The power of the group

Group dynamics in Euripides' *Bacchae*

Research Master Thesis Classics and Ancient Civilizations
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Introduction

Research question

Whether it is a film or book, painting or theatre play: art forms have the capacity to provoke moments of reflection on the spectator's own reality. It is an equally fascinating and complicated task to imagine what such a reflection exactly entails, as there is undoubtedly individual variation in the way we process what we perceive. But it is not unreasonable to look for potential common observations: hence, when we read Euripides' *Bacchae*, it is compelling to speculate how the Athenian audience would have experienced the behaviour of the Theban women, as described by the first messenger:

αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην
ὥραν ἐκίνουν θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα,
Ἴακχον ἀθρόωι στόματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον
Βρόμιον καλοῦσαι· πᾶν δὲ συνεβάκχευ' ὄρος
καὶ θῆρες, οὐδὲν δ' ἦν ἀκίνητον δρόμωι.
κυρεῖ δ' Ἀγαυὴ πλησίον θρώισκουσ' ἐμοῦ,
κἀγὼ 'ξεπήδησ' ὡς συναρπάσαι θέλων,
λόχμην κενώσας ἔνθ' ἐκρύπτομεν δέμας.
ἡ δ' ἀνεβόησεν· Ὦ δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες,
θηρώμεθ' ἀνδρῶν τῶνδ' ὕπ'· ἀλλ' ἕπεσθέ μοι,
ἕπεσθε θύρσοις διὰ χερῶν ὡπλισμέναι. (723-733)[1]

("At the appointed time, they
started moving their thyrsus in Bacchic revelry,
with united voice calling on Iacchos, son of Zeus,
Bromios. And the whole mountain participated in their revelry,
the beasts too, and nothing remained unmoved by their course.
It happened that Agave was leaping close to me
and I jumped up, as I wanted to seize her,
leaving the ambush where I had hidden myself.
But she screamed: "My running dogs,
we are hunted by these men here. Now follow me,
follow me, armed with your thyrsoi in hand!")

When examining the possible impact of Greek tragedies on the contemporary audience, it is crucial to consider the cultural-historical framework in which the play was originally

[1] I follow in this thesis the edition of Diggle 1994 of the *Bacchae*. For all other Greek and Latin texts, I follow the Oxford Classical Text. All translations are my own.

performed. Accordingly, scholarship on Euripides' *Bacchae* has devoted considerable attention to the extent to which the play may have reflected contemporary Dionysiac religion.[2] Archaeological and literary evidence strongly suggests that the events in the *Bacchae* have little to do with the Dionysiac ritual as performed at the end of the fifth century B.C. It is, in Reitzammer's words, "unrealistic to think that Athenian women were liberated from their homes on a regular basis to worship Dionysus in the wilds in anything like the manner described in Euripides' play".[3] Maenadism, at that time, had been calmed down and channelled in the form of private thiasoi, and excessive rituals like the σπαραγμός and ὠμοφαγία seem to be fully absent from actual Dionysiac ritual.[4] In other words, it is highly unlikely that the Athenian spectator witnessing this scene and the ensuing violence against the cattle and the villagers, recognized a Dionysian cult that he knew from his own reality.

How, then, *was* the spectator invited to reflect on the unsettling behaviour of these Greek women? One answer to this question is that Euripides seems to have been responding to actual religious developments in Greece of his age. Scholars have been stressing the importance of the influx of eastern and northern mystery cults in the fifth and fourth century B.C., like the orgiastic mysteries of Sabazius.[5] Perhaps as a result of the social instability due to the Peloponnesian War, these initiation cults gained in popularity among Athenians. In our play, Dionysus emphatically comes from the east, bringing a chorus of Asian women with him. Hence, it is tempting to think that a Greek spectator may have compared the impact that Dionysus' arrival has on the city of Thebes to the impact that the mystery cults of Euripides' day had on Athens. The behaviour of the women, in other words, may have provoked the spectator to reflect on what these new cult groups were able to bring about in the city.

In this thesis, I would like to depart from the idea that the *Bacchae* was written against the background of these religious developments and to adopt a broader perspective. It will be my argument that Euripides has attempted with his play to convey more universal observations about how human beings function in the context of social groups: groups such as, but not necessarily restricted to, these new orgiastic cults. What happens when a new group arrives somewhere and attracts other members? What are the mechanisms at work in and dangers arising from these groups? And what happens to the behaviour of people who are emphatically

[2] For example, Dodds 1960, xi-xxv; Versnel 1976 (with Van Straten 1976); Henrichs 1978; Reitzammer 2017.
[3] Reitzammer 2017, 302.
[4] Versnel 1976, 21-26.
[5] Dodds 1960, xxii-xxiii; Versnel 1976, Reitzammer 2017.

not part of a group? The presentation of the Theban maenads in the passage quoted above serves to illustrate Euripides' strong focus on group dynamics. Until recently, the women were mothers, daughters, slaves and other female citizens of Thebes, but something has changed: they have now become followers of Dionysus, invoking the god 'with united voice' and sharing this collective experience with the whole mountain and all the beasts. Most significantly, while the herdsman emphatically attempts to ambush Agave only, she interprets this as an attack on the group and calls on the others for a collective response.

It is the aim of this thesis to answer the following question: how does Euripides thematize group dynamics in the *Bacchae*? The audience of the play is confronted with two groups. First, the offstage group of Theban maenads, consisting of all female citizens of Thebes, who have been sent to Mount Cithaeron by Dionysus and are celebrating him there. The second, onstage group is the chorus: the female Asian worshippers of the god. The focus of this thesis will be on the group functioning of the first group, as their group is most complex and layered: they go through a transformation in response to the god's arrival. Moreover, in terms of identity, they represent a group that stands closest to the Greek audience, facilitating an easier identification and reinforcing the idea that certain group mechanisms are also at work in them. This is not to say that the chorus does not exhibit these mechanisms. On the contrary, in some respects their behaviour may even reinforce the ideas about group functioning that arise from the Theban group. The conclusion will therefore briefly take them in account too.

Status quaestionis

Naturally, I am not the first one to recognize the importance of groups in the *Bacchae*. It has been pointed out that collectivity and communality were essential to the nature of Dionysus' cult, one psychological effect of which is "a merging of the individual consciousness in a group consciousness".[6] Podlecki has read the *Bacchae* as a poetic statement of what happens when an individual, after being a member or head of the group, suddenly finds himself opposite to the rest.[7] He has analysed the clash between Pentheus and Dionysus on the one hand as leaders of two groups that have incompatible aims, and on the other hand as two individuals not fitting into the same family and world. Oranje, most significantly, concludes his analysis of the various

[6] Dodds 1960, xx. See also the chapter on Dionysiac communality in Seaford 2006, 26-38 and Winnington-Ingram 1948, 171-179.
[7] Podlecki 1974.

audience responses to the play with a suggestion about the power of group nature of Dionysiac ecstasy, unfortunately without any further explication. He claims that Euripides, in the reality outside the theatre, "may perhaps have felt this divine power working in the group that possessed the attraction of a common attitude to life (…). But the real powers of such a group can be seen, not when they seek peace with the help of the various escapist techniques they have developed (…), but when they assert themselves and try to impose their will on someone else."[8]

None of these studies, however, has thoroughly analysed the expression of group dynamics in the play by using modern social psychological studies. These studies provide us with illuminating theories that are able to shed a new light on the behaviour of the Theban women in the *Bacchae* and their interaction with individual stage characters. Such an approach fits in the recent tendency to study Greek tragedy from a cognitive perspective. Cognitive theories, in the most general sense, strive at a better understanding of the human mind and human behaviour, encompassing several fields of study like psychology, philosophy, anthropology and neuroscience. Since tragedies present us with representations of human (or divine) characters who process information and interact in a social setting, the wide array of cognitive theories offers us useful tools to interpret and construct the meaning of these texts.

Several studies have applied a cognitive approach to Euripides' *Bacchae*, such as the investigation of the cognitive role of the thyrsus or the behaviour of Pentheus and Agave from a psychoanalytic perspective.[9] The fact that psychological readings have been very successful in scholarship on the play supports the idea that Euripides had a keen eye for the inner workings of human beings.[10] Interestingly, however, no particular cognitive study has devoted careful attention to the expression of group dynamics in the *Bacchae*, although group functioning and membership form an integral part of Euripides' play.

Theory, method and structure

For my theory, I start out from the study of Stangor 2004 for social psychological mechanisms in general. The relevant theories, ranging from social categorization to the concept of

[8] Oranje 1984, 173-174.
[9] On the cognitive role of Dionysus' and Pentheus' masks and of the thyrsus, see Chaston 2010, 179-225; for the latter also Henkes 2015. For Pentheus' behaviour, see Segal 1978, 1986. For Agave's recognition scene as psychotherapy, see Devereux 1970. Seaford 2018 studies the *Bacchae* in the context of the ancients' knowledge of the Near-Death Experience in mystic rituals.
[10] Thumiger 2007, 60.

'groupthink', will be introduced in the individual chapters with references to more specific studies. Moreover, Taylor 2006 studies the concept of 'brainwashing' as "an extreme form of social influence which uses mechanisms increasingly studied and understood by social psychologists".[11] One of the various domains Taylor 2006 looks at is that of modern religious and political cults. In fact, the phenomena she identifies as commonly found in modern cults are readily applicable to the cult as presented in the *Bacchae*.[12] The psychological mechanisms to which these modern cults groups are subject, also serve to elucidate the group functioning of the Theban maenads. Therefore, I will also occasionally refer to her study.

An important methodological point must be made here.[13] What this thesis will be doing, in part, is examining to what extent Euripides' description of certain behaviour is psychologically plausible according to modern theory. Such an approach presupposes that the human mind and certain psychological sensitivities have not drastically changed in the past millennia. But to use modern concepts, which have been developed in their own cultural-historical context, to explain what happens in the *Bacchae,* would be meaningless if we do not take into account the perspective of the ancient Greeks themselves. To give one example: the Theban women, as described in our play, would meet all the conditions to be diagnosed in modern society as brainwashed. This is a modern concept and the implications of such a diagnosis, for instance for the women's accountability, may be valid to us, but not to a Greek. I will therefore also look at how the Athenians would have interpreted several aspects of the women's group functioning, by considering the implications and connotations of the terminology of disease, madness and the imagery Euripides uses for them. In this way, we read the play in its own cultural-historical context, which, as we will see, will refine the ideas about group functioning that modern theory brings to light.

This combination is reflected in the thesis' structure, with the first two chapters devoted to modern psychological theory and the latter two to the cultural-historical perspective. The

[11] Taylor 2004, ix. The second chapter particularly deals with modern cults.
[12] These five phenomena are: a strict differentiation of leaders and followers in the group (cf. 20-22, 50-52, 608-609, 723-726); rebelliousness against established authority and learning (cf. the rebelliousness of the Theban women, Dionysus and the chorus against Pentheus); a simplistic and dualistic way of thinking, for instance in good and evil (cf. 195-196, 72-77); a utopian credo with a promise of some heavenly alternative reality (cf. the happiness as expressed by the chorus about the worship in 72-77); an often disastrous and violent ending (cf. the killing of Pentheus, although the cult itself does not end after this, with Dionysus travelling on through Greece (48-50)).
[13] I draw here upon the methodological considerations as expressed by Sluiter 2020. A similar view is expressed by Lauwers, Schwall and Opsomer 2018, who argue that a "self-aware use of contemporary psychological insights that are part of the interpretative horizon of the scholar, brings about a self-conscious dialogue between the ancient text and the modern reader (…)."

first chapter will discuss how Pentheus perceives and treats the cult and its members, and how this invites the spectator to reflect on mechanisms like social categorization, stereotypes and prejudice. Focussing on the two messenger speeches, the second chapter will examine to what extent the behaviour of the women is psychologically plausible, using Irving Janis' theory of 'groupthink', and ask how this invites the spectator to reflect on decision-making in highly cohesive groups. The third chapter takes into account Greek conceptions of sickness, discussing what the presentation of the women as mad and diseased tells us about group functioning and the dangers of a group. It will be particularly interesting to examine the extent to which other characters recognize the women's collective insanity and how this raises questions about holding others accountable for their actions. Finally, the fourth chapter will be concerned with Euripides' use of animal and hunting imagery, as well as his use of the term ὄχλος, discussing what this imagery tells us about group functioning and the potential dangers of group association.

1 Pentheus' perception of the cult

The first major aspect of group dynamics in the *Bacchae* concerns the way the cult and the Theban women are perceived by Pentheus. In what follows, I will first analyse how Pentheus perceives the other stage characters (Dionysus, Kadmos and Teiresias), as they belong for him to one and the same group of Dionysus' worshippers. The modern theory of social categorization will prove useful in determining the psychological plausibility of Pentheus' perception, with the Dionysian outfit playing an important role. With this theory in mind, I will then turn to Pentheus' perception of the maenads specifically. The focus will be on Pentheus' accusations of the group regarding sex and wine in particular, proposing an interpretation of these accusations and their alleged invalidity in terms of stereotyping and prejudice.

1.1 Social categorization and group membership

When it comes to perceiving others, modern psychologists often use the concept of 'social categorization', which explains what happens when "we think about someone—either ourself or another person—as a member of a meaningful social group".[14] Stangor offers a good introduction to the concept and its outcomes, of which I will briefly summarize the most important aspects here, before examining to what extent these aspects are applicable to the *Bacchae*.[15] One of the fundamental functions of social categorization is that someone's social category may provide us with information about the individual. The role of 'cognitive economy' is important in this respect: we are particularly likely to rely on social categorization "in situations where there is a lot of information to learn or when we have few cognitive resources available to process information".[16] When we engage in social categorization, this often involves 'self-categorization' at the same time: we classify ourselves as belonging to a group (the in-group) that is opposed to the group of the other that we do not belong to (the out-group).[17]

The process of classifying others according to the group they belong to is essentially subjective: the categorizer divides others into groups that already exist in the categorizer's mind.

[14] Stangor 2004, 112.
[15] Stangor 2004, 112-132.
[16] Stangor 2004, 117-118. For an experiment providing substantial support for the role of cognitive economy, see Bodenhausen 1990.
[17] Stangor 2004, 113, 127-132 on self-categorization; 14-15 introduces in-groups and out-groups.

Most often, this process happens automatically upon seeing the other. Therefore, it has been plausibly suggested that people are more likely to categorize others using categories that are physically immediately apparent, such as clothing or gender. If the individuals exhibiting these categories are the only ones in this category, or the minority, they are more likely to be considered in terms of their group membership, for instance when one man stands in the middle of a group of only women. One last factor contributing to social categorization is the degree of importance attached by the categorizer to specific categories.

Although thinking about others in terms of their social category has potential benefits, like quickly providing information about the other, Stangor also discusses potentially negative outcomes.[18] When we categorize others, we tend to cling to "beliefs about the characteristics of social groups and the members of those groups", known as 'social stereotypes'.[19] Once a person has been categorized, the stereotypes that are associated with this category may be activated, even if we do not intend this to happen. The activated stereotype may in turn influence the way we treat the individual. Hence, categorizing somebody else as part of a certain group may eventually lead to a change in the categorizer's behaviour. When stereotypes include negative beliefs that are unjustifiable, they are called prejudices.

