

PART I

Autochthony Trouble

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Excerpt
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CHAPTER I

The Metic in and out of Theory

The doubt in these cases is, not who is, but whether he who is a citizen ought to be one; and there will still be a further doubt, whether he who ought not to be a citizen, is one in fact, for what ought not to be is what is false.

– Aristotle, *Politics* 1275b38–1276a2¹

The desire to reframe the familiar dilemmas of democratic life has often led modern readers to seek inspiration in the politics and thought of classical Athens. Political theorists in particular have found conceptual resources in Athenian texts for opening new spaces of argumentation and unsettling staid lines of criticism. The practice of treating works of Athenian philosophy and literature as investigations into various orders of democratic rule – institutions, activity, discourse – and proposing that these texts speak, at least allegorically, to problems of modern democratic politics is so commonplace as to raise suspicions about the difficult questions that remain assiduously overlooked in this varied enterprise. How democracy orders its immigrants is one of these questions. The significance of this hierarchical relation to some Athenian thinkers and the curious reluctance by theoretically minded critics to see this dynamic as a preoccupation for classical theorists of democracy are the provocations for this book. Historians have long acknowledged the ubiquity of resident foreigners in the life of the Athenian polis. Yet critics have been reluctant to recognize, let alone analyze, the immigrant as an object of political or theoretical concern for Athenian thought.

This book argues that immigration (*metoikia*) is a critical matter of inquiry in the political thought of classical Athens. My objective is not to replicate historical research on metics (*metoikoi*) – although that scholarship informs the following discussion – but to engage the figure of the metic as a site of discursive and political theoretical meaning. I contend

¹ Translations of Aristotle's *Politics* are by Benjamin Jowett (Aristotle 1996) unless otherwise noted.

that the metic dimension of Athenian membership politics is a persistently overlooked interpretive field for reading Athenian texts and their arguments about the meanings and practices of democratic citizenship. My view is that the restoration of the metic as an interpretive lens unleashes new and unexpected critical energy from Athenian political thought: the recovery of the metic animates a strain of criticism in which Athenian thinkers are wrestling deeply with democracy's relation to nativism and its ambiguous, even paradoxical effects.

It is puzzling that narratives of the history of political thought tend to render Athenian texts irrelevant to matters of immigration even in their own space and time. For decades, scholars have been returning to the thought of classical Athens to analyze its engagements with political exclusion. Figurations of the marginal, in particular women, slaves, and barbarians, many have argued, are central to the construction of meaning in Athenian texts, where they function not simply to underscore the democracy's hierarchical order of inclusion but also to call into question that order's naturalness and inevitability.² The metic represents a striking exception to this way of reading: from Socrates' hosts in the *Republic* to Aristotle himself, the general presumption is that this frontier figure is somehow uninteresting or uncontroversial to the otherwise wide-ranging examinations of political difference readers find in Athenian texts.³ Unlike other categories (woman, slave, foreigner), the metic appears to function simply empirically to affirm a reality about the city's political hierarchies rather than (also) symbolically to generate new insights into them.

What might it mean that in spite of a long-standing turn to alterity across the humanities and social sciences, one figure of particular and utmost significance for the definition of Athenian citizenship has generally failed to incite political theoretical interest in its own right? This question guides much of the proceeding study. I wager that the metic's unique and precarious proximity to the citizen makes its signification easy, if not strategically useful, to overlook and all the more crucial to animate. To attend to figurations of *metoikia* in texts by Euripides, Plato, and Demosthenes, my primary interlocutors in this book, is to examine not only the unstable place of the metic in polis life but also the fraught and shifting meaning of the democratic citizen itself.

² Vidal-Naquet 1986: 159–224; E. Hall 1989; Saxonhouse 1992; Loraux 1993; Zeitlin 1996; Foley 2001; duBois 2003.

³ See, for example, Ober (1998: 303), who concludes, "Despite whatever discomforts Aristotle may have felt regarding his own metic status in Athens, this category of persons was not particularly troublesome from the point of view of his political theory."

