

16. A Monster after Recognition: Euripides' Medea as the "Other" of Man and Society ¹

Zehranur ÇINARLAR² & Nazan YILDIZ ÇİÇEKÇİ³

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Abstract

This article examines Euripides' *Medea* through the lens of "otherness," focusing on Medea's dual role as both the "Other" of man and the "Other" within society. Euripides, one of the three great tragedians of ancient Greece, is acknowledged for his complex and nuanced portrayal of human psychology and social issues. His works, including *Medea*, often challenge societal norms and question rigid cultural constructs, making him a dramatist ahead of his time. *Medea* reflects the condition of ancient women, embodying their struggles for identity and autonomy in a patriarchal world. Medea is positioned as an outsider not only because of her gender but also due to her status as a foreigner, foregrounding her intersectional marginalization. *Medea*'s narrative captures this marginalization, portraying a woman who resists societal norms and confronts the systemic inequalities imposed upon her. By addressing Medea's identity as a foreigner and a woman, twice othered, the article explores how Medea's alienation mirrors the broader historical struggle of women to establish their identity in the face of oppression by men and society. It also discusses how Medea, in a way, as an atypical representation of ancient womanhood, defies her "Othered" position through her words and actions, challenging the rigid structures of societal expectations. Accordingly, the article delineates Medea's complex characterization and her resistance to being confined within the role of the Other by the dominant social order in the intersection of women's and identity studies.

Keywords: Euripides, *Medea*, otherness, woman, identity

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² (%50) Mezun Öğrenci, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü / Graduate Student, Karadeniz Technical University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature (Trabzon, Turkey), **eposta:** zehranurcinarlar@gmail.com **ORCID ID:** <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2976-6505> **ROR ID:** <https://ror.org/03z8fyr40> **ISNI:** 0000 0001 2186 0630 **Crossreff Funder ID:** 501100004045

³ (%50) Doç. Dr., Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü / Graduate Student, Karadeniz Technical University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature (Trabzon, Turkey), **eposta:** nazanyildizi@hotmail.com **ORCID ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5776-0268> **ROR ID:** <https://ror.org/03z8fyr40> **ISNI:** 0000 0001 2186 0630 **Crossreff Funder ID:** 501100004045

Tanınmanın Peşinde Bir Canavar: Erkeğin ve Toplumun Ötekisi Olarak Euripides'in Medea'sı ⁴

Öz

Bu makale Euripides'in *Medea* adlı eserini “ötekilik” kavramı çerçevesinde incelemekte ve Medea'nın hem erkeğin “ötekisi” hem de toplum içindeki “öteki” konumuna odaklanmaktadır. Antik Yunan'ın üç büyük trajedi yazarından biri olan Euripides, insan psikolojisini ve toplumsal meseleleri karmaşık ve incelikli biçimde ele almasıyla tanınır. *Medea* dahil olmak üzere Euripides'in eserlerinde çoğu zaman toplumsal normları sorgulaması ve katı kültürel yapıları eleştirmesi onu çağının ötesinde bir dramatist yapar. *Medea* antik çağ kadınlarının durumunu yansıtır ve ataerkil bir dünyada kimlik ve bağımsızlık mücadelesi veren kadınların deneyimlerini belirgin kılar. Medea yalnızca cinsiyeti nedeniyle değil, aynı zamanda yabancı bir kimliğe sahip olması nedeni ile de dışlanmış bir figür olarak konumlandırılır; bu onun birbiriyle kesişen ötekileştirilmesini ön plana çıkarır. Medea'nın anlatısı bu dışlanmışlığı gözler önüne sererken, aynı zamanda toplumsal normlara karşı koyan ve kendisine dayatılan sistematik eşitsizliklere meydan okuyan bir kadını tasvir eder. İki kere ötekileştirilen Medea'nın hem yabancı hem de kadın kimliğini merkeze alan bu çalışma, Medea'nın yabancılaşmasının kadınların tarihsel olarak erkek ve toplum baskısına rağmen kimlik oluşturma çabalarının bir yansıması olduğunu ortaya koyar. Makale aynı zamanda bir anlamda atipik antik kadınlığı temsil eden Medea'nın, sözleri ve eylemleriyle “ötekileştirilmiş” konumuna karşı çıktığını ve toplumsal beklentilerin katı yapısına meydan okuduğunu ele alır. Bütün bunlar doğrultusunda makale Medea'nın kadın çalışmaları ile kimlik çalışmalarının kesişiminde karmaşık karakter yapısını ve egemen toplumsal düzen tarafından Öteki rolüne hapsedilmeye karşı direnişini ele alır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Euripides, *Medea*, ötekilik, kadın, kimlik

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Hakem Değerlendirmesi: İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

A woman must be a prophet of what she could never learn at home:
 how best to deal with her marriage partner;
 and if we get it worked out well and a husband shares
 our life with us, and he bears the yoke without violence,
 life is to be envied. Otherwise we are better off dead.
 (*Medea*, lines 238-242)⁵

