danaïds' asylum claim rests on their descendance from Io, an Argive priestess whom Zeus desired and, consequently, whom Hera transformed into a cow and drove from Greece. The story of their ancestor alone does not distinguish the Danaïds from their Aegyptid cousins, who are also descendants of Io. While this link between Danaïds and Aegyptids does not appear explicitly in the play, it illustrates that delineating outsiders and insiders is, on a fundamental level, governed by discourse and performance.

What marks the Danaïds as Greek is their apparent reverence for the custom of supplication and the gods of Greek lands, which the sons of Aegyptos reject. After noting the Danaïds' 'foreign clothes' and 'strange' hair, King Pelasgos says: 'Held in their left hand, suppliant branches. / At least that's Greek. At least there's that.'[48] The ritual of supplication continues in a social 'script' that Danaos instructs his daughters to follow as 'land sense' before the King's arrival:

> So, quick, now pick up your suppliant branches,
> Make sure they're properly wound with white wool.
> Hold them left-handed, the way you're supposed to,
> So they can see that you're seeking asylum.
> If you are challenged then choose your words wisely;
> *We're foreign: we must be respectful and meek. . . .*
> Greek people are touchy, they take offence quickly,
> So give way, defer, and always remember
> You're seeking asylum, you must not be bold.
> CHORUS:
> Father you're careful, and we're careful listeners.
> We'll make sure to carefully follow your *script*.[49]

In terms of Scarry's civilization, this 'scripted' performance of obsequious powerlessness hampers the two-way exchange of hospitality. It filters away claims that the Danaïds could make based on their personhood rather than their devotion to established hegemonic power relations.

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It is noteworthy how strongly Aeschylus's play resonates with the UK and Europe's current civilizational crisis. The Ancient Athenians were not bound to international legal obligations of non-refoulement; that is, not to turn back people in need of protection. However, even operating under the non-refoulement constraint, political rhetoric and policy show that the UK democratic establishment *does* present the admission of asylum-seekers as a matter to be voted on. Both Labour and Conservative governments have competed to narrow and ossify the discursive and physical filters that condition admission and dialogue between citizens and asylum-seekers. Prohibited from returning people to likely persecution, necrocivilization in the UK becomes a practice of narrowing asylum routes and narratives, and, more broadly, interpreting and policing values.

Jacques Derrida defines the principle of hospitality as demanding 'a welcome without reserve and without calculation, an exposure without limit'.[50] There are practical limits to this hospitality that must be negotiated, of course, but Derrida's point is that these risks be calculated 'without closing the door on the incalculable, that is, on the future and the foreigner'.[51] In *The Suppliant Women*, Derrida's infinite demand of hospitality is conditioned not by the host's finite ability to respond but by how the powerful construct discursively the threat of the other.[52] The petitioner's safety then rests on their ability to allay the host's fears by complying with established relationships of power and producing a convincing performance of sanctioned values.

Ultimately, the Danaïds find this suppliant discourse insufficient to maintain their safety and lay out the underlying terms of negotiation more forcefully. In the first instance, when Pelasgos remains unconvinced, the women step out of their scripted subservience to remind him that he will bring shame to the city when they hang themselves in the temple. This pattern repeats at the welcoming of the Danaïds, when Danaos advises his daughters to remain respectful because 'if you're a migrant, then people will talk'.[53] He admonishes them to be careful not to 'act in a way that brings shame', that is not to yield to men attracted to them.[54] When the Argives attempt to persuade the women that 'Marriage is always better than war', the Danaïds again shed their deference and resist vociferously, ending the play with a call for Zeus to 'Give equal power to women / And from this blessing let justice flow'.[55] These moments when the Danaïds break with the script reveal the claim to civilizational hospitality that necrocivilization attempts to subdue with the suppliant branch ritual. Democracy did not expand the civilizational capacity of Argives or Danaïds as a matter of course, just as linking democracy and theatre does not automatically address the necrocivilizational currents that employ democracy as an instrument of necrocivilization.

Bookended with a tension at the heart of hospitality's infinite claim on the finite, *The Suppliant Women* wrestles with and ultimately leaves open the question of civilizational integration. The closing demand for equal power must reckon with the appeals of and to Aphrodite that appear alongside it. At the start of Greig's production, Aphrodite's will appears in a fragment, which is all that remains of the last two plays of the Danaïd trilogy: all life is the fruit of love, sex, and marriage, and Aphrodite is the life-giving matchmaker. The fragment appears as an epigraph in the published script. Aeschylus's Danaïd trilogy ends when a new Argive line is born with the marriage of the Danaïd Hypermnestra and the Aegyptid Lynceus. This union was only possible, however, because Lynceus respected Hypermnestra's autonomy and most of the remaining Danaïds eventually integrate through marriage to Argive citizens. The Ancient Athenians, by contrast, employed their newly minted democracy to pass the Citizenship Law in 451 BC, which meant that the child of a *metic* woman and an Athenian man would no longer be entitled to Athenian citizenship.[56] This last point is an illustration of democracy being used to limit a society's sheltering and thus civilizational potential.

Democracy and theatre are profoundly useful civilizational tools, and Greig's *The Suppliant Women* contributes to an important body of work encouraging the acknowledgement of arts spaces as integral to civilizational

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processes. Yet Aeschylus's play offers more scope to radically examine how democracy functions and to challenge the conditional nature of asylum in the UK than the production, audiences, or critics make use of. Commentators, including Greig and Gray, explicitly link democracy and asylum via feminism without considering how approaches to each have the ability both to greatly facilitate but also impede civilization. This downplays an opportunity to cultivate the openness that Scarry's 'shelter' requires in order to negotiate equitably with difference. Scarry's definition grounds civilization in the conditions and processes that produce acts of making between people as well as the acts themselves. *The Suppliant Women* presents a negotiation between petitioner and petitioned that is constantly taking place at all levels of existence. The life vest held aloft in Campean's photograph on the programme, the beacon of succour, prevents the petitioned being 'swept away to a bottomless ocean'.[57] Likewise, the wool at the end of a suppliant branch is the raw material of filtering and weaving, an invitation to co-created acts of making rather than destruction. The danger of necrocivilization is that it poses as civilization, facilitating the latter's demise. The suppliant branch, like any cornerstone of civilizing action, has the power to corrode civilization when the process becomes a hegemonic emblem belonging to one group over another.

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