After the Persian Wars, thousands of people from other parts of Greece and the Mediterranean sought residence in Athens.⁴ Migrants had been settling in the polis for years, but in the first half of the fifth century BCE, the city's economic growth, enabled by its expansion of the port of Piraeus, spurred unprecedented immigration to Attica not only from other Hellenic cities but also from places like Syria, Lydia, and Thrace.⁵ Sometime in this period, the polis established *metoikia* as a formal institution for regulating immigrant membership and restricting the participation of immigrants in civic life.⁶ The polis classified resident foreigners, manumitted slaves, and their Athenian-born children as *metoikoi*,⁷ meaning that, as a category of standing, the metic was not coterminous with the immigrant, as I elaborate.⁸ Athens disqualified persons from acquiring citizen status, generation after generation, on the basis of

⁴ Given the increase in the citizen population in this period, some historians have argued that many immigrants were made citizens. On the “nonnatural” growth of the citizenry, see Patterson 1981: 70. Watson (2010: 260–264) provides an overview of the historical debates on the issue.

⁵ Bakewell (2013: 19) relays that “the expansion” of Piraeus encouraged immigration. Xenophon (*Por.* 2.3) refers to metics as Lydians, Phrygians, and Syrians and other “*barbaroi*.” The Athenian cult of Bendis, a Thracian goddess, discussed in Chapter 3, attests to the presence of Thracian metics.

⁶ Inscriptions make earlier (sixth-century) reference to metics but invoke the term in a nontechnical sense, according to Whitehead (1977: 27–68, esp. 64n44). It is difficult to say precisely when *metoikia* emerged as a juridical status, but most historians believe it was before 460 BCE. Bakewell (2013: 20) wagers that the metic emerged as a legal category sometime between the mid-470s and 460. By contrast, Watson argues that Athenians were concerned about immigrants in those years but did not create a formal metic status until around 450, when the polis “first took an interest in restricting who might become a citizen” (2010: 271, 260). The emergence of the metic as a distinct formal status would, on Watson’s view, coincide roughly with the passage of Pericles’ Citizenship Law, which I discuss later on in the chapter. This claim would also fit with the view of Patterson (1981: 134), who sees the hardening of a metic membership category as one of the city’s efforts to sharpen the citizen’s definition. For an exploration of how Athens encouraged immigration while passing legislation to make citizenship more exclusive, see Irwin 2016.

⁷ Whitehead (1986: 81) argues that individual demes were “required to take formal note of any immigrants who chose to settle within their particular bailiwicks – just as the polis itself had now resolved to monitor the immigrant community as a whole – and to *begin* to devise a broad balance between rights for them and obligations upon them.” Each deme, he adds, would have been free to decide the extent to which it would note its metic residents. “Within each deme,” he adds, “the position of metics may well have varied tremendously” (Whitehead 1986: 84).

⁸ Whitehead (1977: 109) points out that many non-Hellenic metics were freed slaves but argues that the precise breakdown of the metic population into freeborn and freed is impossible to know with certainty. “On present *data* and methods,” he adds, “we cannot proceed much beyond the painfully obvious statement that metics of non-Hellenic origin were living in Athens throughout the classical period. At no time can proportions be accurately estimated” because *metoikia* status was applied to Hellenic and “barbarian” metics alike (1977: 112, 116). Akrigg (2015: 164–165), however, argues that many metics were former slaves; he criticizes Whitehead’s account for suggesting that most metics were economic migrants and downplaying the association of metics with servility. Whether many or most metics were former slaves, the possibility that a metic could fall (back) into slavery made it easy to code *metoikia*, or some metic ways of living and working, as servile. On the last point, see Chapter 6.