Introduction

From ancient Greece to the present day, women have been regarded as inferior to men, struggling to establish their identity within a patriarchal system. Within this system, women have been seen as the "Other," a secondary figure in relation to men (de Beauvoir, 1956, pp. 70-77). Particularly in times when feminism was not as influential as it is today, the situation of women was far more rigid. In ancient Greece, to exemplify, women were subject to the authority of a male guardian, who controlled their economic, legal, and social affairs, ensuring their exclusion from the public domain (Seitkasimova, 2020, p. 52). During this period, when being a woman was already challenging enough, living as a foreign woman in such a society imposed additional psychological and social burdens. This was because, in ancient Greece, non-Greeks were considered uncivilized barbarians. In a time when belonging to a society granted individuals their identity, being labelled as the "Other" in terms of both ethnicity and gender posed significant challenges. *Medea*, the protagonist of Euripides' play *Medea*, is portrayed as a non-Greek barbarian woman under the yoke of her husband in ancient Greek society, reflecting the difficulties faced by women of that era. The present article delineates *Medea* as the "Other," subordinate to men and excluded from the dominant social order in the context of historical and cultural dynamics of women's and identity studies.

Medea tells the story of *Medea*, the former princess of the kingdom of Colchis and wife of Jason, leader of the Argonauts. Jason leaves *Medea* for a Corinthian princess, and before fleeing to Athens to start a new life, *Medea* exacts revenge by killing Jason's new wife and her two sons, thus turning her life into a dead end. *Medea*, who does not belong to Greek lands, becomes an "Other," completely excluded from society. The play has been interpreted in various ways for centuries, primarily from political, psychoanalytical, and feminist perspectives, and put on stage and screen in diverse ways, both nationally and internationally, and particularly identified with the social status of women, offering a reflection on contemporary women's problems. Van Zyl Smit argues that modern plays, films, operas, novels, and poems based on the *Medea* myth represent not only betrayed women but also oppressed racial groups, colonizers, and all women of the modern world (2002, p. 102). Similarly, to George Steiner, women continue to express their pain through *Medea* (1996, p. 129). Then, the majority of readings on *Medea* have specifically linked the work to the social status of women and examined it within the context of feminism and gender roles. However, among these studies, no study has addressed *Medea*, the play's main character, as an "Other", who has been exiled from her place and homeland by male hegemony and excluded from Greek society. There are two studies in the literature whose subject is close to the article. S. Georgia Nugent's 1993 article "Euripides' *Medea*: The Stranger in the House" portrays *Medea* as a foreigner who does not belong to Greek lands, but does not address the concept of the "Other." A more contemporary study, Demetra Kasimis's "Medea the Refugee," explores *Medea* as a migrant within the framework of migration literature, but again, does not address the notion of the "Other." While these studies are similar, they fall outside the focus of the present article, which aims to address this gap by

⁵ All references to the text are from the *Medea* translation by C. A. E. Luschnig.

probing Medea as an "Other" within the framework of women's and identity studies.

For a woman, the process of finding an identity is a complex journey. According to Hall, the concept of the "Other" is crucial for the formation of the self, subjectivity, and sexual identity (1997, pp. 237-238). This idea highlights how women, throughout history, have been positioned as the "Other" in relation to men, influencing the way they form their sense of self. Throughout history, women's nature has often been viewed as inferior to that of men. They have been characterized by traits such as being emotional, passive, illogical, connected to nature, and responsible for child-rearing, among other things, compared to men, including hierarchical binary oppositions such as head/heart, culture/nature, intelligible/palpable, and activity/passivity. For each opposition Cixous questions, "Where is [the woman]?" (1997, p. 91). Undoubtedly, to patriarchal thinking, the woman inhabits the right side of these oppositions. These oppositions reflect a long-standing cultural and philosophical tendency to reduce women to their reproductive and domestic roles, excluding them from public life or intellectual discourse.

Feminists have responded to this binary opposition by arguing that these perceptions are not inherent to women but rather are the result of incorrect social and cultural views imposed on them. They assert that the negative traits attributed to women are socially constructed and rooted in patriarchal structures that seek to marginalize and control women (Stoljar, 1995, p. 262), which hinder the development of their identity. To Nazan Yıldız, likewise, Otherness has framed people's identities and encounters with others throughout history, regardless of time and place. The concepts of identity and otherness are so interrelated that one cannot exist without the other (2019b, p. 2).⁶ This pressure on identity formation of women in relation to Otherness applies to ancient Greece, where women were primarily responsible for raising children and managing household duties, often assisted by slaves if the family could afford it. The division of labour reflects the patriarchal structure, where women's roles were confined to the private sphere, while men handled public affairs. Women's social interactions were limited, and their participation in public life was restricted. Married women were legally under the authority of their husbands, reinforcing gender discrimination (Seitkasimova, 2020, p. 52). This gendered arrangement furthered the position of women as the "Other" by alienating them and maintaining their subordination to men.

