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They were Soldiers. Civil War, *Lieux de Mémoire*, and Anonymity through Aeschylus' *Persae* and *Seven against Thebes*.

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According to Athenaeus (14.627 c), who quotes the epigram, Aeschylus preferred to portray himself like one of the *Marathonomachoi*, rather than referring to his successful career as a playwright¹. The kind of relation between warfare, memory and identity, on which I want to focus, however, is not the *I – style* employed in this funeral epigram, nor the *he – style*, which, for example, Xenophon adopted in his *Anabasis*.

Rather, as the title of my paper may suggest, I am interested in the contexts where the memory of warfare is reported in the third person plural. This form of representing the past generally implies that memory is shaped by those who have survived, in order to give a reason for those who have died. Therefore my study, of which I cannot but present a brief sketch here, concerns the sources which face the problem of creating a bridge between the identity of the dead and the use of their memory within the living community.

I will start with some considerations on the *Seven against Thebes*. The original end of Aeschylus' tragedy is lost and was replaced in ancient times by a new closing, probably on the occasion of a restaging of the play.² The transmitted text sets a new starting for the griefs of the Thebans, as the death of the two rival brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, does not put an end to the curse of Oedipus' offspring. Rather, it causes a further division within the *polis*: whereas Eteocles is to be buried with all honours, because he gave his life for the city, Polyneices will be deprived of any funeral. The herald's announcement reads as follows:

... his brother, the dead Polyneices here, is to be cast out unburied, a prey for the dogs, as one who would have been a destroyer of the land of Cadmus, had not some god stood up to hinder his armed attack. Even in death he shall bear the pollution and curse of the ancestral gods,

¹ See recently Sommerstein (2008), xvii-xviii.

² Sommerstein (2008), 147-148.

whom he insulted when he tried to capture the city, bringing a foreign army to attack it (ll. 1005-1019)³.

I won't enter here the problem concerning the date of the second final of the *Seven*. What is relevant for my purpose is that, by putting aside the curse of Oedipus' offspring, the new closing stresses the link between external invasion and internal strife, whose promoter shall be punished with anonymity, i.e. with a *damnatio memoriae*. In the end, the chorus remains split in two parts, either in favour or against Polyneices' burial, and the troubled memory of the deads still keeps the city in a state of civil war.

The impression raised by the *Persians* is just the opposite. The tragedy celebrates an international victory, shaping it ideologically as a predestined clash of civilizations. One of the peculiarities of this tragedy, beside being the only one of historical subject that has been preserved, is the fact that it depicts victory through the fictional eyes of the losers. The *parodos* hosts a long catalogue of the people and chiefs that left Asia and Egypt to follow the Great King (ll. 16-58), concentrating on the memory of their ethnic mixture and majesty, to which the current anxiety and isolation of the court in Susa is opposed. The catalogical style of the passage has a precise model in the epic tradition of listing chiefs and people who participated in a legendary war (cf. the catalogue of the ships). A second catalogue, spoken by the messenger to the Mother Queen (ll. 303-330), confirms the worst fears of the Persians: the report of the defeat includes a list of the chiefs who died in Salamina, which again fits an epic model: naming the fallen during a hero's military outburst (*aristeia*).

But why are the names of the defeated so important in the *Persians*? A first answer is that counting enemies and their majesty obviously increases the successful depiction of the Greeks who won and exterminated them – at least according to their ideological representation, because in fact Persian losses could not jeopardize Xerxes' mainland empire⁴. Furthermore, the whole tragedy is full of epic borrowings, which contribute to the transfer of the historical event to a legendary plan. Yet there is, I think, also a more subtle reason for the use of an epic catalogue for the Persian enemies, which emerges by reading the relevant

³ Texts and translations from Aeschylus are quoted from the Loeb edition by Sommerstein (2008).

