

THE UNFREE FEMALE WORKFORCE OF THE ANCIENT HOUSEHOLD. SUBJECTS AND SILENCE.

‘‘It is manifest therefore that there are cases of people of whom some are freemen and the others slaves by nature, and for these slavery is an institution both expedient and just.’’ Arist. Pol .1.1255a.

Aristotle famous declaration although reflecting 4th century BC Athens view on slavery that some people by nature had a servile status, is demonstrated already in the early Homeric epos. The setting for inequality is the palace, the private space of the aristocratic married couple Penelope and Odysseys and their son Telemachus. The text describes unequal relations constructed through status, gender, age, ethnicity and sexuality with the unfree workforce dominated by the superior male and female owners. The hierarchical structure of the private space repeated throughout the Greco-Roman society irrespective of cultural or chronological context.

Within the *oikos* the hierarchical relations are confined not only to master and slave but also within the group of unfree certain individuals could by the master, due to their good and obedient behavior, be better treated than their fellow humans. An interesting passage demonstrating existing structural relationships based on class, status, age, gender and ethnicity engendering inequalities within an *oikos* is for example the unfree old nurse Eurycleia commanded by Telemachus who in his turn was told by his father to call for the female slave. We are told that in turn Eurycleia, was in charge over the female servants. (Od 22.390ff). She was in command of fifty women servants who according to Eurycleia were taught the normative duties of unfree women, ‘to card the wool and bear the lot of slaves’. Some of them had, however, made shameful deeds and they were to be punished as, according to Telemachus, these females through their behaviour had poured reproaches on him and his mother, ‘as they continually slept with the suitors’ and also that the death of these females should not be clean (22.420ff). Later these women were executed through hanging. The fate of the unfree women within the elite household in the hands of a hegemonic masculinity produced through the homosocial group defined through the aristocracy, here epitomized through Odysseys and Telemachus as males and heads of the household. Later in the

Classical period the hierarchical order of relations created through class and status is visualized in the *Oeconomicus*, by Xenophon. A man is by his master trained as the bailiff of the household and besides being capable of taking charge of the estate when the husband was away he must learn how to rule the other unfree labour force. Ischomachus, the master, is also very clear on how to train slaves as an effective way to teach obedience is to train them as wild animal (XIII.8-9). Also sexuality of the unfree was in the control of the master, as was his wife and her sexuality (IX. 5). Honest behaviour and justice is of importance and Ischomachus learn the servants to behave according to the ancient laws of Draco and Solon (XIV. 2-7).

The unfree, the marginalized subjects, are seldom focused in the materiality of the past. The following paper will approach, mainly, the unfree female household workforce of specifically the ancient Greek society with the purpose to situate them as social identities in the private setting of the ancient society. What particular challenges were they prone to due to their intersecting identities and by whom in their lived spatial context? This paper goes on to specifically explore the correspondence between domestic violence conducted due to the socially disadvantaged situation and exposedness of the unfree female workforce and their social identity constructed on gender, age, sexuality and ethnicity. The issue on domestic violence and the situating of domestic female workers will draw on comparison with studies with a contemporary perspective.

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