The Concept of Otherness and Women's Search for Identity

Women's othered position is fed through stereotypes and reinforced by social and cultural norms. Therefore, understanding otherness is a fundamental approach to understanding the social status of women (Barker, 1995, p. 98). The question of "otherness" has become increasingly important from various perspectives and within a wide range of fields. To Hall, "otherness" is "hazardous, a place of danger, negative emotions, division, enmity, and violence toward the "Other" (1997, p. 238). Otherness is the outcome of an expansive development in which a leading in-group ("Us," the Self) creates one or more subjugated outgroups ("Them," the others) by defaming differences, whether genuine or constructed, and presenting them as a reason to discriminate. That is, identity and otherness are two faces of a single coin that cannot be separated. Only in relation to the Self does the Other exist. The in-group distinguishes itself and gives itself an identity by creating one or more others (Staszak, 2020, p. 25). Likewise, to Homi Bhabha, the position of the Other "must not be imaged [...] as a fixed phenomenological point, opposed to the self that represents a culturally alien consciousness. The Other

⁶ For the details on otherness, see Yıldız, N. (2019). The other, otherness and othering in the Middle Ages. In D. R. Messer (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of the global Middle Ages* (pp. 1-14). Bloomsbury Publishing.

must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity [. . .]" (2000, "Interrogating identity", p. 100). Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration*, claims that "[t]he 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (1990, p. 4). To Bhabha, in the formation of identities, not only class and gender but also race, generation, geographic location, nationality, sexual orientation, and many other subject positions play a role (1983, "The Other Question", pp. 18-19). Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, states that identities do not emerge from a single point; they develop as a result of cultural differences, social interactions, and dynamic processes. These spaces are where identities are formed more flexibly and socially, as individuals reshape their identities while transitioning between different communities. In this process, although communities share each other's experiences, they do not always cooperate. On the contrary, these differences can lead to conflicts, as the values and meanings of each community may not always be in harmony. As a result, identities are shaped not only by shared experiences but also through the struggle of oppositions, values, and meanings (2012, pp. 1-2).

An individual's identity and self are formed through interaction with the environment. Then, identification encompasses both the individual's biological and psychological characteristics as well as their sense of belonging to the community they are a part of. An individual's identity formation is highly influenced by his/her culture and grows into a reflection of the individual's personality and self-alongside the culture and nation to which s/he belongs (Ergün, 2020, p. 456). Unquestionably, one anthropological constant is the ethnocentric attitude that produces otherness. As an example of othering in this aspect, in ancient Greece, there was opposition to non-Greek people who were regarded as Barbarians. Anyone who did not understand Greek and, therefore, had not understood the logos (and was unfamiliar with democracy) was considered a barbarian. He was from a different society, and his culture was deficient (Staszak, 2020, p. 26).

Women's search for identity cannot be separated from the concept of otherness, as their positioning in opposition to men has long been established through stereotypes and cultural norms (Barker, 1995, p. 98). Just as the Self constructs the Other to reinforce its own identity, women have historically been defined through a lens that highlights their perceived differences, often in a way that limits their agency and autonomy (Staszak, 2020, p. 25). Bhabha argues that this process involves both recognition and denial, as women are simultaneously acknowledged within society yet confined to rigid, often contradictory roles through stereotypes and fetishized images (1983, "The other question", p. 27). Bhabha also claims that these representations create a paradoxical state in which women are both visible and marginalized, essential yet excluded. Moreover, identity formation is not static but shaped through cultural and social interactions, meaning that women's identities have been continuously redefined as they navigate different historical and social contexts (1983, "The other question", p. 19). Thus, understanding otherness is the key to examining how women have sought to construct their own identities within and against dominant narratives.

Accordingly, the search for identity has been a central theme in women's history, shaped by social, political, and cultural forces. Women have always been characterized by their relationship to men and frequently assigned to inferior positions. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, argues that society has always been male-dominated, stating, it's always been a man's world and "[a] man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong" (1956, p. 15). The word woman, thus, "has the same implications as the word other. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's Other: she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man's world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is" (Tyson, 2006, p. 81). De Beauvoir's analysis highlights the structural inequality, where one

group asserts dominance over the other based on social and economic advantages. Women have historically been compelled by this systemic oppression to assume roles that restrict their independence and sense of self. Philosophical discourse has also contributed to the construction of women's identity. The nature attributed to women has historically been framed as inferior to that of men. Feminist scholars argue that these assumptions are culturally and socially constructed rather than biologically determined⁷ and put women and men in binary oppositions, characterizing women as "passive, irrational, emotional, by nature bearers and caretakers of children" (Stoljar, 1995, p. 262). Even in marriage, women were not central figures but were rather instruments in forming alliances between men (De Beauvoir, 1956, pp. 87-88, 92-96). Motherhood, particularly, has been a defining aspect of women's identity. This perception limits women's self-determination, reducing them to their reproductive roles. Women who did not conform to these adjectives and roles were othered by society and prevented from forming their own identities of their own free will.