Pentheus constantly categorizes other characters according to their looks, especially in the first scene. His description of the Stranger begins with and largely depends on his (effeminate) appearance, especially his flowing hair (233-241, 453-459).[20] When he first notices Kadmos and Teiresias, he also refers to their physical appearance immediately:

ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα· τὸν τερασκόπον
ἐν ποικίλαισι νεβρίσι Τειρεσίαν ὁρῶ
πατέρα τε μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς, πολὺν γέλων,
νάρθηκι βακχεύοντ'· ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ,
τὸ γῆρας ὑμῶν εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον.
οὐκ ἀποτινάξεις κισσόν; οὐκ ἐλευθέραν
θύρσου μεθήσεις χεῖρ', ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάτερ; (248-254)

("But look at this other wonder here: I see the soothsayer,
Teiresias, in spotted fawnskins,
and the father of my own mother – what a laugh!
celebrating Dionysus with a narthex: I condemn you, father,

[18] Stangor 2004, 121-131.
[19] Stangor 2004, 115. A study confirming the minimization of differences within a group on the categorizer's part is Taylor 1981. For a more schematic approach to stereotyping, see Pryor and Ostrom 1987, 165-173.
[20] Fragments of Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* suggest that the taunting of Dionysus with his effeminate appearance was a traditional feature (Dodds 1960, xxxi).

seeing your old age devoid of sense.
Will you not get rid of the ivy? Will you not free your
hand of the thyrsus, father of my mother?")

Pentheus mentions the other categories that the men belong to: Teiresias is the τερασκόπος and Kadmos is his father, as he repeatedly emphasizes (πατέρα τε μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς (…) πάτερ (…) ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάτερ). However, he now categorizes them explicitly as Dionysian worshippers (βακχεύοντ'), basing himself on the attributes that he sees. He considers Kadmos and Teiresias to be devoid of sense, rejecting Kadmos with contempt (πολὺν γέλων (…) ἀναίνομαι) in his new role as a bacchant with a narthex and a thyrsus, emphasizing that it are those attributes that have changed Pentheus' attitude towards him. He similarly treats Teiresias as a member of the group, assuming that the seer imports the new god for financial gain (255-260) and commanding to destroy the place where he observes birds (345-351). As for the Stranger, he wants to kill him (246-247).

The social categorization exhibited in this passage is, according to modern theory, psychologically plausible. With Kadmos and Teiresias, Pentheus is confronted with characters he knows well, but who are dressed in markedly alien and deviant clothes: this makes him more likely to consider them as part of a group instead of individuals. We may imagine a similar amazement on the part of the spectators, who were confronted with two characters that they supposedly expected to look different. Moreover, the outfit is a category of importance to Pentheus, as the group that he associates it with poses a threat to his authority: some new Stranger has invaded his city and sent all women to Cithaeron (217-220). All of this brings about that Pentheus' classifies the other characters into one (threatening) category, that of Dionysian worshippers.

The new social category in which Pentheus places the men evidently changes his behaviour towards them. This is obviously due to the threat that the cult poses. But in terms of social categorization and stereotyping, a crucial point to consider is that Pentheus himself repeatedly acknowledges that the cult is 'new' (τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα, 219; νόσον καινήν; 353-354), thereby implying that he does not fully know what is going on. He must be resorting, therefore, to existing, 'old' categories and the (apparently negative) beliefs that he associates those categories with. I will return to this point in the discussion of wine and sex accusations.

The Dionysian outfit remains an important motive in the play. When Kadmos makes an appeal to Pentheus, he offers to crown his head with ivy while urging him to "honour the

god with us" (μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν τῷ θεῷ τιμὴν δίδου, 341-343). Teiresias similarly implores Pentheus to wreath his head and accept the god (312-313). When Pentheus threatens to cut the Stranger's hair and to seize his thyrsus, the Stranger answers that both belong to Dionysus (493-496). In Taplin's words, the Bacchic paraphernalia "come to stand for the acceptance of the new cult—their absence for its rejection".[21] The idea that, by wearing the Dionysian attributes, one can enter the cult group, is further thematized starting from the third scene, in which Pentheus' initially strong aversion to the outfit gradually starts toning down. When he is tempted to spy on the women, Dionysus urges him to get dressed in women's clothes and wear the thyrsus and fawnskin.[22] The god responds to his return on stage:

ἔξιθι πάροιθε δωμάτων, ὄφθητί μοι,
σκευὴν γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης ἔχων,
μητρός τε τῆς σῆς καὶ λόχου κατάσκοπος·
πρέπεις δὲ Κάδμου θυγατέρων μορφὴν μιᾶι. (914-917)

("Get out, before the house; be seen by me,
in the outfit of a woman, a maenad, a bacchant,
a spy upon your mother and her thiasos.
In appearance, you are like one of Kadmos' daughters.")

Πε. Τί φαίνομαι δῆτ'; οὐχὶ τὴν Ἰνοῦς στάσιν
ἢ τὴν Ἀγαυῆς ἑστάναι, μητρός γ' ἐμῆς;
Δι. Αὐτὰς ἐκείνας εἰσορᾶν δοκῶ σ' ὁρῶν. (925-927):

("Pe. How do I look then? Do I not stand here
with the posture of Ino, or Agave, my mother?
Di. When I look at you, it seems as if I am seeing just them.")

In these passages, the audience perceives a Pentheus who, entering the scene wearing the Dionysian outfit, seems to merge into the group of maenads. A spectator most likely would have taken the change in dress as symbolic of Dionysus' victory over Pentheus.[23] However, merely *resembling* a bacchant, by wearing the σκευή of one, or having the same μορφή or στάσις of Ino or Agave, does not *make* him a bacchant. Dionysus knows this: to him, it just seems (δοκῶ) as if he is seeing the bacchantes when looking at Pentheus. Pentheus knows this too: he emphasizes himself that he is a κατάσκοπος, not a fellow maenad (916, 956) and confirms that he just

[21] Taplin 2003, 72-72.
[22] The change of clothes starts in 821; see especially 835.
[23] This change in dress has also been interpreted in terms of metatheatre: see Foley 1980.

represents their image when he asks Dionysus how to hold the thyrsus in order to resemble a bacchant (εἰκασθήσομαι, 941-942). He also once defines the Dionysian attributes as women's clothes instead of Bacchic clothes (835-836). Although Pentheus wears the outfit used by himself to classify others, the out-group, as bacchantes, he emphatically keeps self-categorizing as outsider to that group. Euripides seems to thematize the limits of social categorization here: just looking like a member of a group does not necessarily equal full group membership and appearance is not an unambiguous category to base your evaluation of others on.[24]

1.2 Perception of the maenads

Let us now turn to Pentheus' perception of the Theban women specifically. As opposed to Dionysus, Kadmos, Teiresias and the chorus, Pentheus does not physically perceive the women on Cithaeron until he visits them in the fifth scene. In fact, the women exist entirely in the perceptions that stage characters express of them, as they never enter the stage (with the exception of Agave in the exodos). Pentheus makes clear in his opening words that he was out of Thebes for a while and has only just returned (ἔκδημος ὢν μὲν τῆσδ' ἐτύγχανον χθονός, 215). He therefore relies on information about the group that he was provided with, piecing his description of the cult together from hearsay (κλύω, 216; λέγουσι, 233).

Whether or not this information included the fact that the women were wearing a Dionysian outfit, it is at any rate not a category on which Pentheus explicitly bases his classification of them in the beginning of the play. Pentheus for the first time reveals that he knows what the maenads look like only in the fourth scene (especially 912-944). Physical perception, however, is not a prerequisite for social categorization: it is a way of thinking about others, regardless of their presence. What is important here is that it is clear that he treats the women on Cithaeron as members of Dionysus' group: as such, they are the "new evil" (νεοχμὰ … κακά, 216) to the city and have therefore changed Pentheus' behaviour towards them. He wants to hunt them away from the mountain (225), bind them fast in iron nets (231), adding them to the ones he has already seized (226-227).

One effect that this hunting imagery brings about it is that it emphasizes the fact that Pentheus treats them as a collective instead of individuals: he is hunting them as a group rather

[24] For an extensive cognitive and neuroscientific approach to experiential aspects of Greek theatre, like clothes and attributes including masks, see Meineck 2017.

than as individuals.[25] Individuating features are fully absent also in the rest of his description of the women. In his perception, everybody is doing the same, without making any distinctions (215-225): they are all in sham Bacchic ecstasy, roaming through the mountains, dancing for Dionysus, sleeping with men and having wine vessels in their midst. Pentheus assumes that the women exist of young girls only (νεάνισιν, 238).[26] The messenger, however, differentiates them as young, old and still unmarried women (νέαι παλαιαὶ παρθένοι τ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἄζυγες, 694).[27]

Just as Pentheus' social categorization of Dionysus, Kadmos and Teiresias is psychologically credible according to modern theory, so is his collective treatment of the women. Before the soldier (θεράπων) and both messengers relate their observations, the information he has been given is the only cognitive resource he has to evaluate the group. At the same time, there is a lot take in: upon his return in Thebes, he is faced with an alarming and radically different situation in which all of Thebes' women have been mobilized. In order to act quickly, classifying all women as part of one group without any nuance is an instinctive way to structure this situation.

1.3 Wine and sex allegations

Let us now examine more closely how Pentheus perpetuates stereotypes about the cult in our play, by looking at one specific aspect of his perception of the women: his allegations regarding wine and sex. It has already been noted that Pentheus sees himself as outsider to the group and that his entrance to the stage is marked by expressions of isolation and unfamiliarity with the cult.[28] His distanced position to the cult is emphasized also in other ways: he calls the Theban women sham bacchantes (πλασταῖσι βακχείαισιν, 218) and claims he does not know the new

[25] He expects to find them entangled in nets (957-958) and claims that the women are hunting Aphrodite instead of Dionysus (688). There is more to the repeated use of hunting imagery throughout the play: see chapter 4.
[26] In 229-230, Pentheus does identify his mother and aunts as distinct members of the group, but this is most likely an interpolation, as I agree with Diggle and Dodds (cf. Dodds 1960, 98). The first messenger mentions the presence of Pentheus' mother and aunts for the first time (681ff.).
[27] The uniformity with which Pentheus perceives the women can also be interpreted as a manifestation of 'outgroup homogeneity': the tendency to see all members of an out-group as similar to each other. In contrast, both messengers identify individual characteristics of and differences between the members, such as a division into three thiasoi and distinct activities (680-688, 1054-1057). On this phenomenon, see Stangor 2004, 124-125 and Taylor 2004, 38-43 on its risks.
[28] One way to account for Pentheus' aggressive approach is to recognize his social exclusion: modern studies into ostracized humans reveal they have more intense emotions and less self-control (Stangor 2004, 63-65).

god (τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα / Διόνυσον, ὅστις ἔστι, 219-220).[29] Pentheus is wrong about Dionysus' citizen-status: he constantly addresses him as ξένος, but "Dionysus is, as he has already proclaimed in the Prologue and as the Thebans will learn to their cost, not a *xenos* but an *oikeios* (cf. 1350, οἰκεῖος γεγώς, and 1375-76, τοὺς σοὺς … οἴκους), a Theban and even a member of the royal house, on the same line of descent as his cousin Pentheus."[30] The audience realizes that Pentheus is not fully aware of the newly arrived god and cult, making him prone to resort, in modern terms, to stereotyping.

He starts stereotyping already early in his speech: he accuses the women of being drunk and serving the beds of men (221-225). This is something new for the audience: both Dionysus and the chorus have not included this in their description of the women. The chorus refer to wine once (142), but that is still very far from the excess as described by Pentheus. Regardless of whether his informant told him about these excesses or not, it suggests to the audience that Pentheus is clinging to his own beliefs about the group, repeating his accusations again and again (260-262, 353-354, 487). It really becomes clear that he is stereotyping when these wine and drugs allegations are emphatically disproved by someone who actually witnessed (cf. ὀρῶ, 680) the group: the first messenger. He says they are resting against trees (683-686), but are behaving

σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φὴις
ὠινωμένας κρατῆρι καὶ λωτοῦ ψόφωι
θηρᾶν καθ' ὕλην Κύπριν ἠρημωμένας. (686-688)

("decently and not, as you say,
drunk with a bowl of wine and the sound of the flute,
hunting out Cypris through the woods in abandonment.")

Considering that the messenger has only narrowly escaped death at the women's hands shortly before, it makes it only more curious that he wants to ensure Pentheus that they are not eager for wine and (by implication of σωφρόνως) sex, before moving on to describe the atrocities they commit. This adds to the play's suspense, but it also suggests that Euripides wanted to highlight the invalidity of Pentheus' beliefs. With Sophocles' *Electra* as unique exception, messenger

[29] One may argue that this last claim could be interpreted as reflecting a certain piety, but the general tone in Pentheus' speech strongly suggests disdain. Cf. also 962 in which Pentheus emphasizes his own isolation (μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ᾽ ἀνὴρ τολμῶν τόδε).
[30] Podlecki 1974, 150. He interprets the *Bacchae* partly as a clash between two characters that do not fit in the same family and world, analysing the use of terms like ξένος, νέος and τιμή that are applied to both characters.

speeches are by convention not false, as Euripides' audience must have recognized.[31] Teiresias (314-318) and Dionysus (940) too disprove Pentheus' assumptions about the women's intemperance and neither does the soldier or the second messenger at any moment mention sex or wine.[32] Despite all this, Pentheus continues to make the same allegations (814, 957-958), thus still relying, in modern terms, on the same prejudice, as it is an unjustifiable stereotype.

Pentheus' allegations have been placed under close scrutiny. According to several scholars, we can conclude on the basis of passages in Demosthenes and Aristophanes that similar accusations were made about other new cults at Athens in Euripides' day.[33] Sex and wine seem to have been essential elements of the Athenian conceptualization of mystery cults in general. Certainly, the fact that Dionysus is repeatedly presented as a god coming from the east (for instance, by the god himself in 13-22) strengthens this connection for the spectator: some scholars even go as far as to claim "that it would have been impossible to exclude the element of sex from an account of orgiastic religion without leaving it incomplete".[34] Hence, Pentheus' accusations may not have seemed so implausible for the audience as we might think at first sight: they were rooted in a way of thinking about religious groups known to Euripides' audience, making Pentheus' response an identifiable response for the spectator of the *Bacchae*. To put it in psychological terms, Pentheus' wine and sex stereotype was associated with one of the categories existing in the spectator's mind: that of 'new mystery cults'.