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blood, not place of birth.⁹ While Athenians could naturalize metics or grant them such special privileges as the freedom to own land or buildings in Attica (*enktesis*) or an exemption from the metic tax (*metoikion*), cases of metic enfranchisement were rare because strictly honorific. As David Whitehead observes, “the history of naturalization in classical Athens excludes almost completely the ordinary *metoikos*.”¹⁰ Only a decree by the polis could turn a metic into a citizen, usually as a reward for an especially meritorious act, such as giving generous financial support to the city’s institutions.¹¹

Yet in spite of the legal limits on their political participation, metics enjoyed a practice of freedom and engaged in Athenian civic life in ways that not only distinguished them from slaves but also linked them to aspects of citizen activity that enabled their integration, potential prosperity, political influence, and material benefits to the city.¹² At the start of the Peloponnesian War, metics may have constituted 40 percent of the Athenian hoplite force.¹³ Around a century later, Xenophon (*Por.* 2.1) argued that metics were an excellent but underutilized source of revenue for the newly restored democracy. Improving metics’ social conditions, he insisted, would encourage more metic settlement and revitalize the Athenian economy.¹⁴

⁹ The earliest extant definition of the metic belongs to Aristophanes of Byzantium (fr. 38), a Hellenistic fragment that is therefore a retrodiction. For a thorough discussion of the lived experience and privileges, restrictions, and responsibilities of the metic, see Clerc 1893 and Whitehead 1977: ch. 3, which also provides a critical overview of earlier scholarship on the metic. See also Kamen 2013: ch. 4, and Adak 2003. Kennedy 2014 provides an historical study of metic women in particular.

¹⁰ Whitehead 1977: 153.

¹¹ On citizenship decrees, see Whitehead (1977: 69, 153–159) and Rhodes and Osborne 2003. In one widely discussed case, the freed slave Pasion, who grew rich as a metic from the shield factory he owned, eventually acquired citizenship in the late fourth century because he had made a large donation to the city’s public institutions. For details on Pasion, see Trevett 1992: 1–49. Aspects of Pasion’s life are discussed in Isoc. 17 and Dem. 36 in particular.

¹² There was therefore great heterogeneity within the metic population. Immigrants belonged to every socioeconomic stratum and possessed a range of reasons for coming to or staying (to work) in the city (Whitehead 1977: 18). Nevertheless, Whitehead (1977: 6–7) makes a persuasive case for concluding that the predominant connotation of *metoikos* is “home-changer” and suggests that, whatever the metic’s eventual technical scope, the act of immigrating is crucial to the term’s original meaning. Foreigners who did not intend to stay in Athens for a long period of time, however, could still be classed as metics. This was probably especially true in the fourth century BCE, he explains, for in the fifth “there are signs that the machinery was less rigorous, so that, on average, metics may have constituted a more settled population *de facto* than they did later, when a *metoikos* might be someone merely completing his *emporion* before sailing home” (Whitehead 1977: 9–10).

¹³ Duncan-Jones bases the claim that, among the 29,000 Athenian hoplites, there existed “a force of some 12,000 metic hoplites . . . in 431” on a reading of Thucydides, which he takes to suggest a “massive metic component in the population of hoplite census at Athens” (1980: 101, 106).

¹⁴ Akrigg (2015: 163) reads the *Poroi* to suggest that Xenophon is “bothered not by a shortage of metics – but by a shortage of a particular kind, the ones who brought economic benefits to Athens.”

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When Athenian texts draw on metic characters, spaces, and activities, they are exploring the meanings and effects of these strategies of inclusion and exclusion. The works I read closely here – Euripides’ *Ion*, Plato’s *Republic*, Demosthenes’ *Against Euboulides* – stage a conflict between metics’ formal disenfranchisement and their social and economic integration as a way of exploring a deeper tension in the Athenian conception of membership: is citizenship a particular way of acting made possible by living in the polis or simply the possession of a legal status inherited by blood? If the latter, what political significance does the much-celebrated practice of Athenian citizenship actually carry in the polis?