Women in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece serves as a crucial example in understanding the limitations imposed on women's identity, foregrounding their otherness. According to Aristotle, women are malformed, unfinished men who are meant to be obedient to men (Elhance, 2024, pp. 55-63). Likewise, in Greek society, women had no independent legal or social standing; they lived under the guardianship of their fathers or husbands. Women were entirely dependent on male authority figures, unable to represent themselves in legal matters or even serve as witnesses in court. They were always under the authority of a male guardian, who was her *kyrios*. Before marriage, it was her father or closest male relative; upon marriage, her husband assumed the role. If widowed or divorced without sons, she returned to her original guardian or remained under another guardian if she had sons. This system reinforced women's dependence on male authority throughout their lives, positioning them as the "Other" in society. The *kyrios* controlled legal matters, contracts, and representation in court, ensuring that women's affairs aligned with patriarchal norms (Blundell, 1995, p. 114). That is how women's identities were defined by men, and they were excluded from public life.

In Greek society, women were expected to remain faithful, while men could freely engage with prostitutes and lovers, highlighting the otherness of women. A woman's infidelity was seen as a serious crime, leading to severe consequences such as exclusion from public religious ceremonies, and husbands could even kill their wives' lovers without legal repercussions. This unequal treatment of women reflected the societal norms of the time. This intersection of gender and class further limited women's autonomy, as their roles were tied to domestic responsibilities and childbirth, keeping them from any meaningful public or intellectual participation (Seitkasimova, 2020, p. 52). The economic system also marginalized women, as they had no ownership rights. While they possessed personal items like jewellery and furniture, real property was controlled by their male relatives. The dowry was a woman's most valuable asset, yet even this was managed by her husband, further stripping her of financial independence. However, the value of a woman who married with a good dowry was a little higher because the man had a responsibility towards his wife's father, who was also a man (Blundell, 1995, pp. 114-115).

⁷ For detailed information, see, among others, Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980; Cixous, Hélène. "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." Rpt. in *The Feminist Reader*. 2nd ed. Eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997. 91-103; and de Beauvoir, Simone. "Introduction." *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. Jonathan Cape, 1956. 13-32.

Marriage was another sphere where women were othered. Marriages were arranged by fathers, often at an early age, with cousin marriages being common. In cases where a man lacked a biological heir, he could adopt a son and arrange his daughter's marriage to this heir to maintain family wealth. Besides that, in marriages, the expectation of female fidelity contrasted starkly with the freedom granted to men. While men engaged freely with concubines and prostitutes, a woman accused of adultery faced severe consequences. A husband had the right to kill his wife's lover to protect his honour. The institutionalized control over women extended to divorce, where a woman's old guardian had the authority to annul her marriage. Thus, a woman's autonomy was virtually non-existent, as her life choices remained in the hands of male relatives (Harrison, 1968, pp. 21-32). Thus, as S. Georgia Nugent discusses, although Greek women are not defined as exiles in the political sense, their exile is inevitable in the social context (1993, p. 313).

What is more, in ancient Greece, when a woman moved from her father's house to her husband's house after marriage, she moved physically and metaphysically. Greek society viewed each family as an independent unit. When a woman moved from one family to another through marriage, she was not fully accepted as a member of her new family. This situation always positions her as a partial stranger (*xenos*), beckoning her otherness again. This situation of "alienation" is also evident in Greek literature. In Euripides's *Alcestis*, for example, Alcestis sacrifices herself for her husband Admetus, Admetus ignores her death and tells Heracles that the deceased is only a "stranger": "A stranger born; yet near and dear to us" (1894, line 29). This similarity between women and strangers in Greek society is also seen in marriage rituals. The acceptance of a stranger into a home sometimes included a ceremony similar to marriage ceremonies. These examples show that the institution of marriage was a kind of metaphorical exile for women and that women were perceived as strangers even within their own families (Nugent, 1993, pp. 313-314). This exile of otherness is portrayed strikingly by Euripides through Medea, who has to live in a trap of marriage in a foreign land.

A Woman after Recognition: Euripides' Medea as The "Other" of Man and Society

In 431 BC, Euripides' *Medea* was performed in a competition and won third place, but it left a great impression on the Athens audience. Medea is a refugee, a princess insulted by her husband, the murderer of her own children, and a woman facing exile. Knox emphasizes that Medea is not just the heroine of an individual revenge story but also represents a larger, universal concept of human nature. Beyond being a woman who has been wronged and took revenge, Medea becomes a powerful and enduring archetype. She is not just a character on stage, but a representative of a larger human condition, especially the injustice and search for identity that women are subjected to (1977, pp. 193-194, 209).

The foreign princess from Colchis, Medea, betrayed her father and nation by previously assisting Jason after falling in love with him. After that, Medea was compelled to leave her nation to go to Greece, where Jason was born. Positioned as an exile both physically and emotionally, Medea is separated from her homeland and family and excluded from the communities she belongs to. This situation makes her sense of belonging and identity uncertain and fragile. Euripides adds depth to Medea's character by presenting her as an "exile" not only because she is away from home, but also because her ties to society and family are constantly questioned (Nugent, 1993, p. 321). Medea and Jason eventually arrived as refugees in Corinth, where Jason intended to wed King Creon's daughter to better his own circumstances by siding with the ruling family. This would betray Medea and break his vows to her. Jason's disregard for the duties of familial *philia*, which is regarded as the strongest human friendship in both Greek

philosophical ethics and the heroic moral outlook, is the exact reason Medea feels degraded and seriously harmed (Sezer, 2015, pp. 215-216). That is why Medea speaks out against a system that demands women submit to men. This aspect of resistance plays a significant role in her psychological problems, which ultimately lead her to do the horrific act of killing her own children. Medea would rather kill Jason's new bride and her own children and then celebrate her moment of vengeance. She takes pleasure in witnessing Jason's suffering and views it as a personal victory (Menelaou, 2021, pp. 117-118).