⁴ It will help here mentioning also the Persian part of the propaganda, in particular a royal inscription from Persepolis, for which see Ruberto (2011), 36-39, where Xerxes appears quite differently from the crazy tyrant of Aeschylus' portrait. This cliché, as Ruberto aptly points out, makes sense in Athens and later in the long-term Greek memory of the Persian Wars. For a comprehensive approach to both the Greek and Persian sides of the propaganda, see refs quoted below, Bibliography, I, 2.

passages within the broader set of the play. A dialogue between the Mother Queen and the chorus is the core of a proceeding which implies portaying Greeks – namely the Athenians – by distinguishing them in a comparison *e contrario* with Asia (ll. 230-240):

Q. - *There is something I wish to learn, my friends. Where in the world do they say that Athens is situated?*

Ch. - *Far away, near the place where the Lord Sun declines and sets*

Q. - *And yet my son had a desire to conquer that city?*

Ch. - *Yes, because all Greece would then become subject to the King*

Q. - *Do they have such great numbers of men in their army?*

Ch. - *And an army of a quality that has already done the Medes a great deal of harm.*

Q. - *Why, are they distinguished for their wielding of the drawn bow and its darts?*

Ch. - *Not at all; they use the spears for close combat and carry shields for defence.*

Q. - *And what else apart from that? Is there sufficient wealth in their stores?*

Ch. - *They have a fountain of silver, a treasure in their sole.*

Q. - *And who is the shepherd, master and commander over their host?*

Ch. - *They are not called slaves or subjects to any man.*

Q. - *How then can they resist an invading enemy?*

Ch. - *Well enough to have destroyed the large and splendid army of Darius.*

Each of the topics discussed above deals with a specific aspect of contemporary Athenian pride and is chosen to symbolize the roots of Athenian victory and power. A central role is played by the observations on warfare and politics. Both military practice and power are ideologically shaped according to the value of sharing risks and responsibilities among free citizens, in opposition to Asian hierarchy, where the chief is not responsible for his deeds in front of anyone.⁵ In this context, the epic model of naming heroes, which is applied in the tragedy only to the army of the Great King, represents a past model – although a glamorous one – which is projected onto the defeated enemies for the twofold aim of increasing the winners' glory and of stressing the current ideology of *demos*: anonymity as the symbol of equality in both hoplitic warfare and politics.⁶

⁵ On shaping Athenian and Greek identity by opposition with Barbarians, see Bibliography I, 1.

⁶ Anonymous celebration is a crucial point both in the Athenian politics of '470s and in later ideological commemorations of the spirit of the Persian Wars. A clarifying case in this regard is provided by the epigrams inscribed on the three Herms dedicated on the Athenian agora after the conquest of Eion from the Persians (475 BC): they only name Homeric heroes and geographic references and they simply refer to the Athenian marshals without calling them

Since antiquity, battlefields have often been treated, to use an expression by Pierre Nora, as *lieux de mémoire*.⁷ A recent monograph by Michael Jung has focused on the long-lasting ideological inheritance of the victories of Marathon and Plataea, which helped Greek *poleis* to shape international struggles until Hellenistic time.⁸ Epigraphic sources attest the survival of a religious festival in Plataea during the 3rd century BC, still commemorating the victory of the Hellenic alliance against Mardonios in 479. On the one hand, this implies that the fallen in the battle had been tributed a proper heroic cult. On the other hand, Jung has argued that the continuity of the cults relied on the fact that the memory of Plataea had a basic meaning – fighting till victory or death for the sake of Pan-Hellenic freedom – which could be adapted through centuries to new historical contexts.

The political relevance of heroic cults for fallen soldiers in antiquity is paralleled by the social role of military tombs and cemeteries in modern and contemporary Europe. As Reinhardt Koselleck has argued, political experiences and ideological messages are difficult to transmit beyond the generations who have lived and shaped them, unless specific social institutions are created to preserve them and to adapt their meaning to the changes occurring within society. In 2003, Gianluca Guidotti and Enrica Sangiovanni, art directors of the Italian theatre group Archivio Zeta, staged the *Persians* in the *Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof Futa-Pass*, the largest German Military Cemetery in Italy. This Cemetery, built between 1962 and 1965 on a project of the German architect Dieter Oesterlen and inaugurated in 1969, hosts more than 31.000 German soldiers who died defending the Futa Pass, on the Italian Appennini, and the access to Bologna against the advance of the Allies in the summer of 1944 (fig. 1). The Futa Pass was a keypoint on the Gothic Line and *Linea Gotica* is also the name of the first trilogy performed at the German Cemetery by Archivio Zeta, comprehending *The Persians* (2003), *Seven against Thebes* (2005) and *Antigone* (2007). Archivio Zeta has recently started a new project in the same setting, the *Oresteia* trilogy, starting from *Agamemnon* (July 31st – August 15th 2010).⁹

(not even Cimon) by name. The history of the Herms is quoted by several authors, but Aeschines evokes it in the most striking ideological way (*Against Ctesiphon* 183-185, about 330 BC) as he uses it to portray the good time of old when the personalism of Athenian leaders had not yet won over the priority of *dēmos* (see esp. the closing line: “Is the name of the generals anywhere here? Nowhere; only the name of the people”). For a recent discussion of these epigrams and their meaning, see Bing (2012).