Let us pause here for a moment to consider modern cults. Also in modern times, studies reveal that there is a great consistency in stereotypes within a given culture.[35] What is striking, is that sex and drugs prejudices about religious cult groups are still prevalent. The community of Jonestown, for instance, set up by Reverend Jim Jones in the 1970s, developed into an extremely isolated cult in the jungle of Guyana.[36] To his followers, Jones was the saviour and the commune was one of brotherhood and happiness, but to the outside world, rumours about mind control, immoderate sexual activities and excessive use of drugs quickly spread. It seems

[31] Marshall 2006, 203.
[32] It must be noted that the first messenger mentions one maenad drawing wine from rock (706-707), but as nobody drinks it, it is no reason to mistrust the strong point of 686-688.
[33] The passages mainly refer to the oriental cult of Sabazius: Demosthenes *De corona*, 259-260 and Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 387-398; *Birds* 875; *Wasps* 9. Cf. also Cicero *De legibus* 2,37 in which Aristophanes is said to have attacked new gods and the nightly vigils belonging to their cults. For a more extensive discussion of these passages, see Versnel 1976; Dodds 1940, 171-176 and Reitzammer 2017. Versnel and Reitzammer also point to the importance of music in the Athenian conceptualization of mystery cults (for instance in Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 1-3): Pentheus does not include it in his stereotype, but it is included in the messenger's dismissal (686-688).
[34] Winnington-Ingram 1948, 65.
[35] See, for instance, Katz and Braly 1933 and Devine and Elliot 1995.
[36] For an analysis of his cult, see Nesci 2018, Taylor 2004, 31-36 and Galanter 1999, 113-117.

an instinctive and cross-cultural human response to resort to these allegations against isolated and cohesive social groups.[37] In Jones' case, not without justification: sex played an important role in his policies, sometimes purging his followers by eliciting sexual confessions, forcing them to sleep with him or allowing orgies, and at other times declaring months of celibacy.[38]

In our play, however, these accusations are said to be incorrect. How was the audience supposed to interpret this marked invalidity of Pentheus' assumptions, while to them, it was a fairly reasonable attitude? One possible answer is that it enhances the tragic effect: especially Versnel argues that it makes Pentheus' behaviour more acceptable, hence justifying a spectator's sympathy for a king whose perception is recognized by not a single other character.[39] A second interpretation that explains the sex allegations in particular, is that these allegations might reveal something about Pentheus' unconscious desires. Pentheus is, unknowingly, fascinated by the sensual aspects of the worship, manifest in his eagerness starting from the end of the third scene to spy on the women: Pentheus "thinks he is rational and prudent, but really, like them [the maenads], he is at the mercy of irrational impulse".[40]

I believe that we can add a third explanation. The audience is aware of Pentheus' limitations of knowledge of the group. They then repeatedly see him perpetuating a negative stereotype of intoxicated and lascivious women. In the *Bacchae*, the threat that the women pose as a group and that Pentheus feels is clearly confirmed by both messengers, but the specific allegation of sex and wine turns out to be unjustified and therefore a prejudice. One may well imagine that the spectator still believed the women were drunk given their frenzied behaviour. But precisely because this was an Athenian stereotype too, it must have invited the spectator to reflect upon his or her own way of looking at religious groups, and psychological mechanisms like stereotyping and prejudice more in general. On the whole, the message that is strongly implied is that it is not right to fully rely on (unjustifiable) stereotypes about other social groups and its members.

This is supported by our text in various ways. The fact that all attempts by other characters to persuade Pentheus to change his prejudice about the women fail, adds to his

[37] I have not encountered well-founded studies about underlying mechanisms of this attitude. One (obvious) explanation is that in many cults, these excesses have in fact occurred, like the cult of Charles Manson in the 1960s, who used sex to initiate his female followers and gave them drugs like LSD (Taylor 2004, 30-31). Cf. also Dodds 1940, 157-158 about ritual dance as a cross-cultural religious experience.
[38] See Chidester 2003, 97-104 about Jones' policy on sex and property within the community.
[39] Versnel 1976.
[40] Winnington-Ingram 1948, 58. For an analysis of Pentheus in terms of oedipal desires, see Segal 1986, 283-284.

dogmatic, even tyrannical attitude, which in turn leads to his downfall. Kadmos looks at the cult from a different perspective than Pentheus and Teiresias. He accepts it because it is in the interest of his family and of Thebes politically, urging his grandson to recognize this (181-182; 331-342) and to accept Dionysus even if he is not really a god, for it would be better for Thebes. Thus, in Kadmos' opinion, a good ruler should be able to neglect his prejudices. Teiresias, conversely, has a more rationalizing stance towards the new cult, visible for instance in the rationalized account of the Double Birth-myth (286-296) as opposed to the versions of Dionysus and the chorus (1-3; 88-103).[41] The audience perceives these nuanced approaches to the cult, which enables them to recognize individual differences among its followers, that, by contrast, Pentheus fully neglects, throwing all others into the same evil pot. Would Pentheus have allowed his prejudice to be broken down by Kadmos' civic and familial appeal, he might have prevented the collapse of Kadmos' race (1302-1326).

Significantly, in contrast to Pentheus, other characters in the play do seem to change their beliefs about the cult. The soldier is sent to imprison Dionysus, but is perplexed (δι' αἰδοῦς, 441) by his immediate surrender and the many wonders (πολλῶν … θαυμάτων, 449) that the god brings. Clearly in awe of the god, he "half confesses his faith in the Stranger, then breaks off in fear of offending his master – 'but what shall happen next is your concern, not mine'."[42] The emphasis on the chastity and sobriety of the women reveals that the first messenger expected to find them in this state. However, clearly intrigued by the cult's appeal, he ends his speech with a plea to accept the god (769-774), something he is at first reluctant of to tell Pentheus (668-671). He tries his best to persuade his king by almost making him an eyewitness (εἰ παρῆσθα, 712; ἂν προσεῖδες, 737; εἶδες … ἄν, 740), in the sense of 'if you would have been here, you would respect this god'.[43] A similar appreciation for the god is expressed by the second messenger (1150-1152). It is good to note here that all these characters have changed their beliefs after perceiving the cult themselves. The subtle change of sides, or at least the openness to other beliefs, as exhibited in these characters, emphasizes that one may look beyond stereotypes and prejudices, something Pentheus, who does not see them until it is too late, is not capable of.

[41] For Teiresias' speech as satire of sophistry, see Winnington-Ingram 1948, 47-54 and Segal 1982, 293-295. For the different position of the two old men from the women, see also 195-196. They seem to worship Dionysus more deliberately: δεῖ (181, 184) could express a similar coercion as with the women, but expressions like ξυνεθέμην (175) suggest a more independent position. Note that the use of ἥκω for both characters echoes Dionysus' first word, therefore subtly suggesting their affinity with the god.
[42] Dodds 1960, 132 on 449-450.
[43] De Jong 1991, 51, 105.

This chapter has demonstrated how Pentheus, at the beginning of the play, categorizes all other stage characters as members of one group of Bacchic worshippers, changing in turn his behaviour towards them. According to the theory of social categorization, this behaviour is psychologically plausible, as he judges particularly by appearance and is confronted with deviant and threatening categories. The Dionysian outfit is a recurring motive in the play, used by Euripides to reflect on group association and the limits of social categorization on the basis of looks. Regarding the maenads, Pentheus does not categorize them based on their looks, but still evidently treats them as a uniform group, which again is an instinctive human response. One specific aspect of his perception of them, his repeated allegations of wine and sex, are emphatically disproved, confirming that these are his prejudices. His dogmatic position is contrasted to the different perspectives that Kadmos and Teiresias adopt, as well as the flexible beliefs of the soldier and the messengers. Pentheus fails to look beyond his initial prejudice, which has disastrous consequences for him. His response is one the spectator could sympathize with, given the recognizability of his accusations in the context of the mystery cults of Euripides' day, but their invalidity entails an implicit warning: one must not judge too quickly about groups and its members, as this may have real life consequences.

2 Group performance

Having discussed how Pentheus perceives the cult and its members, this chapter now turns to a second important aspect of group dynamics in the *Bacchae*: the women's own behaviour in the two messenger scenes (677-774, 1043-1152). The bloody atrocities they commit on Cithaeron, as well as the gruesome plundering of the villages at its foot, evidently demonstrate abnormal behaviour. The idea that they are deviating from the norm seems to be asserted by the messenger himself when he describes how the women ravage the villages "as if they were enemies" (ὥστε πολέμιοι, 752). One could argue that their frantic behaviour becomes even more abnormal and frightening for a spectator as they continue their rage in the civilized world rather than in nature. How, then, is the spectator invited to understand the women's actions?

Before presenting an interpretation of this in modern social psychological terms, let us first look at the explanation many scholars have given for the anomaly of the women's behaviour. What we see throughout both narratives is Dionysiac madness at work: the spectator here experiences the brutal power of the god.[44] In the first messenger speech, for example, the messenger himself already provides sufficient arguments for this reading. According to him, the first thing the women do after waking up is to arrange their Dionysian outfit and perform Dionysian rituals (695-711), confirming as an eyewitness Dionysus' management of the women as he pronounced himself in the prologue (23-38). But the god's influence is expressed in more explicit ways. He draws water and wine from the rock (704-707, 766).[45] Bulls that were strong before are now subdued and torn apart by the maenads in extraordinary swiftness (743-745). The women even seize children (748-763), they lift the whole booty on their shoulders and carry fire in their hair that does not burn them, while being immune to hostile spears (755-763). All this inhuman behaviour leads the messenger to exclaim: "women did this to men, not without the help of a god" (γυναῖκες ἄνδρας οὐκ ἄνευ θεῶν τινος, 764), before ending with a plea to Pentheus to please accept the god in the city (769-774).

[44] For example, Segal 1982, 62ff and Dodds 1960, 159 about this scene: "It also depicts for the audience what could not be shown on the stage, the strange workings of the Dionysiac madness upon the Theban women, as it appeared in all its beauty and horror to a simple-minded observer", later referring to this as 'black maenadism'.
[45] Dodds, 1960, 163-164: "Dion. is a miraculous wine-maker (…), and his power is transmitted to those possessed by him when they wield his magic rod. (…) his rod can also, like Moses', draw water from the rock, and its power extends likewise to the two other liquids which Nature gives to man—milk and honey."

Although I completely agree with the interpretation that the messenger thematizes Dionysus' power over the women, undoubtedly also to save his own face, and that the scene serves in part to exhibit the Dionysiac madness of the women, I would like to argue for a complementing explanation. In what follows, I will propose another way to account for their behaviour, by using Irving Janis' model of 'groupthink', a phenomenon occurring when a group is in a state of very high cohesion. As a close-reading of both scenes will demonstrate shortly, the messenger also thematizes the collectivity of the group and the violence that a group is capable of, thereby inviting the spectator to reflect on such group processes. The god-induced madness undoubtedly left the spectator with a feeling of eeriness.[46] But when we read between the lines with Janis' model of groupthink in mind, the women's behaviour as presented by the messengers turns out to be psychologically plausible. Such a social psychological analysis thus only reinforces the eeriness of the situation: the women's behaviour is psychologically more instinctive to a spectator than a simpler dismissal of 'divine madness' might suggest.

2.1 Janis' theory of groupthink

Janis created his theory during his analysis of several disastrous decision-making processes in the twentieth century.[47] His objects of study were "instances in which a defective decision was made in a series of meetings by a few policy-makers who constituted a cohesive group."[48] Starting out from an analysis of several particular groups, Janis argued that groupthink can occur in any group as a result of a generalized set of specific group processes. In essence, the phenomenon occurs "when a group, which is made up of members who may actually be very competent and thus quite capable of making excellent decisions, nevertheless ends up, as a result of a flawed group process and strong conformity pressures, making poor ones".[49] His model identifies, first, antecedent conditions in groups that are conducive to groupthink and, second, symptoms of groupthink. These symptoms, in turn, lead to faults in decision making.

It should be noted here that the maenad's behaviour is not a conventional object of groupthink, as we are not dealing with political decisions in a series of meetings. Recently,

[46] Dodds 1960, 159-160 notes that the snow on Cithaeron, mentioned by the messenger in 661-662, made Greeks feel uncanny.
[47] Janis 1972, 1982. The most notorious fiasco he analysed was the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961.
[48] Janis 1972, 10.
[49] Stangor 2004, 197. Conversely, Surowiecki 2004 argues that collective judgements are often better than individual ones, provided they meet certain conditions: one of them is the avoidance of homogeneous groups and hence the risk of groupthink (36-39).

Turner has convincingly attributed groupthink to a more comparable decision-making process in Greek literature, namely Thucydides' account of the Athenian decision to invade Sicily.[50] He concludes that "Thucydides reveals an understanding of decision-making that Irving Janis would much later formalize in his theoretical framework of Groupthink".[51] Although the objects of study are different, I believe that Turner's method, namely to examine to what extent the conditions and symptoms of groupthink are implicit in Thucydides' explanation, is equally effective for Euripides' description of the maenads, as both messenger speeches demonstrate many of the conditions and symptoms of the theory as well.[52]

There is one other methodological point to make here. Throughout the analysis, it is helpful to keep De Jong's observations about the limited perspective of the messenger in mind. She has argued that, with a few exceptions, the Euripidean messenger "is an 'I-as witness'-narrator".[53] This means that the messenger always plays a role in his own narrative, but is never its protagonist, recounting the events as he understood them at that time and inferring motives of other characters from what they do and say, or from his own perceptions. What I will be arguing in this chapter, is that his words reveal something else: they hint at psychological mechanisms that he may not consciously be aware of and that can be explained by groupthink.

2.2 Conditions for groupthink

Let us first look to what extent the maenads meet the conditions that are conducive to groupthink. Janis identified four conditions:

1. High group cohesiveness and social identity;
2. Directive, authoritative leadership;
3. Isolation from other sources of information;
4. Time pressures and stress.[54]

[50] Turner 2018.
[51] Turner 2018, 245.
[52] Janis also formulated several 'defects' in the decision-making process, such as an incomplete survey of alternatives and the lack of contingency plans, but as these are more relevant for political decisions, this analysis is limited to conditions and symptoms.
[53] De Jong 1991, 60-62. According to her, messengers in the *Bacchae* are no exceptions to this. Our first messenger repeats that he is an eyewitness: ὀρῶ (680), θαῦμ᾽ ἰδεῖν (693) and τὸ δεινὸν ἦν θέαμ᾽ ἰδεῖν (760).
[54] I follow here Stangor's classification and explanation of groupthink conditions (Stangor 2004, 197-202).

A high level of social identity means that members perceive the group to which they belong as extremely important and valuable. Members are therefore more prone to conforming to the norms and opinions of the group. In modern cults, such conformity pressures often lead to what Taylor calls a 'reality drift': cult members tend to adjust their own beliefs and values to those of the cult leader, who often holds beliefs that are far away from reality, and the validity of these beliefs can often not be tested due to the cult's isolation and environment control.[55] Followers of Charles Manson's cult, for instance, calmly defended the murders which they had committed, convinced of their leader's righteousness.

The first messenger's speech exhibits all the conditions that are conducive to groupthink. He starts his narrative with a description of what he encountered upon meeting the group (677-688). He distinguishes three thiasoi, each led by one of Kadmos' daughters, and although some are lying under a pine and others under an oak, all of them (πᾶσαι) are sleeping.[56] This calm and, in the messenger's words (686), decent situation changes when Agave wakes the others (689-713). All women jump up, young and old, and the first thing they all do is arrange their Dionysian outfit, while some (αἳ, τις, ἄλλη) continue to perform various Dionysiac rituals. The messenger thus emphasizes that the maenads are doing some things collectively, while at the same time identifying distinctions and observing individual activities. More importantly, this beginning of the narrative already contains strong indications of the group's high cohesiveness and social identity: by dressing themselves in the same outfit and performing rituals that bind them together as a group, the women express the importance they attach to their group. The messenger even seems to thematize high levels of conformity when he describes their awakening as "a marvel of orderly behaviour" (θαῦμ' ἰδεῖν εὐκοσμίας, 693).