To Nugent, every wife in Greek society finds herself as a foreigner, far from her home, and raped, either literally or figuratively, at her father's home. Medea is an extreme instance that represents this plight, even if this is a typical state for Greek women (1993, p. 316). Medea can be interpreted not only in terms of women's rights or the female roles of her time but also in terms of her representation of the ethnic and cultural Other. Medea's acceptance as a foreigner in Greek territory, as well as her close attachment to her own origins, make her a socially excluded figure. Nimis states that Medea's being a foreigner coming from a different place and her opposition to the established cultural norms in her story create a figure that contradicts the concept of "autochthonous" in Greek society. To Nimis, Medea's personal identity shows how the boundaries between the native and the foreign are blurred and how this conflict challenges the social structure. In this context, Medea's story is not only an individual tragedy, but also a dramatic example in which social identities and belonging are questioned (2007, pp. 397-401).

In ancient Greek society, a foreigner had no official rights when he was away from his city and family. This situation was especially dangerous for women because their security was usually provided by their families or spouses. When Medea arrived in Corinth, she was both betrayed by Jason and ostracized by society, making her defenceless. Thus, Medea is portrayed not only as a betrayed woman, but also as a homeless (*apolis*), unprotected, and deprived foreigner. Her helplessness increases the dramatic power of the play and allows Euripides to criticize the fragile position of women and foreigners in society. The empathy that the Corinthian women feel towards the injustices that Medea experiences is also a part of this social criticism (Sezer, 2015, p. 216-217). Their solidarity with Medea shows that the play is not only a story of individual revenge, but also a text that questions the injustices of the male-dominated society that othered women. As pointed out by Kasimis, Medea's status as a refugee is shaped by gender, and her exile as a woman is no coincidence (2020, p. 395).

Medea is both the Other to the man and the Other within the society she inhabits, and this dual othered position has made her a significant figure in the intersection of women's and identity studies. In contrast to Jason, a man, Medea is positioned as the "Other" and pursues identity, equality, and freedom. Right at the beginning of the play, she is presented as a woman whose fate is sealed by men as part of a chain of events that begins with the voyage of the Argo, not as an agent of her own will, but as a woman who follows Jason, an exile who aims to satisfy her husband in whatever she does:

You sailed from your father's home
with maddened heart between the double rocks of the sea
and you live on foreign soil,
abandoned, with no man in your marriage bed,
poor woman, now an exile from this land
you are driven away without rights. (lines 432-436)

Jason is at the centre, while Medea is cast as the "Other" to his journey and merely exists to fulfil Jason's

needs. Despite her sacrifice, Medea, betrayed by her husband, is left completely helpless and even wants to die:

But for me this unexpected disaster
has wrecked my life. I am cast adrift. I have lost
all pleasure in living and I want to die, my friends.
The man who was everything to me, try to understand this. (lines 224-227)

Medea's screams are, in fact, the cries of a woman wronged, deceived, and abandoned by a man. As a woman who defines herself through her intelligence and determination, Medea cannot reconcile her nature with having become so deeply attached to a man. As Jyotika Elhance notes, although Medea possesses the heroic qualities that Greek society praises in men, these very traits are disparaged when seen in a woman (2024, p. 59). This double standard intensifies both Medea's inner turmoil and the way society positions her as the "Other." Her plea for death is not only a cry of despair but also an expression of the anger that stems from having betrayed her own identity. The scene in which Medea steps out of her house and addresses the female chorus for the first time reveals, to both the audience and the characters, that she is not merely an angry wife, but also the voice of all women within society:

But the man, when he is bored with things at home
he can go out to ease the weariness of his heart.
But we have just one person to look to.
They say that we live a life free of danger
at home while they face battle with the spear.
How wrong they are. I would rather stand three times
in the line of battle than once bear a child. (lines 244-250)

In her reasoned speech, Medea not only speaks of her own otherness but also describes the unjust system that all women are subjected to. She clearly states that women are the most wretched of all rational beings and emphasizes that they are forced into marriage through a costly process, almost as if purchasing a man. Marriage, for a woman, results in submission to a man who has absolute control over her body. Medea compares her husband to a master. For women, marrying a good man is a matter of luck; if they marry a bad one, divorce is met with shame, while a man, when unhappy, can leave and start a new life. However, the woman remains bound to her husband. Even more striking is Medea's assertion that giving birth requires more courage than going to war, laying bare the burdens of womanhood. Such biological processes are often used as excuses to exclude women from public life and restrict their freedom. As Bhabha has pointed out, the process of othering is carried out by focusing on the differences within marginalized groups (1983, pp. 23-24), and this division has been applied to women and men, with childbirth and menstruation viewed as major taboos, presenting significant challenges for women. In this sense, womanhood and having children are seen as weaknesses that differentiate women from men, yet, as Medea states in her speech, they require more strength and effort than going to war, which men consider a skill. Van Zyl Smith refers to this speech as "one of the most famous feminist statements in ancient literature," highlighting that Medea's words shed light on the inequality women have faced throughout the ages (2002, p. 104) alongside their reflection upon women's otherness.