⁷ For the definition and the application of this category, cf. Nora 1989.

⁸ Jung (2006). Other discussed cases are of course Salamina and even the defeat at the Thermopylae.

⁹ For documentation on Archivio Zeta and the projects *Linea Gotica* and *Oresteia*, cf. Bibliography, III.



Fig. 1. *Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof Futa-Pass*. Fiorenzuola (Italy), 1962-1965 (Archivio Zeta).

The architecture of the German cemetery is made by a 2 km long wall, ascending the mountain on a spiral till the top, where it ends up with a big point turned towards the sky. All around, terraces host the tombstones, all identical and coupled like the pages of an open book (fig. 2). The public was asked to recall the parallels between the tragedy and the events of the war. For this reason, the brochure was meant to evoke those that were distributed during the II World War (fig. 3).



Fig. 2. A scene from *I Persiani* at the Futa cemetery (Archivio Zeta).

ARCHIVIO ZETA
con
l'Alto Patronato del Presidente della Repubblica
Carlo Azeglio Ciampi
con il contributo di
Comune di Firenzuola
Regione Toscana
con il patrocinio di
Ambasciata della Repubblica Federale di Germania

I PERSIANI
di Eschilo
al Cimitero militare germanico Futa-Pass

Ad agosto debutterà il nuovo spettacolo di Archivio Zeta: *I Persiani* di Eschilo al Cimitero Militare germanico 'Futa-Pass'. È un progetto legato alla Memoria e alla Linea Gotica: *I Persiani* è la prima tragedia giunta fino a noi e parla dello scontro tra Oriente e Occidente. Eschilo mette in scena i vinti e per primo si riconosce nel dolore degli 'altri'. Per questo abbiamo scelto questo luogo come palcoscenico simbolico della tragedia della guerra. Sono coinvolti nello spettacolo attori professionisti di Archivio Zeta, un Coro maschile di non attori che vivono in questo territorio e il Coro polifonico femminile 'Mulieris Voces' di Firenzuola: trenta persone daranno voce e corpo a queste antiche parole di pietà, come nel teatro greco alla luce del tramonto.

**Posti limitati - Prenotazione obbligatoria
dal 15 luglio per prenotazioni informazioni repliche orari**
Biblioteca Comunale di Firenzuola 055 8199434/5
Archivio Zeta 055 812203

Fig. 3. The brochure of *I Persiani* (Archivio Zeta).

As the performance was staged in different places of the cemetery, spectators followed the architectural path in an ascending and descending movement around the mountain, which carried out a progressive overlap of the fictional space of the tragedy with the concrete one, marked by the tombs (fig. 4-7).



Fig. 4. A scene from *I Persiani* at the Futa cemetery (Archivio Zeta).



Fig. 5. A scene from *I Persiani* at the Futa cemetery (Archivio Zeta).



Fig. 6. A scene from *I Persiani* at the Futa cemetery (Archivio Zeta).



Fig. 7. A scene from *I Persiani* at the Futa cemetery (Archivio Zeta).

The play was opened by a quotation from the novel *La Casa in collina* by Cesare Pavese, one of the most known Italian authors who have dealt with shaping the memory of the II World War. As Pavese states, the fallen are an upsetting inheritance for the survivors, as their blood-stained bodies raise the perturbing question of why death has snatched them away instead of us. The perception that the fate of living and dying cannot be charged with an explanatory sense implies, in Pavese's words, that «every war is a civil war: every fallen resembles those who remain and ask them for a reason».¹⁰