In the next stage of the narrative, the focus shifts to the herdsmen (714-727). They are plotting an ambush and it is their explicit intention to hunt down Agave only. Having hidden in the bushes, they notice how the women start invoking Dionysus (723-727). They wave their thyrsus in their revelry, calling on the god with united voice (ἀθρόωι στόματι), after which the whole mountain, including the beasts, participate in their ecstasy (πᾶν δὲ συνεβάκχευ' ὄρος / καὶ θῆρες) with nothing remaining unmoved in their course (οὐδὲν δ' ἦν ἀκίνητον δρόμωι). This all happens at the "appointed hour" (τὴν τεταγμένην / ὥραν). From the sudden collective action that the messenger perceives, he infers that there must have been an appointed time for

[55] Taylor 2004, 41-42.
[56] The distinction of three thiasoi seems to reflect actual Dionysian cult practice in Thebes, as can be inferred from an inscription from Magnesia: see Dodds 1960, 161-162; Murnaghan 2006, 100-101.

their worship. He emphasizes the absolute unity of the maenads as he perceives it, as there is no distinction or exception, and reinforces this by mentioning the harmony with the natural world, something he already prepared in his description of the women as suckling gazelles and wolf-pups (699-700).[57] In the light of groupthink, however, the behaviour as he observes it again indicates high levels of conformity and social identity: according to the groupthink theory, the time of worship would not be appointed, but happen quite instinctively.

With the women in this condition of unity, the narrative enters its crucial stage: the turning point of the women's behaviour and the ensuing crisis (728-763). The messenger jumps up to seize Agave, after which she immediately exclaims:

ἴΩ δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες,
θηρώμεθ' ἀνδρῶν τῶνδ' ὕπ'· ἀλλ' ἕπεσθέ μοι,
ἕπεσθε θύρσοις διὰ χερῶν ὡπλισμέναι.
ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν φεύγοντες ἐξηλύξαμεν
βακχῶν σπαραγμόν, αἱ δὲ νεμομέναις χλόην
μόσχοις ἐπῆλθον χειρὸς ἀσιδήρου μέτα. (731-736)

(""My running dogs,
we are hunted by these men here. Follow me,
follow me, armed with your thyrsoi in hand!"
We fled away and we escaped being torn apart
by the bacchantes, but they, with unarmed hands,
attacked the heifers that were grazing on the young grass.")

Agave's words are significant. She appeals to the group-feeling of the women: by invoking them as δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες and claiming that the men are a threat to the group (θηρώμεθ', 1st person plural), she addresses them in their capacity as group members and frames the messenger as their common enemy. This is particularly striking for the spectator as the messenger has repeatedly expressed that only Agave was to be seized. Agave transforms it into an attack on the collective, appealing to and at the same time increasing the women's social identity. Moreover, this passage confirms her power over the group, as the maenads obey her without hesitation: the women identify themselves as group members and act to protect the group, although they carry out their attack on the μόσχοις instead of the men. Nevertheless, the impact of her command demonstrates her directive and authoritative leadership (the second condition for groupthink), that was already hinted at during the group's awakening.

[57] Nature is fundamental to Dionysus' worship: see Dodds 1960, xi-xx.

One result of an increased cohesiveness and importance of the group to its members, according to Taylor, is that "the difference between the group and the outside world also increases. The group tends to practise increasingly strict boundary control to protect against intrusion by others. This can include 'deviant' behaviour—glazed expressions, xenophobia, or aggression—towards any outsider perceived as threatening."[58] Such a distinction between the cult world and the outside world is evident for the maenads, as their complete isolation (Janis' third condition for groupthink) is thematized: situated on Cithaeron, they are far away from the civilized world and are surrounded by other maenads only. For a Greek, the mountain carried strong connotations of remoteness and seclusion: a "liminal area, at the frontier between civilization and wild nature".[59] Dionysus himself emphasizes the distinction between cult world and outside world in 471-472: non-bacchantes are not allowed to know the details of the initiation rites. The distinction is marked as well by the secrecy with which the herdsmen approach the group. The women are trapped in their own reality and prone to a reality drift: this drift will be most clear in the women's failure to recognize Pentheus in the second messenger scene. Lastly, the maenad's behaviour also meets the fourth condition of crisis and stress: the attack of the messenger pressures them to respond quickly.

Their response, the ensuing σπαραγμός and the raid of the villages, is then described in detail by the messenger. There are some individualized descriptions: some women are tearing apart bulls and others young heifers, but on a whole, these activities are part of one collective σπαραγμός. This image of collectivity becomes most powerful when the bulls are "dragged down by countless girl hands" (μυριάσι χειρῶν ἀγόμενοι νεανίδων, 745) and when the messenger compares the women to a flock of birds flying away (χωροῦσι δ' ὥστ' ὄρνιθες ἀρθεῖσαι δρόμωι, 748).[60] Similarly, the raid on the villages is performed together, described in third-person plural forms of verbs only (διέφερον, ἥρπαζον, ἔθεσαν, πῦρ ἔφερον, οὐδ' ἔκαιεν, ἐτραυμάτιζον κἀπενώτιζον φυγῆι, 754-763). Everybody is doing the same at the same time (underlined by the use of imperfecta), emphasizing that the maenads operate as one cognitive

[58] Taylor 2004, 42.
[59] Segal 1982, 114-117. Two examples from tragedy serve to illustrate the connotation of remoteness: in Euripides' *Supplices* 757, the mountain is used as a place to bury the dead; in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1110-1181), it is the place where Oedipus is left to die as an infant.
[60] In the former, the meter (two resolutions) enhances the collective insanity: a "swift, perhaps slightly hysterical rhythm" (Dodds 1960, 167). Animal imagery will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

unit during the entire crisis.[61] Finally, in the last stage of the narrative (764-774), all maenads return to their isolation on the mountain to wash themselves.

All four conditions for groupthink are thus met in the first messenger's speech. We have seen high levels of cohesion and social identity, directive leadership from Agave, isolation from the outside world and time pressures and stress. The bloody atrocities stand in strong opposition to the calm and decent situation in the beginning of the narrative. One significant element to consider is that the messenger relating all this has nearly escaped death, so for a spectator, his initial description of calmness and decency may have appeared rather fabricated. The result of this dramatic opposition is that the turning point of the maenad's behaviour becomes more significant: it is not until the group is threatened that they turn to collective violence. According to Janis' model, this turning point is psychologically plausible, as the group exhibits the conditions that are conducive to poor group decisions. It is in any case a warning for Pentheus not to provoke the group and, as it turns out in the second messenger's speech, a parallel for what will happen to him.

Before identifying the groupthink conditions in the second messenger's speech, let us briefly return to the herdsmen in the first messenger's speech. We have seen the maenad's immediate and collective response and the absolute absence of any type of deliberation. The contrast with the herdsmen plotting the ambush (717-723) could not be bigger. Even though it is told in brief, their deliberation process is much more elaborate and evokes an ἐκκλησία-setting.[62] There is one member of the group, practiced in speaking (τρίβων λόγων), who stands up and formally addresses the others in direct speech. He makes a proposal with a convincing argument. The messenger emphatically concludes his report of the decision-making process by saying that the group accepted his proposal (εὖ δ' ἡμῖν λέγειν / ἔδοξε). The herdsmen go through a process that the maenads never do. This contrast is reinforced by the fact that the process of an assembly is strictly connected to the organized setting of the πόλις: it here reminds the spectator of the 'normal' way affairs are handled, while the πόλις has now been disintegrated by Dionysus' arrival. Also by means of this contrast, Euripides thematizes the reckless and inconsiderate decision-making of the women.

The second messenger (1043-1152) demonstrates all four conditions for groupthink in a

[61] The combination of collective and individual action as described by the messenger is interesting in the light of Budelmann's recent article (2019) on the Greek concept of collective cognition: one could argue that Euripides explores here questions of individual cognition versus collective cognition.
[62] Susanetti 2010, 233-234.

relatively similar manner, allowing here for a more concise analysis. Parallel to the first messenger, the narrative starts upon the arrival of Pentheus, Dionysus and the messenger on Cithaeron, with a description of the maenad's relatively calm behaviour (1043-1057).[63] All engage "in delightful work" (ἐν τερπνοῖς πόνοις, 1053): again, some (αἳ) are arranging their outfit while others (αἳ) are performing rituals. Next to this initial combination of collective and individual actions, also the secrecy that we encountered in the herdsmen's approach to the women returns. Pentheus, the messenger and Dionysus are emphatically hiding themselves from the women "in order to see them without being seen" (ὡς ὁρῶιμεν οὐχ ὁρώμενοι, 1050), again indicating the division between the isolated cult world and the outside world.

The situation changes when Pentheus proposes to climb a tree:

Πενθεὺς δ' ὁ τλήμων θῆλυν οὐχ ὁρῶν ὄχλον
ἔλεξε τοιάδ'· Ὦ ξέν', οὗ μὲν ἕσταμεν
οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι μανιάδων ὄσσοις νόσων·
ὄχθων δ' ἔπ' ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα
ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς μαινάδων αἰσχρουργίαν. (1058-1062)

("But wretched Pentheus did not see the female crowd
and said: "Stranger, from where we stand
I can not see the these false maenads.
But when I climb a lofty pine on a hill,
I might clearly see the shameful behaviour of the maenads.")

By calling the maenads false and calling attention to their αἰσχρουργία, he is emphatically presented as a threat to the group and its identity. Moreover, parallel to the second stage in the first messenger's narrative (where the maenads were collectively invoking Dionysus in communion with nature), we find a similar indication of the group's collectivity in Pentheus' mention of the group here too: θῆλυν ὄχλον.[64] Note that for a spectator, this indication of unity follows the more individualized description of the first stage of the narrative and comes just before the turning point of the women's behaviour, subtly reproducing the order of the first messenger's narrative. And just like then, the moment of crisis is preceded by rational decision-making: Pentheus presents an elaborated and valid argument (οὗ μὲν ἕσταμεν / οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι

[63] I say relatively calm, as the menace in these verses must not be discarded: for one, the spectator knows what happened after the peacefulness in the first messenger's narrative. Cf. also the suggestion of 1054-1055 that the women prepare the thyrsus for a new battle.
[64] The implications of ὄχλος will be discussed in chapter 4.

μανιάδων ὅσσοις νόσων) for his proposal to climb a tree, with which the Stranger then helps him (1062-1069).

The crisis is then instigated by Dionysus' voice:

ἐκ δ' αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι
Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν· Ὦ νεάνιδες,
ἄγω τὸν ὑμᾶς κἀμὲ τἀμά τ' ὄργια
γέλων τιθέμενον· ἀλλὰ τιμωρεῖσθέ νιν. (1078-1081)

("And from the air, a voice cried out,
Dionysus I guess: "Young women,
I bring you the man who ridicules you and me
and my mysteries: come, punish him!")

Dionysus is now the directive and authoritative leader, but his appeal to the women is highly comparable to Agave's. He addresses them in their capacity as group members, first as νεάνιδες, then as part of a group that is united in being threatened by Pentheus. In strong contrast to Pentheus' calm reasoning ('from where I stand, I cannot see the women, but when I climb a tree, I might), Dionysus' argument is, indeed exactly the same as Agave's, blunt and irrational ('we are threatened, so let us fight back'). Pentheus ends with a potential optative (ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς, 1062), Dionysus with an imperative (τιμωρεῖσθέ). His similar appeal to the women's social identity turns out similarly successful: after a brief silence, Dionysus has all the maenads' attention and a brief repetition of his words (1082-1088) prompts the women to, without any hesitation, swing into violent action to protect their group (1088-1142).

This high cohesiveness is confirmed by the messenger's emphasis on collective action. When the maenads notice Pentheus, some climb a rock and start throwing stones and branches, while others (ἄλλαι) hurl their thyrsus at him (1095-1089), all part of one collective attack. There is another comparison to birds, in this case to the swiftness of doves (1090-1091), and it is emphasized that all are participating, "Agave, her sisters and all bacchantes" (1092-1093). When all attempts to hit Pentheus fail, Agave addresses the women once more (1106-1110), in the first-person plural, in their capacity as μαινάδες, urging them to protect "the secret of dancing for the cult" (ἀπαγγείλῃ θεοῦ / χοροὺς κρυφαίους), thereby again appealing to the women's social identity. Their immediate and undivided cooperation confirms their conformity. After Pentheus is killed by his mother, Ino, Autonoe, and all the bacchantes devour his flesh while screaming and cheering (1129-1136): one (ἥ) has an arm, the other (ἥ) a foot,

but all (πᾶσα) play with his flesh like throwing a ball. Finally, in the last stage of the narrative (1137-1152), the messenger tells that Agave has left the isolated cult world on Cithaeron and her fellow maenads in there and now enters the city.

As we have seen, the second messenger's speech too demonstrates strong indications of a high levels of cohesion and social identity, isolation from the outside world, directive leadership by Dionysus and Agave, in a situation of stress and time pressures. Again, a relatively calm situation fatally escalates once the group is provoked, shortly after a brief episode of rational reasoning.

2.3 Symptoms of groupthink

As all conditions that are conducive to groupthink are thus met, let us now turn to the symptoms that groups exhibit when groupthink actually occurs. Janis identified three type of symptoms that are indicative of groupthink, each with more explicit examples of symptoms. The first type is:

1. General overestimation of the group by its members

- The belief of most or all members that the group is prudent or even superior to the rest;
- The belief that the group has an inherent morality;
- The illusion of being invulnerable to the main dangers arising from the groups' actions.[65]

In the *Bacchae*, such an overestimation of the group is expressed on multiple levels. The fact that the maenads themselves perceive their group as supreme is strongly implied in their unquestioning obedience to protect the group against an enemy who ridicules the group or may betray its secret. But the supremacy is most explicit after the events on Cithaeron in the exodus, when Agave glorifies the group's actions (1169ff.) and even exclaims to Kadmos that her father can be proud, "for he has engendered by far the best daughters of all mortals" (πάντων ἀρίστας θυγατέρας σπεῖραι μακρῶι / θνητῶν, 1234-1235). Ironically, she makes this remark after the catastrophe, emphasizing a fortiori for the audience that her assessment of the situation is anything but realistic.

[65] These symptoms are introduced first in Janis' treatment of the Bay of Pigs fiasco (1972, 35-49). In this section, I started out from Turner's synthesis of groupthink symptoms (2018, 245-253) and added some of Janis' specific symptoms.

The inherent morality of the cult as a whole is established by the on-stage worshippers and the god himself. Kadmos, for instance, connects the acceptance of the cult to respecting the laws (331) and Teiresias believes that the two are the only ones having sense, as opposed to all others who do not honour Dionysus in the city (μόνοι γὰρ εὖ φρονοῦμεν, οἱ δ᾽ἄλλοι κακῶς, 196). Moral language pervades many of the choral odes, confirming, for instance, in the first stasimon, what Kadmos and Teiresias have professed shortly before. The chorus claims, on a more generalizing level, that those who oppose the instinctive religious life are lawless (ἀνομου, 386), thoughtless (ἀφροσύνας, 386) and destined to ill fortune (δυστυχία, 387). They say that Pentheus has exhibited unholy insolence (οὐχ ὁσίαν / ὕβριν, 374-375). The accepting side is connected to positive terms, like peace (ἡσυχίας, 389) and a good life (εὐαίωνα, 426). On the whole, the ode presents "the religious life as the life of piety, gaiety, and humility".[66] Dionysus expresses the inherent morality of his cult in his prologue (26-52). One of his motives for coming to Thebes, next to the vindication of his mother, is "that the city must learn once and for all, even if she does not want it, what it means to be initiated into the Bacchic rites" (δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ᾽ ἐκμαθεῖν, κεἰ μὴ θέλει / ἀτέλεστον οὖσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων, 39-40), something he intends to do in other places too (48-50). Although the Theban women do not explicitly express the inherent morality of the cult, it is not absurd to attribute such a self-perception to them as well.