When we examine Medea's speech in light of the philosophical fundamentals in de Beauvoir's *The*

Second Sex, Medea's voice also speaks to the historical systematic othering of women. According to Beauvoir, societies have always been constructed in a patriarchal manner, with men viewing women not as subjects but as the absolute "Other." Whenever women have been associated with fertility, nature, or divinity, they have been pushed outside the category of humanity, remaining not as "subjects" but as "objects" (1956, p. 96). While men establish social bonds among themselves, women have served as intermediaries in these relationships, a kind of "commodity." In this sense, Medea reflects both an ordinary woman oppressed within this system and an othered object who rises against this oppression.

Medea's speech also represents the Athenian women of her time and societal expectations, which enables Medea as an icon of womanhood if she follows them despite her otherness: "And for this you have made me an icon/of Greek womanhood: I have in you a wonderful/husband and faithful to me — oh, the pity of it/if I must go into exile, cast out of this country/without friends, a lonely mother with two lonely children," (508-512). The fact that women had no rights within marriage, their physical and social mobility was severely restricted, and their relationships with the outside world were mediated through their husbands, critiques the societal othering at the heart of the play. Once a woman falls under the protection of her husband, she is condemned to a life limited by him, while the man enjoys the freedom to establish new relationships in the outside world (Barlow, 1989, p. 159). However, the key difference that sets Medea apart from other women is her unwillingness to keep quiet in the face of injustice and the open display of her reaction. Upon Medea's uncommon reaction, Jason offers her money and humiliates her womanhood when she rejects it:

I will not carry on this quarrel any longer.
 But if you want to take me up on my offer
 of money for the children or your own exile
 say so. I am ready to be generous to you
 and to send letters to friends abroad who will take care of you.
 And you are a fool, if you refuse my offer, woman.
 Put aside your venom and you might get somewhere. (lines 608- 614)

Through Medea, Jason insults all women by calling her a "woman" rather than by her name, linking feminine individuality to venom, and characterizing womanhood as stupid and narrow-minded. Medea, yet, never stays mute in the face of these insulting words. As Barlow notes, Medea is not simply someone who recognizes she has been wronged; she is a figure who analyses the structural causes of this injustice, can assess the behaviour of those around her, and make strategic decisions. In this way, she not only responds emotionally but also questions her societal role (1989, p. 160) assigned to her with an etiquette of otherness. Unlike, for instance, Sophocles' Deianeira, who silently submits to her husband's betrayal, Medea rejects the system itself, in a way, the system of othering. Then, Medea highlights not only her personal tragedy but also the historical oppression and othering of women. Through this character, Euripides not only gives women a voice but also critiques the moral decay of the patriarchal order. This awareness, culminating in Medea's words, is perhaps one of the most powerful declarations by a woman in ancient literature: "When wronged, when betrayed in love, there is nothing more bloodthirsty than a woman's heart" (*Medea*, Lines 264-265). This statement implies that a woman's rage can transform into a rebellion against patriarchy, which underestimates women. This underestimation is sealed by Jason's following words:

These things I approve of, woman, and I do not blame you for the past.

It is natural for the female of the species to give way to passions
when a husband takes on another marriage. (lines 907- 909)

But why, you foolish woman, do you deprive yourself of these?
Do you think the king's house is in need of dresses
or gold? Keep them. Don't give them away.
If my wife has any respect for me at all
she prefers me to gold, I am certain. (lines 959-963)

In these striking lines, Jason's words reflect the societal attitude towards women. His calling Medea a fool, his dismissive attitude towards women's emotional responses, and his blaming them for greed represent both individual and structural misogyny. Jason's words are not only directed at Medea but also contain derogatory language aimed at all women. This positions Medea not just as a woman betrayed in a personal sense, but also as an ordinary woman othered because of her gender. The woman-hating expressed in this scene is not just an individual perspective but also reflects the general perspective towards women at that time. For example, biological reductionist approaches, such as Aristotle's definition of women as "incomplete men," legitimized the secondary position of women in the social and political spheres (Elhance, 2024, p. 55). Thereby, both mythology and philosophy positioned women as "the Other" in both societal and existential terms; the belief that womanhood is incomplete, disordered, and passive compared to manhood facilitated the marginalization of characters like Medea. In this context, Medea is fighting not only Jason's betrayal but also the entire structure built by a male-centred society othering women. Jason's words above represent a world in which both the biological and emotional othering of women, while Medea's response becomes a rebellion against the roots of this othering.