I argue throughout the book that an exploration of the meaning of the citizen (*politēs*) in Athenian political thought must include an interrogation of the place of the metic. The blood-based distinction the polis used to distinguish citizen from metic insinuates that an unbridgeable, constitutive gap separates these two relatively free and approximate figures. Athenian thinkers draw on the metic in my view not to resecure this assertion of naturalized difference but to reveal its fragility and accentuate the political theoretical stakes that are raised by this sort of distinction. I read their engagements with the metic to suggest that in a heterogeneous, inclusive, yet hierarchal polis, the democratic demand to distinguish the citizen according to a seemingly pregiven difference like blood can generate a need for and an acute anxiety around the deciphering of membership activity as either the authentic expression or the disingenuous performance of a “natural” difference.¹⁵ Within this frame, the verifying, exposing, and proving of consanguinity risk becoming preeminent democratic activities. Thus it is to the possibility of a metic’s passing as a citizen that the recently enfranchised speaker in *Against Neaera* turns, in an ironic attempt to save himself from falling back into *metoikia* (if not slavery): within the Athenian legal system, Apollodorus strategizes, the best way to protect one’s newfound citizen status from further instability is actually to exploit the ambiguity around membership claims and portray the wife of his enemy accuser as a foreigner fraudulently exercising her own citizen privileges.

Alert to these democratic anxieties about citizen illegibility and status flux, the texts I focus on depict metics passing as citizens and citizens

¹⁵ Consider that population estimates for the middle of the fifth century suggest metics made up anywhere between 20 and 50 percent of the entire free population of Athens and in some demes may have outnumbered citizens (Stewart 1995: 588; Bakewell 2013: ch. 1).

passing as metics through acts of imitation or mimesis. I view this concern with instability not as a lament about democratic egalitarianism run amok but as the more critical insight that the possession of Athenian blood is not necessarily an adequate prerequisite for a practice of membership characterized by freedom and equality. Contrary to what the polis promises its natives, Athenian parentage neither determines nor secures a lived experience of democratic citizenship. Whether citizen or metic, political status emerges in my readings as the uncertain and precarious performance of a naturalized distinction.

In these ways, the book complicates the standard view that sees Athenian political thought as an elite tradition of writing invested primarily in criticizing the egalitarianism of the polis.¹⁶ What concerns critics of democracy is not only the polis's (wishful) erasure of socio-economic barriers to citizen rule but also its simultaneous dependence on creating new forms of exclusion through a logic of blood. When political theorists invoke Athens as an instructive model of egalitarianism, however, they typically leave this part of the democratic picture undertheorized.¹⁷ To insinuate that the polis was, with the advent of democracy, moving progressively away from a kinship order – that its forward-looking core was inclusive and de-essentializing – is not wrong, but it is misleading. The common portrayal fails to capture the extent to which the Athenian demos was, like most contemporary democratic citizenries, still a descent-based order.¹⁸ What is more, the progressive account distracts us from appreciating that Athenian thinkers do not take for granted the idealized self-conception this order presupposed. Rather than treat the exclusionary dimensions of Athenian democracy as incidental or unimportant to its symbolic politics, self-definition, and cultural power as a critical-historical example of democratic politics, this book asks readers to think about democratic inclusion and exclusion together. It presents Athenian texts as provocations for theorizing the pull of nativism in democracy, a matter of critical importance for contemporary political theory that I explore in the conclusion. The interpretations advanced in what follows suggest that nativism is not simply at odds with democracy's explicit commitments to political

¹⁶ Ober (1998: 5), for example, advances the influential argument that “formal political theorizing originated in the work of an informal, intellectual, and aristocratic community of Athenian readers and writers” who sought to show “what was wrong with ‘the power of the people.’”

¹⁷ See Chapter 5.

¹⁸ On the continued and widespread use of a blood-based criterion for contemporary membership, see Stevens 1999.

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equality and active participation but also working, paradoxically, to maintain them.