The Theban women's illusion of invulnerability to the dangers that might arise from their actions is evident. We have seen that both messengers perceive a feeling of invulnerability with the maenads: in addition to their hair not being burned, the easiness with which they carry heavy load on their shoulders and their immunity to spears, it is stressed that they do everything barehanded and without iron (736, 1104, 1140). In the exodus, Agave exalts that she left the city to hunt with her bare hands (1206-1207, 1236-1237). One way to account for this perceived physical invulnerability is that Dionysus is granting the maenads his powers.[67] But the fact that the women kill animals, plunder villages and even murder their own king without even briefly considering the potential risks or consequences, can be interpreted as a symptom of groupthink.

The second and third type of symptoms are the following:

[66] Dodds 1960, 117-118. See also the moral analysis of this ode of Winnington-Ingram 1948, 66-68. Versnel 2011, 140-142 argues that the god's supremacy, as pronounced by the chorus, typifies a new type of religiosity emerging in the 4th century B.C.

[67] Dodds 1960, 170 refers to several anthropological studies that demonstrate an insensitivity to pain with persons in abnormal mental states. He identifies a similar plundering in certain cults in Liberia and Senegal (1951, 275).

2. Close-mindedness of the group

- Collective rationalization of deviant information or warnings that may lead the group members to change their beliefs;
- Strong stereotyping of the outgroup: those who hold opposed opinions are, for instance, presented as weak, evil or impotent.

3. Pressures towards uniformity

- Self-censorship of group members who hold beliefs that deviate from the group norm;
- Illusion of unanimity among the group members
- Direct pressure on anyone who questions the group's beliefs to change opinion, sometimes even in the form of 'mind-guards'

Some of these symptoms are more difficult to demonstrate with the women than those of the first type. Stereotyping seems evident, especially in the second messenger's speech: Dionysus calls attention to the man that ridicules the cult, thus holding an opposed opinion, and for holding this opinion, he is evil and must be punished accordingly. The emphasis on collective action suggests apparent unanimity, but there is no indication in the text that this unanimity is an illusion and that some of the members have different opinions on how to deal with the messenger and with Pentheus, nor that they are pressured to change their opinion. However, when it comes to the processing of conflicting information, there is one relevant and moving passage that has not been discussed up till now:

ὁ δὲ μίτραν κόμης ἄπο
ἔρριψεν, ὥς νιν γνωρίσασα μὴ κτάνοι
τλήμων Ἀγαυή, καὶ λέγει παρήιδος
ψαύων·Ἐγώ τοι, μῆτερ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·
οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μῆτέρ με μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνηις.
ἡ δ' ἀφρὸν ἐξιεῖσα καὶ διαστρόφους
κόρας ἑλίσσουσ', οὐ φρονοῦσ' ἃ χρὴ φρονεῖν,
ἐκ Βακχίου κατείχετ', οὐδ' ἔπειθέ νιν. (1115-1124)

("And Pentheus snatched the head-band from
his hair, so that she might recognize and not kill him,
the wretched Agave, and he touched her cheek
and said: "It is me, mother, your son
Pentheus, whom you bore in this house of Echion:

Pity me, mother, do not kill me,
your child, for my sins."
But she spat out foam and twisted her eyes
all around, not thinking as she ought to,
she was completely in Bacchus' power, and he did not persuade her.")

Pentheus attempts to disrupt the groupthink by providing information that has the potential to change the group's belief. That is, when Agave would recognize him in his crucial role as her son, they might stop the murder. He is stressing this deviant information by repeatedly expressing his real identity (μῆτερ … παῖς σέθεν / Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες … ὦ μῆτέρ … παῖδα σὸν). However, he is not able to convince her: she is not touched by what would normally affect a mother heavily and as the messenger understands it, she is not thinking as she ought to. Agave does not exhibit a particular symptom as identified by Janis (she is not explicitly rationalizing the deviant information and self-censorship would mean that she kills her son despite knowing that it is him), but continues to be mad. However, when we consider that the group meets all the conditions of groupthink and many of its symptoms, having Pentheus presenting conflicting information that does not take hold might suggest that Euripides was aware of this aspect of groupthink, the close-mindedness and uniformity pressures, as well.

This chapter has demonstrated how the group of maenads gradually swing into violent action. One crucial aspect of both messenger's narratives is the strong focus on collectivity, inviting the spectator to reflect on decision-making in highly cohesive groups, as opposed to the contrasting reasoning of the herdsman and Pentheus shortly before the women act. In fact, when we approach their behaviour with an awareness of groupthink, it turns out that Euripides has described these group processes in a psychologically plausible manner, exhibiting many of the conditions and symptoms of groupthink and revealing an understanding of group dynamics that Janis would only centuries later develop in the context of disastrous political decision-making. For a spectator, this could only have added to probability of the play, enhancing in turn the uncanny feeling that the Greek women evoke. They witnessed something that, intuitively, was possible to happen in their own reality and it is not a big step to imagining that such group behaviour could also occur in the new mystery cults in the Athens of their day.

3 Group dynamics as madness and disease

Having discussed the psychological workings of the group in the two messenger speeches, this chapter will now take a different approach to the group's dynamics. One particular aspect that typifies the Theban women is their altered state of mind. They are repeatedly presented, by different characters, with language of madness, possession and disease, and this altered condition is shared by the whole group. In what follows, I will discuss the implications of this presentation of their group dynamics as madness and disease. I will first briefly analyse the explicit verbal instances with which the women's frenzy is thematized by all other characters, before discussing how the description of their behaviour on a more implicit level is embedded in Greek conceptions of disease. Starting out from the modern concept of 'brainwashing', I will then explore the degree of accountability assumed in ancient Greece for people who are sick or even 'out of their mind'. I conclude with a brief analysis of the extent to which other characters acknowledge the altered mind state through their expression of identity, to see what this tells us about group functioning and the interpretation of the play.

3.1 Madness, possession and disease

We find a variety of explicit verbal instances for the women's frenzy. A verb that is repeatedly applied to the women and to them only in our play is οἰστράω. The sting of the gadfly (οἶστρος) was a Greek metaphor for a sting to madness. Homer uses it in the *Odyssey* to describe the wooers being struck with panic by Athena, fleeing through the palace like a herd of cows being stung by a gadfly.[68] The insect is mythically connected to Ino, who as punishment from Hera is constantly stung.[69] Euripides uses the image in other plays to denote characters that have been maddened with passion or love[70], the frenzy of Heracles[71] and the fury of Orestes.[72] The common denominator in all these instances is the fact that the frenzy is inflicted, in some cases more explicitly than in others, by a divinity.

[68] Homer, *Odyssey* 22.296-309.
[69] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 566, 681, 836, 879; *Supplices* 307, 541 and Sophocles, *Electra* 5.
[70] Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* 77, 547; *Hippolytus* 1300.
[71] Euripides, *Hercules furens* 862, 1144; also Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 1254.
[72] Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 1456; *Orestes* 791.

In our play, we find that different characters recognize this divine frenzy. The first instance of the word is in the prologue, where Dionysus claims:

τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ᾤστρησ᾽ ἐγὼ
μανίαις, ὄρος δ᾽ οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν (32-33)

("Therefore, I have stung these women from their houses
in frenzy, and they dwell in the mountains, out of their minds.")

In the parodos, the chorus describes the group as driven mad (οἰστρηθείς, 119) and the first messenger confirms this (οἴστροισι, 665). In the fourth choral ode, the Asian bacchantes urge the swift dogs of Madness (Λύσσας κύνες, 977) to drive the women crazy (ἀνοιστρήσατε, 979) so that they fail to recognize Pentheus as their king. Finally, also Kadmos observes the madness of his daughters, calling them "driven wild" (οἰστροπλῆγας, 1229). Pentheus, significantly, never uses the term.

There are other terms denoting the madness of the women. In 36, Dionysus repeats that he has have driven them away from their houses in madness (ἐξέμηνα δωμάτων), before defining the whole group in 52 as maenads (μαινάσι, literally 'mad women'). The second messenger observes that they are possessed by the god's breath (θεοῦ πνοαῖσιν ἐμμανεῖς, 1094), vividly describing Agave's possession in the seconds before she murders her son (1122-1124). With foam on her lips and her eyes twisting (as confirmed by the chorus who sees her coming in 1166-1167), she is not thinking as she ought to and possessed by the god (οὐ φρονοῦσ᾽ ἃ χρὴ φρονεῖν / ἐκ Βακχίου κατείχετ᾽, 1123-1124). Kadmos finally, explains to Agave that she and her sisters did what they did because they were mad (ἐμάνητε, 1295).

These terms of madness and possession are also applied to other characters. As Thumiger sets out in her systematic study of characterization in the *Bacchae*, these words preclude "a predictable identification (…) with any one pattern of behaviour": they are used by different characters from different perspectives, thereby assuming different implications.[73] For example, most of the verbal instances mentioned above in the context of the Theban women come from the root μαν-. In these instances, μανία is used either to denote divine punishment or ecstatic possession. But it is also used by Teiresias and the chorus to denote Pentheus' (and a general) impiety towards the gods (326, 359, 887, 399-400, 999). Teiresias even uses it for the

[73] Thumiger 2007, 79. Her second chapter presents a comprehensive study of psychological and medical motifs throughout the play.

Dionysian ecstasy that gives seers their valuable abilities and that fills armies with panic (289-305). In other words, μανία "is a gift, an initiatory state, the product as well as the source of ignorance and stupidity, and the means as well as the aim of divine punishment", offering the audience no fixed point of meaning.[74] Importantly, just as with οἶστρος, Pentheus never uses the term for the women on Cithaeron.

Nor does Pentheus use words with the root φρεν- for the women, whose usage is similarly complex and manifold.[75] We have seen that Dionysius uses it for the women who are out of their minds (33) and the messenger for Agave who does not think straight (1123), but it is also applied (negatively) by Teiresias and Kadmos to Pentheus' foolishness for rejecting the god (269, 332, 359) and by the messenger to denote Pentheus' quickness of mood (670). One context in which its use is particularly interesting is the change in Pentheus' mental attitude towards changing clothes (and symbolically, Dionysus' victory over him). At the end of the third scene, Dionysus says:

τεισώμεθ' αὐτόν. πρῶτα δ' ἔκστησον φρενῶν,
ἐνεὶς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν· ὡς φρονῶν μὲν εὖ
οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν,
ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται. (850-853)

("Let us punish him. But first, let him be out of his mind,
by sending him mild madness: for if he is sound of mind,
he will not agree to dress in women's clothes,
but if he is driven out of his senses, he will dress up.")

What is implied here, is that the intention to do something is subject to mental change: the god emphasizes that Pentheus would only be willing to change dress if his mental state changes from, literally, "thinking straight" (φρονῶν εὖ) to 'being out of his mind' (ἔκστησον φρενῶν; ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν). Once Pentheus has changed clothes, his delusion is clear (918-922): he thinks he sees two suns, two cities of Thebes and a wall with seven gates, perceiving Dionysus as a bull. Dionysus compliments him for having changed his mind (μεθέστηκας φρενῶν, 944), as his former mental state was not healthy (τὰς δὲ πρὶν φρένας / οὐκ εἶχες ὑγιεῖς, 947-948). The message is clear: the mental condition of both the women and their king have been changed. Both have 'given up' their old state and have been imposed a new one by the god.

[74] Thumiger 2007, 79.
[75] For an exhaustive examination of these words, see Thumiger 2007, 75.

Agave, eventually, will come back to her senses, returning to her former state (γίγνομαι δέ πως / ἔννους, 1269-1270).[76] I will discuss the implications of this insanity in a moment.

On a more implicit level, the women's behaviour is presented as that of diseased people. The theme of disease and cure is a recurring theme in our play and, similar to what we have seen with μανία, its language is used by various characters from opposing perspectives.[77] Although there are no explicit verbal references to sickness in the presentation of the maenads, it has been convincingly argued by Thumiger that Euripides' description of their frenzy closely corresponds to the symptoms as described in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*.[78] In the *Epidemics*, for example, sick people, regardless of which specific sickness, are repeatedly described to react to their disease as to being struck and screaming out loud. Also, they restlessly wander while making sudden movements. In general, a sudden change from a state of calmness into one of crisis is considered as a typical manifestation of sickness.[79] We find the imagery of restless leaping with the maenads too (for instance, in 445-446, 1056-1057) and the sudden movements of the sick are, for instance, reflected in the women's behaviour during the σπαραγμός and raid. The image of the οἶστρος also conveys a sense of unpredictability. One particularly striking parallel is the women's description in the *Bacchae* as being "struck out of their minds" (παράκοποι φρενῶν, 33) to a recurring Hippocratic symptom (παρακρούω, παράκρουσμα, παρακοπή).[80] Lastly, the foaming lips and twisting eyes are traditional symptoms of abnormal mental conditions as described in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, also recurring in other Euripidean plays.[81]

In other words, the description of the women's frenzy must have tapped into a more traditional Greek conceptualization of sickness in general, suggesting to a spectator that the mental condition of the women was one of sickness. But Thumiger takes the discussion one step further. The cult as portrayed does not correspond to the conceptualization of just a disease, but of a collective disease, which becomes clear when comparing the description to

[76] Devereux 1970 argues for the clinical plausibility of this 'psychotherapy'-scene.
[77] Thumiger 2007, 86-100 presents an elaborate linguistical examination on disease and cure. For example, Pentheus presents the cult as a polluting sickness (262, 353), whereas Teiresias presents the god as the cure (283) and Pentheus as sickness (311, 326-327).For a more general survey of (the ambivalence of) disease and cure in Greek tragedy to depict human misfortune, see Lloyd 2003, 84-97; 91-94 on the *Bacchae*.
[78] Thumiger 2007, 86-100. The Hippocratic works she refers to are *Epidemics* III and VII.
[79] Musitelli 1968.
[80] Hippocrates, *Epidemics* III, 3.104.2-3, 3.122.14-15; VII, 5.460.10.
[81] Hippocrates, *De morbo sacro* 7 on epilepsy; Euripides, *Medea* 1173-1176 about Medea; *Hercules furens* 931-934 about Heracles, who is said 'not be himself anymore (ὁ δ' οὐκέθ' αὑτὸς ἦν).

Thucydides' account of the plague that hit Athens in 430 B.C.[82] Among the key elements of the epidemic as Thucydides perceived it were the novelty of the disease, the inability to control it, its unpredictability, the fact that it had first struck elsewhere and had now reached Athens, the impartiality with which it made it victims, the social dislocation it engendered and the need for a collective scapegoat (in Athens' case, the Peloponnesians). Moreover, thirst and burning heat were the main symptoms, as well as a terrible amnesia afterwards.