The scene where Medea confronts Jason reinforces the play's critique of a male-dominated society othering woman. Jason's arrogant and dismissive tone confirms the insensitive and oppressive attitudes towards women that Medea outlined in her earlier speech. In this scene, Medea not only demonstrates her ability to use the rhetorical tools of the male-dominated world but also transcends gender boundaries by mastering them. Jason belittles Medea's justified anger to invalidate her personal struggle, showing an openly misogynistic attitude. This explains why the Chorus continues to support Medea, as they still view her as a wronged woman. However, when Medea's plan, who is "emotionally torn" (Cairns, 2021, p. 8), to kill her children is revealed, the Chorus realizes that she is not an ordinary woman and tries to stop her from carrying out this unnatural act (van Zyl Smith, 2002, p. 105). This moment marks a turning point, showing that Medea has lost her common ground with other women and has crossed the boundaries of femininity as defined by society, and rejects her otherness. Medea is no longer simply the Other to men, but a unique and dangerous figure who transcends the concept of womanhood itself. At this point, her identity as the "Other" becomes more complex, as she is now positioned outside both society and her fellow women.

In the later dialogues, Jason offers financial support to Medea on the condition that she remains calm, but this offer is not truly motivated by concern for her well-being. Rather, Jason frames his offer as an act of generosity, yet it clearly masks his desire to maintain social order and personal reputation, revealing once again the manipulative dynamics at the core of their relationship. Jason's so-called generous offer to Medea, in fact, reflects a widespread patriarchal belief that a woman's fundamental needs can be satisfied solely through material support. According to this perspective, once a woman is

financially secure, she is presumed to need nothing more, because women are not considered developed beings capable of having deeper social needs, or of imagining concepts such as identity or self-respect. Jason dismisses Medea's rage as "madness," belittling her emotional world and cognitive competence. As Judith Butler points out, the conditions for being socially recognized as "human" are variable, and the norms that grant humanity to one group often exclude another from that same status (2004, p. 2). Medea, by virtue of being a woman and a "barbarian," falls outside this threshold of recognition. Euripides constructs Medea's identity not only as a mother or a wife, but also as an individual who wants to be recognized and to exist; yet this individuality is constantly under threat within the boundaries drawn by men, which is given in Medea's words to the utmost patriarch, Zeus, the cruel ruler of goddesses:

[Aah!] Oh Zeus and Earth and Light
Hurl your fiery bolt of lightning straight through
my skull. What use is life to me?
feu, feu! [Aah, aah.] Let me die and leave
this life I hate. (lines 143-147)

Medea's revenge is not only an individual reckoning but also a challenge to patriarchal social norms that other women. Euripides associates this act of revenge with a violence far beyond the societal expectations of Greek women. This expresses her deviation from the socially accepted natural identity of women and turns her into the Other, a figure excluded by society. This elevates her beyond a mere avenger, pushing her far beyond the boundaries that society would accept. Medea's revenge becomes an act that completely reshapes the woman's maternal role and social identity. As Foley points out, this act is also a reflection of her rejection of this identity. Euripides highlights Medea's departure from society's "ideal" understanding of motherhood, emphasizing her exclusion and marginalization, and reveals how fragile and susceptible to exclusion the maternal role that defines a woman's social identity really is (1989, p. 66).

Jason's supposed virtuous stance is, indeed, a patriarchal strategy aimed at silencing and suppressing both women and foreigners. Edith Hall explains the impact of Medea's "barbarian" identity on the Greek audience. She argues that Athenians defined themselves as a democratic and egalitarian society, while "barbarians" were seen as despotic, hierarchical, and culturally inferior (1989, p. 2). In this context, Medea's presence on stage becomes not only an individual but a political and cultural threat. Medea appears as a figure who challenges both the Greek male order and societal norms. As Kekis states, this leads Athenian audiences to approach Medea with scepticism and distance, as they witness a barbarian woman criticizing the Greek value system on stage (2010, pp. 1-2). Thus, understanding Medea's actions requires considering not only her personal desire for revenge but also the survival struggle of a figure excluded by society. Medea's act turns her into a monster in the eyes of Jason:

Damn you. Now I see it, I didn't understand it then,
when I brought you, so hideous a monster, into Greece,
from your home and that barbarous land,
betrayed of your father and the country that reared you.
The gods have hurled you as an avenging spirit against me.
For you killed your brother at the hearth
and then boarded the beautiful ship Argo.