By moving from this assumption, the *Persians* of Archivio Zeta point to a remarkable change in the evaluation of war and the treating of the deads, at least in countries, like Italy and Germany, where national memory has been indelibly affected by the II World War. In a way, if the fallen (both soldiers and civils) resemble each other as in a civil war, then we can see an overlap between the *Persians* and the *Seven against Thebes*. But why and how have some 20th century military cemeteries undergone such a strong change, to challenge the traditional praise of military death and victory? Studies on the shaping of the memory of the fallen after the World Wars have pointed out that the massification and mechanization of death, associated with trench warfare and brought to new proportions by technological weapons, has progressively undermined the traditional depiction of heroic combat. Monuments for the Unknown Soldier are an early response to the multiplication of death and the dispersion of bodies, which are consequences of modern warfare and have contributed to the transformation of important battlefields into *lieux de mémoire*. Furthermore, systematic bombing on civil targets and the demographic decimation of the enemy have brought forth a final step: in contemporary wars, civils always die in vain and their death only fulfills the aim of forcing the internal front of the enemy to an economical and emotional breakdown, but has no ideological sense in itself.¹¹

Massive death cannot then be easily portrayed as self-sacrifice for a common cause. Referring to the suppression of military hierarchy in the monuments for the Unknown Soldiers, some scholars have talked about a democratisation of death. This expression, however, sounds quite awkward in relation to the loss of meaning that I have described so far. I would rather quote the title of a book by Hannah Arendt, to talk about the upsetting *banality*

¹⁰ Pavese (1990), quoted 122.

¹¹ On the problem of shaping memory of the dead for the benefit of the surviving community, see Koselleck (1979); Mosse (1980; 1990); Nora (1989); Assmann (1993).

of evil in 20th century mass treatment of life and death.¹² According to me, this expression offers a good parallel to the puzzling lack of sense displayed by the anyconic lay-out of many contemporary military cemeteries, like the German one at the Futa Pass. The fact that they give up portraying the human figure in funerary sculpture is revealing of a widespread feeling that death caused by war can no longer be given a resolute meaning. Accordingly, the abstract structure of the monuments for the fallen of mass conflicts aims at raising unanswered questions, rather than providing the survivors with an *intentional history*, which can build identity and guide present action.¹³ On the other hand, by falling short of this function, post-World War funeral monuments prove to be living symbols, as they embody an updated sensibility towards violence and death, which is shared by the social groups that have conceived and built them.

I will conclude my paper quoting a short text by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Anforderung an den modernen Bildhauer (Requests to the Modern Sculptor)*,¹⁴ written in 1817 for the project of the funeral monument for the Field-Marshal Blücher in Rostock. According to Goethe, the depiction of military victory used to be effective in earlier times because of the clear-cut cultural opposition between the fighting parts (for instance, European Christians and Turks). Compared with past wars, however, more recent conflicts, such as the one between Germany and France in Goethe's times, were more difficult to portray: they did not convey a univocal meaning, inasmuch as a contrast of economical interests opposed two parts that were culturally and morally alike.

As a consequence, we find again that in some historical and cultural contexts, external war can look ambiguously similar to internal conflict. Goethe's words show how variable the depiction of victory and death can be in building identities, and sound even more topical in the context of our contemporary mass society and warfare. Overall, by showing that anonymity can pass from the *damnatio memoriae* of the internal enemy to a general assessment of the dead of all wars, Goethe's quotation could be a good epigraphy for the Futa Pass Cemetery, as well as for the *Persians* of Archivio Zeta:

¹² Arendt (1994²).

¹³ Koselleck (1979), 272-274. On intentional history, see esp. Gehrke (1994; 2001); also Clarke (2008).

¹⁴ Goethe (1817), quoted 397-399, mentioned in Koselleck (1979), 150: «Deutsche und Franzosen, ob gleich politisch und moralisch im ewigen Gegensatz, können nicht mehr als kämpfend bildlich vorgestellt werden, wir haben zu viel von ihrer äußern Sitte, ja von gleich costumierte Nationen sonderlich unterscheiden könnte. Wollte nun gar der Bildhauer (damit wir dahin zurückkehren wo wir ausgegangen sind) nach eigenem Recht und Vorteil seine Figuren aller Kleideung und äußern Zierde berauben; so fällt jeder charakteristische Unterschied weg, beide Teile werden völlig gleich; es sind hübsche Leute die sich einander ermorden, und die fatale Schicksalgruppe von Eteokles und Polynices müßte immer wiederholt werden; welche bloß durch die Gegenwart der Furien bedeutend werden kann».

If the sculptor wanted ... to deprive his figures of any clothes and ornament, every specific difference would disappear and both parts would look completely the same: they are handsome people that kill each other, and one should repeat every time the fatal group of Eteocles and Polyneices, which would be made clear by the presence of the Furies.

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