In our play, Dionysus arrives as an emphatically new god to the city, having first imposed his cult abroad, and is impartial when it comes to distinguishing between his followers (209). As for the inability to control the plague, the mass reaction and chaos that Dionysus' arrival causes "certainly recall the historian's account of social dislocation in plague-stricken Athens".[83] The failure of Pentheus and his aunts to acknowledge Dionysus as god, but also as family, as well as Agave's failure to recognize her son, may reflect Thucydides' description of victims not recognizing their relatives while being sick. Lastly, fire is a recurring marker for divine power and the women's frenzy in the *Bacchae*, which corresponds both to Thucydides' symptom and the Hippocratic description of fever.[84] All in all, it is not difficult to imagine the Athenian spectator drawing the analogy between these two collective events: at any rate, it must have invited the audience to understand the women's new condition as a collective disease.

3.2 'Brainwashing' and accountability

Let us now return to the women's description of insanity specifically and the implications for a Greek in terms of accountability. It will be helpful to start out by considering how we, in modern-day society, would evaluate their behaviour. The description of the women would duly qualify for a diagnosis of 'brainwashing', at least according to the aspects that Taylor describes in her influential study on the concept.[85] According to her, our modern conceptualization of brainwashing entails, first of all, intentional behaviour on the brainwasher's part, who wants to alter or even destroy the old beliefs of the victim, so that new beliefs may be adopted. These new beliefs are often very strange and insensible compared to the old beliefs. Both aspects are evident

[82] Thucydides, *Historiae* 2.47.3-54.5.
[83] Thumiger 2007, 91.
[84] For example, *Epidemics* I, 2.684.13. In *Oedipus Tyrannus* 27, Sophocles describes a plague as imposed by a god of fever. On the connection between this play and the plague, see Lloyd 2003, 84-85.
[85] Taylor 2004; the aspects are systematically introduced with illuminating case studies from p. 10 onwards.

in our play: the women change from denying Dionysus' divinity to worshipping him on Cithaeron and it is emphatically Dionysus who is behind this (20-34).

Naturally, humans change many of their beliefs over time, which is something we would not define as brainwashing. Therefore, the timescale is another aspect Taylor identifies: "the shorter the time of transition – between old and new beliefs— the more likely that some form of brainwashing has occurred."[86] As our play opens with the women already sent away, we do not know how long they are in frenzy already, but one can hardly imagine that this situation has lasted for weeks until Pentheus finally intervenes, with οἶστρος also suggesting a swiftness of change. Lastly, persons that we would call brainwashed often associate strong emotional states with their new beliefs, that are in turn difficult to challenge with rational arguments: this, I believe, is clearly demonstrated in the analysis of the two messenger speeches in the previous chapter.

But what does it help us to recognize that we, 21st-century spectators, would consider the Theban bacchantes as victims of brainwashing? It is the last aspect of Taylor that is particularly interesting here. She claims that in our modern conception, too, "brainwashing has a guise as a concept of last resort, a screen pulled across to hide the abyss of our ignorance. We invoke it when we have no other explanation, or are not motivated to look for one."[87] This 'last resort' has significant consequences for the extent to which we hold the brainwashed accountable for his or her acts. As Taylor sets out, we are likely to nuance our opinion of the victim as moral agent or even discard full responsibility. In fact, most of the trials in which alleged victims of brainwashing were prosecuted for committed crimes, centred around the question whether they were acting voluntarily or under coercion.[88]

An example that serves to elucidate this is Charles Manson's cult.[89] When his followers stood trial for seven murders, the prosecution adopted the argument that it was Manson's brainwashing that caused their actions, thereby implicating him in the murders. The dilemma, however, was that this absolved his followers from responsibility, while at the same time, Manson himself was not even present during the murders, complicating his own responsibility. Although a higher court eventually decided that 'brainwashing' cannot relieve one from criminal liability and convicted both Manson and his followers, the trial demonstrates the

[86] Taylor 2004, 11.
[87] Taylor 2004, 9.
[88] See Taylor 2004, 10 for the case of Patty Hearst; for the case of Charles Manson's followers, 29-31.
[89] Taylor 2004, 29-31.

complexities in thinking about altered mind states and responsibility. In our conception, claiming that the Theban women must be brainwashed would imply at least a reduced accountability for their actions, with Dionysus using them to some extent as a 'tool' to kill Pentheus.

How, then, would a Greek spectator of the *Bacchae* have assessed the women's responsibility? First of all, it is worth noting that μανία and other diseases in ancient Greece are generally god-induced and mark a situation of calamity. Lloyd argues that the theme of gods as responsible for disease (and their cures) is already strongly developed in archaic texts.[90] There is, generally, a strong correlation between good behaviour and health and prosperity, with (one or more) gods often sending a disease as punishment for some offence. The idea that divine retribution was widespread among Greeks, moreover, is confirmed by various episodes in Herodotus.[91] At the same time, Lloyd warns us not to make too many universalizing claims, as there are also instances in which sickness has nothing to do with the gods.[92]

In our play, divine retribution is evident for the audience and most characters, as we have seen in the analysis of the use of the gadfly metaphor. The instances of μαν-words reveal that even more characters recognize their deranged mental state, except for Pentheus. At any rate, the audience knows that the μανία is imposed on the women as punishment for their denial of Dionysus' divinity and we have also seen that οἶστρος implies a divine cause. Surely, there is responsibility on the women's part in this respect: they have done something wrong for which they are to blame and are (rightfully) punished with μανία. This is confirmed by Kadmos in the exodus: when Agave asks him how the women ended up on Cithaeron, he answers that they were mad (1294-1295). Agave then understands it was Dionysus who brought them ruin, to which Kadmos replies that he had reason to do so: "He was insulted with insolence, for you did not consider him a god" (ὕβριν <γ'> ὑβρισθείς· θεὸν γὰρ οὐχ ἡγεῖσθέ νιν, 1297).

But what did temporal insanity specifically imply for the accountability of their actions? It will be helpful here to look at other instances in Greek literature in which this area of tension

[90] Lloyd 2003, 10-26.
[91] Lloyd 2003, 115-127. One example is the case of Cleomenes, king of Sparta, who strikes one of his own people and then self-mutilates, ending in his death. Herodotus describes the various explanations that the Greeks offer for his madness, all going back to divine punishment. Only the Spartans, contrastingly, offer a naturalistic explanation, blaming his drinking habits.
[92] For example *Odyssey* 22.296-309, where Odysseus' mother explicitly contrasts a death by the hand of Artemis, who is often connected in Homer with women's diseases, with dying from consumption that is caused by a disease. The third chapter of Lloyd 2003 discusses more naturalistic approaches to disease in the fifth century B.C.

emerges, for which I depart from Walton's discussion on this subject.[93] When Agamemnon in book 19 of the *Iliad* reflects on his seizing of Briseis from Achilles, he emphatically states that he is not responsible (ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι, 19.86), but rather the gods, who casted delusion on his mind (οἵ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην, 19.88). He then explains how ἄτη operates and how it can even afflict Zeus, before concluding:

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἀασάμην καί μευ φρένας ἐξέλετο Ζεύς,
ἄψ ἐθέλω ἀρέσαι, δόμεναί τ' ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα· (Homer, *Iliad*, 19.137-138)

("But because I was blinded and Zeus took away my wits,
I want to make amends and offer countless ransom.")

What is suggested by Agamemnon is that he acted in a deluded, god-induced state of mind, thereby "dissociating the action from himself".[94] In this sense, he is not αἴτιος, as his actions were not carried out by his usual self – that intentions are subject to mental changes has been noted by Dionysus. But Agamemnon does accept responsibility in the sense that he must pay for what he did during the subversion to compensate Achilles. Obviously, there is a rhetorical aspect to this: Agamemnon needs Achilles back and cannot offend him again, but he needs to save face as well. Resorting to a god-inflicted delusion is, apparently, a good way out, as his words are accepted: it demonstrates that a reduced accountability due to an abnormal mental condition was a plausible explanation.

Other plays confirm the ubiquity of this idea. In Euripides' *Hercules furens*, Hera sends Madness (Λύσσα) on stage to madden Heracles. She is reluctant at first and makes sure Heracles will not know that he is murdering his own children when he does, until he is released from madness (865-866). After the murder, Heracles comes to his senses again (1089ff.), indeed not recalling what he has done, until Amphitryon tells him everything, just like Kadmos with Agave. Theseus then enters the stage and is told about Heracles' atrocities (1182ff.). Significantly, Heracles is never blamed by Theseus: the latter claims it was Hera at work (Ἥρας ὅδ' ἀγών, 1191) and strongly sympathizes with Heracles (1196-1198; συναλγῶν, 1202). Madness, moreover, is not mentioned at any point anymore.

[93] Walton 2009, 131-147.
[94] Williams 1993, 53; see 50-75 for his full analysis of the passage. For a more theological analysis of the passage, see Versnel 2011, 163ff.

In Euripides' *Orestes*, Orestes himself presents a slightly different take on responsibility after murdering his own mother. Initially, he blames Apollo for urging him to do this most unholy deed (285-286), just like Electra in the prologue declared it was Orestes' obedience to the god that caused the murder (28-32). Orestes, who is mad during the beginning of the play, for instance mistaking Electra for one of the Furies, repeats the point that the gods piled the trouble upon him later to Menelaus (394). But when Menelaus then asks him from what he suffers exactly, he responds that it is his conscience, because he knows that he has done terrible things (ἡ σύνεσις, ὅτι σύνοιδα δείν' εἰργασμένος, 396). So, while blaming the gods, Orestes does not fully hold them accountable and, by referring to his conscience, he suggests that he is aware of his own responsibility.[95]

These examples demonstrate how Greeks poets explored the complex relationship between insanity, divine and personal responsibility. The major and unanswered question here, as Walton puts it, "is where personal responsibility can be disowned and personal weakness passed off as god-sent."[96] In the beginning of *Orestes*, Helen claims she is sorry for the death of her sister Clytaemnestra, whom she never saw back after sailing to Troy, due to a god-induced frenzy (θεομανεῖ, 79). As the audience knows she was simply fulfilling divine will by joining Paris in her capacity as most beautiful women in the world, it is a strange excuse, perhaps with some comic intent.[97] But even if it was meant ironically, such an excuse demonstrates that the idea of reduced accountability due to divine frenzy was an idea that the Greeks reflected on and that we can assume the audience of the *Bacchae* to be acquainted with. This is important for our present purposes, as we will shortly see that, while the audience may have considered the possibility of reduced accountability for the women, not all characters do, as not all recognize the women's frenzy.

3.3 Insanity and identity

By looking at the explicit verbal instances of insanity, we have seen that while most characters do recognize the (divine) madness of the women, Pentheus does not use words that denote this madness for the women. One other, specific way in which the maenad's altered condition is reflected is the expression of their identity by other characters. As Laura Swift sets out in her

[95] Walton 2009, 145.
[96] Walton 2009, 144.
[97] Walton 2009, 131.

analysis of choral identity in Euripides' *Medea* and *Ion*, the tragic chorus can hold "a range of alternative identities (choral, familial, gendered, local): the tensions created by these potentially conflicting identities enhance the play's exploration of associated ideas".[98] This range of conflicting identities is also apparent in Euripides' presentation of the Theban maenads, sometimes even referred to by scholars as "shadow chorus".[99] They are simultaneously Theban, hence Greek, mortal, women and, most significantly, they have become maenads or bacchantes by suffering from a new mental condition. In what follows, I will analyse how the expression of identity also demonstrates the fact that Pentheus does not recognize the women's new condition.

A recurring tension in the group's identity is the distinction between the group's femininity and the group's bacchanalianism. Dionysus' presentation of them in the prologue epitomizes this tension. Initially, he emphasizes the fact that the group on Cithaeron consists of his aunts and all the female offspring of Kadmeans, as many as there are women (35-36), emphasizing "the exclusion of men".[100] In the next references, however, he refers to them merely as bacchantes and maenads in the mountains (βάκχας, μαινάσι, βάκχαις, 50-52, 62), suggesting that they have given up their civic and female identity, to become something else.

Euripides thematizes the ceasing of the group's traditional female identity in a quite explicit manner. When the chorus in the parodos invokes Thebes to join the god's worship, they add that the Theban women are waiting on Cithaeron, taken away by Dionysus "from the weaver's shuttle and loom" (ἀφ' ἱστῶν παρὰ κερκίδων, 118). The image of the loom reappears at the end of the second scene, when Pentheus addresses the women of the chorus, threatening them to stop their drum roll and keep them as slaves at the loom (511-514). Moreover, Agave mentions the loom also in the exodus to Kadmos:

ἦ τὰς παρ' ἱστοῖς ἐκλιποῦσα κερκίδας
ἐς μείζον' ἥκω, θῆρας ἀγρεύειν χεροῖν. (1236-1237)

("For I have left the weaver's shuttle at the loom
for greater things, to hunt wild animals with my hands.")

[98] Swift 2013, 131.
[99] For example, Murnaghan 2006, 100: in her metatheatrical reading of the *Bacchae*, she argues that Euripides invited the Greek audience to perceive the maenads as the real chorus in the play, hence presenting two models of choral experience. Cf. also Bierl 2013 for a different metatheatrical reading of the chorus.
[100] Dodds 1960, 67.

Euripides uses the image of the loom as a marker for the everyday activities of women, a role also Pentheus has in mind for women. But the image is also used as a tool to emphasize the fact that the Theban maenads have abandoned their civic female identity, according to the chorus, under Dionysus' force, and more deliberately according to Agave. The abandoning of the loom, the metaphor for femininity, thus also comes to represent the women's altered state.

The movement from female to Bacchic identity is made particularly apparent in the first messenger's narrative. At the beginning, the group is predominantly referred to as a female group: they are dancing women, led by his aunts and his μήτηρ Agave (680-682); the group includes young, old and even unmarried women (694) and many of them still have swollen breasts as they have abandoned their new-born infants (699-702). The herdsman trying to ambush Agave explicitly identifies her as the mother of Pentheus (718-721). But once the group is attacked and flies into a rage, in the messenger's presentation, the group's female identity is completely substituted by its Bacchic' identity: the herdsmen escape a βακχῶν σπαραγμόν (735) and the villages close to Cithaeron are plundered by βακχῶν (759).[101] Even Agave herself invokes her fellow maenads as dogs, as opposed to the hunting men (731-732). The idea that their femininity has perished, perhaps becomes most clear in 754, as they are even plundering children from the villages.

The messenger ends his narrative explicitly reflecting on the theme of identity:

γυναῖκες ἄνδρας οὐκ ἄνευ θεῶν τινος. (764)
("Women did this to men, not without the help of a god.")

Although the messenger brings up their femininity again, he does this to emphasize the peculiarity of the situation: women inflicted these things on men, while in normal circumstances, they would not be able to do so, obviously saving his own face as well with this remark. Taken together with the messenger's shift in identity focus in the course of the narrative, the message of his conclusion is clear: it is the god that turns the group from women into bacchantes, and in this latter identity, they carry out the atrocities.[102] The only solution that the messenger sees is to urge Pentheus to accept the god (769-774).

[101] The only exception and 'female reference' to the group is in 745: μυριάσι χειρῶν ἀγόμενοι νεανίδων.
[102] See Barrett 2002, 102-131 for a metatheatrical approach to the ability of the messengers to see hidden things that Pentheus fails to recognize.