I am by training a political theorist, and this disciplinary orientation inspires the book's concerns with criticizing, diagnosing, and theorizing not only practices of political action as they are figured in Athenian texts but also modes of interpretation that have until now stood in the way of our seeing the metic as a live issue in Athenian political thought. In a sense I follow the historian Michel Clerc, who argued more than a century ago that "the history of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE can only be completely explained if one pays the greatest attention to the foreign population that was incorporated into the city" – but with an important exception.¹⁹ Unlike Clerc and the vast majority of scholars who have written on metics, I do not attempt a historical study in these pages. The book engages carefully with scholarship in ancient history and classical studies, but it does so for purposes of reading Athenian political thought anew. Indeed, one of the book's aims is to liberate the metic from its hitherto primary function as an object of historical evidence and explore its signification and political theoretical meanings in democratic Athens, in some of the city's critical tradition, and on behalf of contemporary democratic theory. My approach thus shares some of the interpretive commitments of Cornelius Castoriadis, Nicole Loraux, S. Sara Monoson, and Josiah Ober, who have variously argued that a political and theoretical analysis of Athenian democracy and its figurations in contemporaneous texts ought to attend to "the patterns of life and ideology"²⁰ – the wide range of cultural practices, discourses, and ritualized performances – that, along with the city's administrative institutions and procedures, constitute the shifting meaning of democracy for Athenians and in Athenian texts.

I engage the metic, then, primarily as a discursive site, not exclusively as a historical referent within a juridical order, to show that Athenian thinkers do not take the naturalized difference between citizens and their menacing counterparts at face value and to argue that this way of reading opens Athenian texts and some of their most established concepts to new and sometimes dramatically different political and theoretical conclusions. I pay attention not only to the metic *qua* metic in these texts but also, if not chiefly, to the dynamics, myths, idioms, and institutional practices of which this in-between figure is uniquely indicative and generative. There is

¹⁹ This is Bakewell's (2013: 7) translation of Clerc (1893: 2).

²⁰ Monoson 2000: 7. See also Goldhill 1987; Castoriadis 1997; Connor 1989; Ober 1998.

a reason for this. The politics of *metoikia* are produced symbolically and used rhetorically in ways that demand careful attention to the rhetorical dimensions of political theory as well as to the practices of law and myth making that helped make citizenship appear as an antecedent, expressive status in Athens. Textual engagements with *metoikia* frequently take the form of characterization, setting, or a way of living in the polis, where the metic may not even be mentioned as such.²¹ At times, the symbolic politics of *metoikia* circulates under the sign of exceptionalist Athenian idioms, like autochthony or good birth (*eugeneia*), or less obvious ones like mimesis, all of which, in my view, can work in contemporaneous discourse to insinuate that the metic is the naturally undeserving, inadequate, but dangerously good copy of the citizen.

When Athenian thinkers deploy these tropes, I contend, they are both calling on their established meanings and reappropriating them in ways that expose the quotidian political practices – from deme registration to kinship testimonies to accusations of fraudulent citizen activity – that conspire to maintain the artifice of “natural” democratic differences. That *metoikia* is not always named in texts that otherwise implicate or evoke metics does not restrict the power of these works to generate political theoretical meaning about this democratic dimension, nor should it hinder our ability to read for them. Engagements with the city’s membership hierarchies need not take overt, doctrinal, or prescriptive forms for us to treat them as theoretical responses to these political realities. The works of tragedy, philosophy, and oratory I read in this book may not endorse citizenship for metics or adumbrate a set of solutions to a metic “problem.” They do, however, make political theoretical arguments by rhetorical means. The potential for the metic to provoke new thought about the familiar meanings of democratic citizenship thus depends on animating this figure’s shifting, at times contradictory, and seemingly unmarked historical and discursive meanings.

It may come as little surprise, then, that the foregoing analyses of kinship, blood, and citizen performance in Athenian texts are subtly

²¹ According to Akrigg (2015: 155), sometimes individual metics “are not explicitly identified as such” in Athenian thought but, if not because, they are “attested throughout the written record, literary and epigraphic, with rarely any indication that their presence is anything but routine in all kinds of contexts.” Chapter 3’s reading of the *Republic* argues that the tendency for metics to become assimilated within the dramatic worlds of the texts they inhabit leads readers to assume mistakenly that their juridical and political difference is insignificant to the arguments at hand. Relatedly, that Euripides does not use the word *metoikos* or its cognates in the *Ion* ought not inhibit us from engaging the tragedy’s preoccupations with living as a metic in Athens. To overlook such textual concerns with *metoikia* is to discount the allegorical dimensions of Athenian political thought in favor of an interpretive strategy of literalness.