That is where you started. But after marrying
 me and bearing my children,
 because of the marriage bed you killed them.
 There is no Greek woman who would have dared
 such deeds, any of whom I could have married, but instead
 chose you, a marriage tie that has ruined me,
 a lioness, not a woman, with a temper
 more savage than Tyrrhenian Scylla.
 But not even ten thousand curses could
 sting you. Such boldness is in you.
 Go, you depraved murderer of your children. (lines 1328-1345)

In this scene, likening Medea to a lioness and a monster, Jason once again turns Medea into "Other". In fact, otherness is mostly examined in terms of monsters and monstrosity, particularly in the Middle Ages, where monsters and beasts are othered along with Jews, Saracens, lepers, and pagans in relation to monster studies (Yıldız, 2019a, "The Monsters of Geoffrey Chaucer", p. 129).⁸ In this sense, Medea's being othered is once again sealed through an animal imagery dating back to the Middle Ages. Likewise, to C. A. E. Luschnig, Medea "was metamorphosed into something inhuman" (2007, p. ix). Calling her a monster, Jason portrays Medea not only as a mother who has killed her children but also as a morally corrupt and inhuman being, referencing her barbarian past and foreign origins. In Jason's accusations, there is a deeper societal judgment in which Medea's crimes are intertwined with her foreign identity, marking her as a cultural "Other." As Edith Hall points out, ancient Greek tragedies often revised the origins of mythological figures, associating them with "barbarian" peoples. Medea's portrayal as a Colchian woman is part of this dramatic strategy. According to Hall, such ethnic transformations allowed audiences to categorize characters into certain moral patterns easily: Trojans were made Phrygians, and Medea was made a Colchian (1989, p. 103), an Other. What is more, to Jason, no Greek woman would dare to do what Medea did; Medea's act removes her from her icon of Greek womanhood status and transforms her into an atypical Greek woman. Jason is unfamiliar with this atypical woman, an active woman who demands her rights and refuses to accept being "other." Jason describes this unfamiliar woman as a monster who is more savage and dangerous than even Scylla, the legendary, man-eating monster in Greek mythology. Similarly, to Luschnig,

The idea of Medea as a perfect woman is disturbing. For the Athenian man in Euripides' time, an ideal wife is one who tends her husband's house and slaves and produces heirs. The less talked about she is the better. She makes no arrangements or contracts for herself. She has no property except her dowry. She keeps basically to the house and women's affairs, attending to life's transitions, lying out the dead, perhaps attending births among women in her family, participating in ritual life with other women of the community. (2007, p.8)

Eventually, Medea becomes a figure who can no longer be accepted by any home or country; she no longer belongs to any community. She is positioned outside Greek society due to both her gender and her ethnic identity, and she has already been exiled from her former place of residence. Here, exile represents more than a spatial displacement; it symbolizes Medea's complete exclusion from the Greek social and political order. Her othering is therefore multi-layered: she is suppressed as a woman and

⁸ For detailed information on the relationship between monstrosity and otherness, see, Cohen, J. J. (1996). *Monster culture* (Seven theses). J. Cohen (Ed.), *Monster theory: Reading culture*, Minneapolis (pp. 3-25) and Cohen, J. J. (1999). *Of giants: Sex, monsters, and the middle ages*. Minneapolis.

alienated as a so-called barbarian. Within this tragic framework, Euripides turns Medea into the voice of both women and foreigners, prompting a critical reflection on patriarchal and ethnocentric structures. At the same time, this exclusion drives her into profound isolation; with the collapse of her home, she is left entirely alone. Therefore, she is no longer a wife or a daughter; this pushes her into an othered position of without any certain identity.

Conclusion

From the earliest civilizations to today, the search for identity has been a difficult journey for women. In the societies they lived in, women were often excluded either because of their biological features or their assumed characteristics. This caused them to become “the Other” next to men. Sometimes, reasons such as giving birth and menstruating, and sometimes reasons attributed to women by society, such as being too emotional and not being intelligent enough, have caused women to be kept in the background and deprived of many rights. But beyond legal rights, the social pressure women faced was a much more exhausting experience. Often, they became invisible Others, and their thoughts and wishes were ignored, which finds expression in de Beauvoir's famous lines: “If I want to define myself, I first have to say, ‘I am a woman’; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth. A man never begins by positing himself as an individual of a certain sex: that he is a man is obvious” (1956, p. 5). Defined under the protection of a father or husband, and valued by whether they had children, women lost their identity in the patriarchal system.

In Ancient Greece, the situation was not much different. Even though it was one of the most renowned civilizations known for democracy, women were also oppressed at that time. They were denied many legal rights and locked inside their homes, treated like objects to serve men. Mythological stories and dramas, which had a significant impact on the ancient Greek period, present us with many stories and characters to support this subordination. Euripides' *Medea* is an example in this context. Although Medea had noble blood, her story represented the women of her time and was largely examined through a lens of feminism and gender roles. In fact, Medea, a woman betrayed and humiliated by her husband and exiled several times, was subjected to a multi-layered othering. Jason's betrayal was already hard enough for her as a woman left completely alone, and on top of that, being forced to leave society made her situation even harder. Meanwhile, she was blamed by her husband for being emotional and irrational. Her life had been shaped around Jason's desires, which destroyed her personal identity and strengthened her otherness. In her famous speech to the women of Corinth, Medea talks about how hard a woman's life is and how women are actually treated as the “Other” of men. At the same time, Medea has been constantly exiled. In addition to being a woman, living in a foreign society places many burdens on her, such as acceptance and a sense of belonging. Medea, hence, experiences a deeply layered otherness: the “Other” of man and the “Other” of society, a monster, who asks for acknowledgment and a non-othered identity against de Beauvoir's well-received diagnosis of gender issue “[h]e is the Absolute. She is the Other” (p. 6).

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