Does Pentheus acknowledge this god-imposed insanity? In the beginning of the play, he focuses on the group's female identity. They are women who have left their houses (217) and in their capacity as women are now serving men (222-225). He claims that Dionysus presents his mysteries to young women (238), emphasizing that their maenadism is false and feigned (218, 224) and threatens to end their βακχεία, their Bacchic revelry (232). Pentheus perceives the group primarily as women, merely participating in the frenzy, or at any rate with a safe distance to really being bacchantes. This seems to change after the soldier reports the Dionysian miracles that happened in prison, referring to the group as βάκχας (443), and after the first messenger claims he has seen the terrible behaviour of the βάκχας ποτνιάδας (664). Pentheus for a moment seems to take this as a confirmation of the group's new, Bacchic identity: he now for the first time calls them βακχῶν (674, as opposed to βακχεία), and continues to identify them as bacchantes after the messenger's narrative, denouncing the ὕβρισμα βακχῶν (779) and urging to fight the βάκχαισιν (785).

However, he resolutely changes his course at the end of his response to the first messenger, emphasizing the group's female identity:

οὐ γὰρ ἀλλ' ὑπερβάλλει τάδε,
εἰ πρὸς γυναικῶν πεισόμεσθ' ἃ πάσχομεν. (785-786)

("For nothing exceeds this,
that we suffer what we suffer at the hands of women.")

Pentheus does not accept the messenger's suggestion that the god is behind everything, and still assumes that the group acted as women, and as such must be punished. This is developed in the rest of the third scene and the fourth scene. Pentheus intends to shed female blood (796-797). He defines the thyrsus and fawnskin as women's clothes instead of Bacchic clothes (835-836). When Pentheus returns on stage after changing clothes (914-927, quoted on page 11), Dionysus enumerates the different identities that his new outfit displays: a woman, a maenad/bacchant, a spy upon his mother and her thiasos and in appearance similar to his aunts. Significantly, Pentheus zeroes in on the female identity, asking whether he looks like Ino or his mother. He wants to spy on the γυναῖκας (953-954). Having arrived at Cithaeron, in the messenger's words, Pentheus is initially not able to see the female crowd (θῆλυν ὄχλον, 1058) and, repeating his allegation of false maenads (1060-1062).

In conclusion, then, what does this tell us about how Euripides thematizes group dynamics in our play? For one, the Athenian spectator must have been aware of the women's divine insanity, as the survey of explicit verbal instances denoting their madness has demonstrated. The description of their behaviour in general addressed Greek conceptualizations of calamity-marking disease, even collective disease, as a comparison to the *Corpus Hippocraticum* and Thucydides has revealed, with all texts containing similar psychological observations. For a Greek, suffering from sickness or insanity entails personal responsibility in the sense that it is usually, as in our play, imposed by a god as a punishment for some offence. Although a survey of other instances of μανία in Greek literature does not offer definitive answers to questions regarding accountability, it shows that Greek poets explored this idea much in the same way as we encounter complexities in thinking about brainwashed criminals nowadays. At any rate, the divine frenzy-excuse made sense in ancient Greece and could be a plausible explanation for reduced accountability, although it was at times also used as way of simply ducking the consequences of one's actions.

Most importantly for us is that an analysis of the expression of the group's identity confirms that all on-stage characters were aware of the women's temporal divine frenzy, with one exception: Pentheus. The spectator, aware of the delusion, would at least have considered it a possibility that the women were not to be fully blamed, whereas this is not an option for Pentheus. Admittedly, he was not on stage during the prologue and lacks crucial information that the audience has. But he also fails to recognize the hints that the soldier and the messengers give in their expression of the group's identity, never capitulating in his eagerness to punish them. For one, this enhances the tragic element of the play. But it also reinforces, in a way, the message of our conclusion of the first chapter: Pentheus is blind to the forces that are really active in the group, and stubbornly does not even attempt to adopt another perspective that may (partly) absolve the women from responsibility, tragically considering them as fully responsible agents. Moreover, the general frame of the group behaviour of the women of marked madness and disease, with the collective μανία eventually having disastrous consequences, implies a warning to the potential dangers lurking in a social group.

4 Group dynamics through imagery and ὄχλος

The last way in which Euripides thematizes group dynamics that we will be discussing is his use of animal and hunting imagery. Much has been said about this imagery in the *Bacchae*, as images of animals and literal references to them appear more often than in any other tragedy.[103] What I am concerned with here, is the extent to which this imagery tells us something about the Theban women's group functioning. This chapter will analyse, first, Euripides' use of the image of foals, fawns and dogs within the play and discuss its implications in the context of the Greek conception of hunting. After a brief discussion of the connotations of the bird simile, also outside the *Bacchae*, it will then examine one particular word that is used for the group of maenads: ὄχλος. This is not a term that necessarily belongs to Greek animal vocabulary. However, like the hunting and bird imagery, the word has certain connotations in Greek literature that have a lot to say about the way Euripides perceived groups and regarded group functioning.

4.1 Foals, fawns and dogs

Two particularly strong images that are linked to the Theban maenads (and Dionysiac worship in general) are those of foals, fawns and dogs. The three images are uttered by different characters and are closely connected to each other through the theme of hunting. We find the first instance at the end of the parodos (163-169), when the chorus compares a joyful bacchant to a "foal with its grazing mother" (πῶλος ὅπως ἅμα ματέρι / φορβάδι). Segal points to the grim symbolism here, as Pentheus, in the outfit of a bacchant, will eventually be reunited with his mother: the grazing, then, assumes a totally different meaning.[104] The chorus' image of a jumping foal (σκιρτήμασι, 169) is recalled by the soldier who describes the cheerful jumping (σκιρτῶσι, 445) of the women after being set free. The second messenger explicitly takes up the simile, describing the women before they turn to violence as "foals, freed from the embellished yoke" (αἱ δ' ἐκλιποῦσαι ποικίλ' ὡς πῶλοι ζυγὰ, 1056).

[103] Thumiger 2007, 128-138; Segal 1982, 31-42; Podlecki 1974, 146-147; Winnington-Ingram 1948, 100-120; Barlow 1971, 76; Carey 2016, 76-78.
[104] Segal 1982, 34.

The bacchantes are thus connected to a strong sense of joy, youthfulness and liberation, which is echoed in the simile of the fawn. In the third choral ode (862-876), the Asian women wish for themselves to dance around "like a fawn" (ὡς νεβρός), playing in the green pleasures of the meadow. The fawn has just escaped in a chase the "well-woven nets" (εὐπλέκτων ὑπὲρ ἀρκύων) and the hunter with his running dogs (κυναγέτας / συντείνηι δράμημα κυνῶν). The young (and female) animal now jumps over the plain along the river and rejoices in solitude, away from humans (ἡδομένα / βροτῶν ἐρημίαις). With the first messenger speech still fresh in mind, it is hard not to draw the parallel between the hunted fawn and the Theban women, who experienced a similar alternation of joy and anxiety during the attack of the herdsmen.[105] The women in fact look like fawns, as the fawnskin is an essential element of their outfit.

At the same time, however, the women also represent the other side of the coin, that of the hunter. This reversal of roles occurs at the moment that the herdsmen attack the group. Agave responds to this attack (731-732), seeing her fellow maenads both as "hunted down" (θηρώμεθ') and as "running hounds" (δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες) that subsequently hunt and devour the cattle. Running is strongly associated with hunting, as we have seen with the dogs in the third choral ode, but also in the parodos, where the thiasos is running (δρομαίων, 137) to seize and devour a goat. In the fourth choral ode, the chorus invokes (977-981) the quick hounds of madness to go to Cithaeron and pit the Theban women, who are "running on the mountain" (ὀρειδρόμων, 985), against Pentheus. Just like the fawn was the object of chasing dogs, now the women are on the hunted side, but they are incited at the same time to become the hunters of Pentheus, subtly reversing roles.

In the ensuing second messenger's speech, the turning point of their role reversal is marked by Dionysus' exhortation to attack Pentheus. They hunt him down, running (δραμήμασι, 1091) and really behaving like hounds: "first, they are roused by their master, at 1078; they lift their head nervously, almost as sniffing the air, at 1086-87; then they are commanded to surround the prey, at 1106."[106] Agave finally holds Pentheus' head as hunting trophy (θήρᾳ, 1144), praising Dionysus as her fellow-hunter (τὸν ξυγκυναγός, τὸν ξυνεργάτην ἄγρας, 1146) and later even as "hound-leader" (κυναγέτας, 1189).[107] From 1168 onwards,

[105] Winnington-Ingram 1948, 115. He argues (105-116) that the image of the fawn, foal and dogs is a "commentary upon the animal life and the aspiration of human beings towards it". See also Barlow 1971, 113, who recognizes the "closeness to the instinctive life of animals" as part of the Bacchic philosophy.
[106] Thumiger 2007, 136.
[107] The hounds return in Kadmos' comparison of Pentheus to Actaeon, whose self-raised σκύλακες murdered their leader, first foreshadowing Pentheus' fate (337-40) and later confirming the analogy (1291).

Agave's return is presented as a κῶμος, a revel after a successful hunt, in which the hunter displays the trophy and everybody congratulates the hunter.[108]

So, the women are simultaneously presented on one hand as gamboling young animals, that in essence always run the risk of becoming a prey, in our play specifically of running hounds led by a κυναγέτας. On the other hand, once the women find themselves in a threatening situation, they perceive themselves as hunting dogs with Dionysus as their leader and are described by the messengers as behaving as such.[109] This fits into a greater theme of role reversal in the *Bacchae*, as many scholars have noted, with Pentheus starting as the hunter and becoming hunted and Dionysus going through the opposite process.[110] This hunting reversal, moreover, was part of many Greek myths in which the hunt plays a role, such as the myths about Actaeon and Callisto.[111] On a general level, therefore, this hunting imagery adds to the play's suspense, as the use of the image itself already suggests imminent danger to a Greek spectator.

What is interesting for our present purposes, however, is to examine the implications of the hunting role of the women specifically. In her study on the archaic and classical Greek conception of the hunt, Barringer argues that the hunt occupied a crucial place "in the construction of the male gender in Athenian aristocratic culture".[112] It was strongly linked to ἀρετή, the emulation of Homeric ideals and the preparation for military activity, as the hunt would help young men to acquire the skills to become warriors. Therefore, the fact that the women perceive themselves as hunters is therefore already anomalous. They assume a role that they are not supposed to assume, which in turn adds to their presentation as mad and as having lost touch with their usual existence.

Besides adding suspense and confirming the women's madness, Euripides' use of the hunt image for the women conveys an implicit message about group functioning. At this point, the specific way in which they hunt deserves attention. In the play, Pentheus hunts with tools: he intends to imprison the women and the stranger with "iron nets" (σιδηραῖς … ἐν ἄρκυσιν, 231; ἐν ἄρκυσιν, 451). Dionysus hunts in a similar way, leading Pentheus "into his net" (ἐς βόλον, 848) and throwing a "noose" (βρόχον, 1021) around him. Conversely, it is repeatedly

[108] Taplin 2003, 73-74.
[109] The god alludes to his position as military leader of the group in the prologue (50-52). Next to hunt-leader, Dionysus is also the bull that leads Pentheus to his death (920, 1159).
[110] Segal 1982, 31-36; Winnington-Ingram 1948, 93-95, 106-108; Podlecki 1974, 146.
[111] See Barringer 2001, 125-171 for an analysis of these and other 'reversal'-myths. In her second chapter, Barringer discusses the hunt as an image for erotic pursuit, where often a similar change of ἐραστής into ἐρώμενος occurs.
[112] Barringer 2001, 10: she develops this idea especially in 10-59. Cf. also Xenophon, *On Hunting* 1.18, who urges young men not to despise hunting, as it will prepare them for war.

emphasized that the women do not use such hunting tools: they use oak branches as "ironless levers" (ἀσιδήρος μοχλοῖς, 1104) and they hunt without a noose (ἄνευ βρόχῶν, 1172). Agave even emphatically boasts about not having used spears or nets, but having hunted bare-handedly: she even despises huntsmen who use tools (1202-1210).[113]

If we base ourselves on the main surviving hunting manual that was written around Euripides' time, Xenophon's Κυνηγετικός, the hunt that Pentheus and Dionysus launch corresponds to a popular and common type of hunting on small animals, like the hare.[114] This type of hunting involved a hunt-leader with a pack of hounds, that were supposed to drive the game into a net, snare or trap, and explicitly not to catch it themselves, for "if one were going to cook and eat a hare, it was better to catch her in a net than to have to pull her out of the mouths of the hounds, half-eaten already."[115] It must be noted here that Xenophon devotes 70% of his manual to hare-hunting, perhaps sketching an incomplete picture of what the Greek hunt fully entailed.[116] However, the mention of hounds and nets and nooses in our play at least suggests that our play activated in the audience the connotations of this type of hunt. An argument in support of this is the fact that Pentheus' death is also linked to a hare's death in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (26), suggesting that this type of hunting was part of the myth more in general. The great mismatch between the image of a relatively non-risky form of hunting and the actual hunting down of a god or a king, obviously adds to the tragic effect of the play.

For us, the outright rejection of any conventional hunting tools by the women is significant. It makes them, for one, more reckless and mad, more so because they are chasing what they believe is a big animal, a lion. In the context of the Greek conception of hunting, I think that the point of this emphasis on their anomalous way of hunting is that Euripides wants to convey an image of the women that have really *become* hunting hounds.[117] The κυναγέτας (Dionysus) may need nets or nooses, but the women just assume the subordinate role of hounds, obeying what their leader commands them to do: chasing the prey into a net. Yet, they fail this role: the women tear their prey apart (both the cattle and Pentheus), the remains are

[113] The thyrsus is an exception here, as Agave calls upon the others to use it as weapon (633). Yet, it is not used during the hunt, but only to display Pentheus' head on afterwards.
[114] For a good introduction to Xenophon's treatise, see Phillips and Willcock 1999, 2-8. On ancient Greek hunting more in general, see Hull 1964. Thumiger 2007, 135-136 also discusses the comparison to hare hunting.
[115] Hull 1964, 10. Hounds are generally used by Euripides only in a hunting context, see for instance *Cyclops* 130; *Hippolytus* 18, 217-219 and *Helena* 154.
[116] Phillips and Willcock 1999, 10. Their edition also covers Arrian's treatise on hunting, written centuries later, who also devotes most attention to hare-hunting.
[117] See Xenophon, *On Hunting* 4.4-5 for particularly striking similarities between his description of chasing dogs and the women's overall behaviour.

scattered over the mountain and they even plunder villages.[118] In this savage aspect of their hunting, Podlecki has rightly observed a reflection of Euripides on the excessive dangers of group feeling.[119] Once the women start their violent behaviour, they figuratively turn from a peaceful foal or fawn into impetuous dogs. They become animals that, according to Greek conception, always hunt in a pack. This stands in sharp contrast to their identification during the joyful and peaceful scenes with single foals and fawns, who are "travelling not in a flock or drove, but alone", and desire a life of solitude away from humans (ἡδομένα / βροτῶν ἐρημίαις, 874-875).[120] Here it is supportive to recall the second chapter, in which we have seen that the turning point of the women's behaviour initiates a collective description of their actions in both messenger speeches, whereas before this turning point, the women are also involved in individual activities.

This strongly suggests that, at least in part, it is the group-feeling that causes the women to perform the atrocities, blindly following the leader's directions. In Podlecki's words, the image suggests that "the herd-instinct is thoroughly destructive: the women get their dangerously volatile energy from the stimulus of group-association."[121] This herd-feeling seems to emerge in the chorus as well: when they finally see the return of Dionysus, they complain about the solitude they felt with him gone (μονάδ' ἔχουσ' ἐρημίαν, 609). They want the opposite from what the fawn desires. Euripides in this way uses the opposing images of the fawn and the dog as a tool to warn for the dangers of the collective. Eventually, it will be Agave's dissociation from the group, her distanced position to the 'herd', that enables here to recognize and deplore her actions carried out while being part of that group.

4.2 Birds

Another simile both messengers and Pentheus use for the women is that of birds. The first messenger describes the women, who have just torn apart the cattle, as raising "like birds in speed" (ὥστ' ὄρνιθες ἀρθεῖσαι δρόμωι, 748) towards the villages. When preparing for his journey to Cithaeron, Pentheus expects to find the women mating "like birds in the thickets" (ἐν λόχμαις ὄρνιθας ὡς, 957). The second messenger describes how the women advance

[118] Thumiger 2007, 136-137.
[119] Podlecki 1974, 146-147.
[120] Podlecki 1974, 147.
[121] Podlecki 1974, 147. According to him, the image also suggests that "Bacchic worship is truly liberating of the individual, whose identity is not suppressed or amalgamated in the group."

Pentheus "no less in speed than a dove" (πελείας ὠκύτητ' οὐχ ἥσσονες, 1090). The aptness of this image has been noted by various scholars, as birds map "all the aspects of the women's behaviour: peaceful aggressive, military, finally helpless".[122] At any rate, like the hounds, the bird image implies a sense of swiftness and of a collectively operating group, something we also find in Homer's comparison of the Trojan army to birds (*Iliad* III, 2-7).[123]

There is, however, something interesting to say about the implication of the image for the mental state of the women. For within the play, flying also has a strong connotation of instability of mind and loss of control. It is used twice by Kadmos to denounce Pentheus: "how fluttered he is" (ὡς ἐπτόηται, 214) and "now you are fluttering" (νῦν γὰρ πέτῃ, 332). When Kadmos brings Agave back to her senses, he asks her whether she is still fluttering in her soul (τὸ δὲ πτοηθὲν τόδ' ἔτι σῇι ψυχῇι πάρα, 1268).

In fact, the connection between madness and the flight of birds, the idea of a 'flying' mind, is more common in Greek literature. Two centuries earlier, Theognis in his elegies urges not to make hasty decisions (1049-1053). Rather, one should ponder the things in his heart before acting, for "the heart and mind of those who rage are fluttering, but counsel leads even a good mind to what is beneficial" (τῶν γὰρ μαινομένων πέτεται θυμός τε νόος τε / βουλὴ δ' εἰς ἀγαθὸν καὶ νόον ἐσθλὸν ἄγει, 1053-1054). The context is different from our play: we are dealing here with gnomic poetry and practical and ethical advice about life. However, acting too hastily, a loss of self-control, is described in language that resembles the language in our play, presenting the mind as flying. Deliberation, as it is implied, brings a mind back on the ground.

We find another interesting parallel in Aristophanes' *Birds,* performed some ten years before the staging of *Bacchae*. In the play (166-170), Pisthetaerus urges birds not to fly around with their beaks open, for that is discreditable (ἄτιμον). He then illustrates this point by saying that in Athens, when people see a fluttering (πετομένους) man, they ask what kind of bird it is, to which Teleas would answer: "the man is a bird, unstable, flighty, inconsistent, and he never remains in one place" (ἄνθρωπος ὄρνις ἀστάθμητος πετόμενος / ἀτέκμαρτος, οὐδὲν οὐδέποτ' ἐν ταὐτῷ μένων, 169-170). Although the exact details of the illustration are open to interpretation, as Dunbar sets out in her commentary on the play, the general point of the passage is clear: "for a man to be described as a bird, and as flighty, is discreditable".[124] Again,

[122] Thumiger 2007, 203; Segal 1982, 142.
[123] For birds blindly following the authority of their leader, see also the chorus in Euripides' *Helena*, who imagine themselves as migrant birds (1479-1493).
[124] Dunbar 1998, 141; 141-143 discuss the details of the passage.

the image of flying is applied to a human in a negative context of instability and unpredictability. Both the Theognis and the Aristophanes passage demonstrate that a description of the women acting like a flock of birds presumably implied for a Greek audience a sense of instability, of not having both feet on the ground.

4.3 Ὄχλος

Next to foals, fawns, dogs and birds, one specific term that is used to denote the entire group of maenads is ὄχλος.[125] When the chorus in the parodos describes how Dionysus leads his thiasos into the mountains, the "crowd of women" (θηλυγενὴς ὄχλος, 117) is waiting there for him. According to the second messenger, after arriving on Cithaeron, Pentheus is initially not able to see the "female crowd" (θῆλυν … ὄχλον, 1058). After the king is torn apart by his mother, first Ino joins the attack, then Autonoë and then the "whole crowd of bacchantes" (ὄχλος τε πᾶς … βακχῶν, 1130-1131). The question here is: what connotations did this word activate in the audience and what does this tell us about the way Euripides reflected on group functioning? I will first analyse the instances of the word in Euripides' other tragedies, as he extensively uses it elsewhere, before briefly looking at how Thucydides uses the term.

Most importantly, the term generally has a negative connotation in Euripidean drama. This is in some cases more evident than in others, but the term at any rate never conveys a positive message. Often, ὄχλος implies a sense of a threat: more specifically, the group indicated by ὄχλος poses this threat in its capacity as a crowd. In *Heraclidae* (44), Iolaus declares that shame prevents him from exposing young girls to a crowd of people. Helen in *Orestes* also utters that it is not good for maidens to go into an ὄχλος (108) and fears the Argive mob herself (119). Menelaus in *Helena* (415) expresses about himself a similar embarrassment to burst into a crowd and make inquiries. The intimidating nature of an ὄχλος emerges in *Hippolytus* (986-989) in the context of public speaking. In *Cyclops*, Odysseus denotes the Trojan enemy using the term (199) and the Cyclops himself uses it for the potentially threatening throng of pirates and robbers near his cave (222). In *Phoenissae*, Antigone fears to face the crowd (1276) and the servant describes the ὄχλος of women advancing the palace as a disturbance to the city.

[125] The entry in the Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon translates it as "crowd, throng", most often in a military sense ("crowd, throng") or political sense ("populace, mob"), or a more general sense ("mass, multitude"). A second meaning, often together with παρέχειν, is "annoyance, trouble" (Liddell et al. 1996, 1281).

Iphigeneia Aulidensis, lastly, contains references to the mob as a cause of fear (517), as a group Odysseus sides with (526) and as the intimidating group of men approaching Iphigeneia (1338).

Odysseus' description of an army as ὄχλος finds a parallel in many other occurrences of the word. It is often used to denote the whole Greek army or divisions of it.[126] In *Phoenissae*, an armed ὄχλος submissively follows its leader Parthenopaeus (148). In Euripides' oeuvre, the word thus also carries strong connotations of obedience to a military leader, of not acting autonomously but under someone's command. This sense of compromised agency is also conveyed in two references to an ὄχλος of slaves.[127]

So, given these strong connotations of the word, its use in our play is significant. It implies that the maenads pose a threat in their capacity as a group and that they are acting not as free individuals, but as an amalgamated herd. There is one particularly striking occurrence of ὄχλος in Euripides' *Hecuba* that is relevant for our present purposes. When Hecuba hears from Talthybius about the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena, she is stricken with grief and urges the messenger:

σὺ δ' ἐλθὲ καὶ σήμηνον Ἀργείοις τάδε,
μὴ θιγγάνειν μοι μηδέν' ἀλλ' εἴργειν **ὄχλον**
τῆς παιδός. ἔν τοι μυρίωι στρατεύματι
ἀκόλαστος **ὄχλος** ναυτική τ' ἀναρχία
κρείσσων πυρός, κακὸς δ' ὁ μή τι δρῶν κακόν. (604-608)

("Go now and proclaim this to the Greeks,
that they do not touch my daughter, but to keep the **crowd**
away from her. For in a countless army,
a **crowd** is undisciplined and the unruliness of the sailors
is stronger than fire, and there it is evil not to do anything evil.")

Hecuba here explicitly thematizes the potential danger of a group of countless members, in this case in a military context. The combination with μυρίωι is significant, as it returns in our play too, when the women subdue the cattle with "countless maiden hands" (μυριάσι χειρῶν ... νεανίδων, 745) and pull a tree out of the ground with "countless hands" (μυρίαν χέρα, 1109). Hecuba here utters that with such a myriad of individuals together, a group is likely to become

[126] The whole army in *Andromache* 605; *Hecuba* 521, 533; *Iphigeneia Aulidensis* 735, 1030, 1546. Specific divisions, like cavalry or charioteers, are referred to with ὄχλος in *Andromache* 759; *Supplices* 660, 681, 757.
[127] *Hippolytus,* 842; *Hercules furens* 976. For other occurrences of the word, in markedly negative contexts: *Heraclidae* 122; *Orestes* 801. In its second meaning of "annoyance, trouble", see *Medea* 337; *Ion* 635; *Helena* 439; *Orestes* 282. The word occurs sometimes in more neutral contexts, for instance in *Orestes* 871; *Hercules furens* 411 and *Hecuba* 1014.

licentious and turn into anarchy that is stronger than fire. Recall that the Theban women were carrying fire in their hair but were not burning themselves (957-958) and that Pentheus denounces the insolence of the women as fire (778-779). In the *Bacchae*, the combination of ὄχλος, μυρίος and fire asserts the potential power and danger of group in a religious context. Here, it abandons this context for a military context. The similar motives, however, suggest that anarchy is feasible no matter what the context is.[128]

Lastly, when we look beyond Euripidean drama, we find that the word has some significant connotations in Thucydides. In his *Historiae*, most of the instances of the word refer to (divisions of) military forces and he relatively rarely uses the word in a political context.[129] There is, however, a particularly interesting occurrence in a political context. In 4.28, Thucydides describes the Athenian reaction to Cleon, who has made claims about what he would be able to inflict on Pylos, if only he would be in command. Nicias offers him to lead the expedition, but Cleon starts retracting his claims. The more Cleon declines the command, the more the Athenians, "as a crowd is prone to do" (οἷον ὄχλος φιλεῖ ποιεῖν), urge Nicias to resign and Cleon to sail. Thucydides' comment on the crowd's behaviour here suggests a concern about the crowd as an unruly mob, stirred up by emotion. This concern is congruent, as Hunter has claimed, with other negative evaluations of the crowd (often denoted with ὄμιλος) throughout the narrative.[130] In 2.65.4, for example, Thucydides describes the great anger of the Athenians towards Pericles, which nevertheless perishes quickly, as their grief was dulled, "as a crowd is prone to do" (ὅπερ φιλεῖ ὅμιλος ποιεῖν). Hunter argues that Thucydides judges crowd behaviour entirely negatively, as a mob gives up reason for emotions and can be easily manipulated.[131]

Euripides' use of ὄχλος, therefore, might have activated in the audience these negative connotations of a crowd. This is not to say, of course, that we can assume that all spectators shared this negative evaluation. Xenophon's use of the term in political contexts, for instance, does not suggest similarly strong concerns: his use of the term is predominantly neutral.[132] But it does demonstrate that these were questions that were explored at that time and, taken

[128] Hecuba again alludes to the potential capabilities of large numbers of women (868-880).
[129] See, for instance, 6.20.4 or 7.78.2. For this survey, I started out from Zumbrunnen's 2017 extensive inventarisation of the occurrence of ὄχλος and ὄμιλος. For relatively neutral instances of the word in a political context, see for instance 1.80 and 6.31.
[130] Hunter 1988.
[131] For other negative comments on crowd behaviour, see 6.17.4 and, for a Syracusan crowd, 6.63.2.
[132] See, for instance, *Hellenica* 1.3.22, 2.2.21; *Cyropaedia* 2.2.21. The only possible exception I have found is *Hellenica* 1.7.13, in which the crowd is driven by strong emotion.

together with Euripides' markedly negative use of the term in other plays, its use in our play is significant: an ὄχλος is threatening in its very capacity as a group and members rarely act on their own accord. The similarities in motives in *Hecuba*, moreover, reveal that the poet also recognized the danger of other type of groups.

This chapter has shown how the Theban women, both explicitly and more implicitly, are compared to foals, fawns and hunting hounds. In the context of the Greek conception of the hunt, the use of hunting imagery first of all brings about suspense, as hunting ominously involves a potential reversal of roles. Moreover, the hunting theme underscores the atypical state of the women, as hunting was a male affair in Greece. Fluttering like birds throughout the play, then, with the strong connotation of mental instability, the women are presented as all but independent, self-controlled and serene human beings. The anomaly of their behaviour is further emphasized by their rejection of conventional hunting tools and I have demonstrated how closely connected their savage behaviour is to that of a flock of hounds in contrast to their calmness as individual fawns. This strongly suggests that Euripides thematized the potentially destructive power of group-association, as it seems that the herd-feeling at least in part causes their behaviour. This is supported by our analysis of Euripides' use of ὄχλος in his other plays, which has demonstrated that he regarded groups as potentially threatening, a concern that is also expressed by Thucydides.

Conclusion

When Dionysus arrives in Thebes, he throws the city into complete disorder. By expelling all female citizens of Thebes to Cithaeron, he puts in motion several developments that we have been examining in the preceding chapters from the perspective of group dynamics. What happens when a new group arrives somewhere and attracts other members? What are the mechanisms at work in and dangers arising from certain groups? And what happens to the behaviour of people who are emphatically not part of the group? Our analysis of the *Bacchae* has centred around these questions. By looking at different aspects related to the group of Theban women, who go through a radical transformation after Dionysus' arrival, I have argued that Euripides has intended to convey more universal truths about the workings of social groups and to invite the spectator to reflect on certain mechanisms in his own reality. Let us, to conclude, briefly recapitulate the most important findings, before ending with some considerations about possible future research.

Conclusions

Our analysis of group dynamics started out from the perspective of the outsider to the group: Pentheus. He practices social categorization, considering Dionysus, Kadmos, Teiresias and the women all as members of one uniform group of Dionysian worshippers, which activates certain stereotypes that in turn change his behaviour towards them. As nowadays, this happens mainly on the basis of physically apparent categories: references to looks and attributes are among the first things Pentheus says to the others. Euripides seems to thematize the limits of social categorization later in the play, when Pentheus, while wearing the outfit that he uses to classify others as the out-group, self-categorizes as an outsider to that group. Just exhibiting a certain category does not mean that you automatically belong to the associated group. Pentheus' categorization is psychologically plausible, as the Dionysian outfit is a highly atypical outfit which entails a threat to his authority. Moreover, it is an instinctive human reaction to structure a complex situation in this way, whether it be because one is cognitively overloaded (on his return to the city, Pentheus is faced with a radically different situation) or when there are few information resources available (Pentheus only knows about the Theban women from hearsay).

This last point in particular makes Pentheus susceptible to resort to stereotypes and prejudice. For one, he generalizes about the women, but we have seen that one specific repeated accusation regarding wine and sex, which seems to be a cross-cultural allegation against cult groups, turns out to be fuelled by his own beliefs about the group, as it is emphatically disproved by the other characters. To the spectator, however, Pentheus' attitude was one he could sympathize with, as his allegations seem to have been part of a larger Athenian conceptualization of mystery cults around the time of the play. I have argued that the marked invalidity of the allegations invite spectators to reflect on their own perception towards other groups, like the cults of, for instance, Sabazius, and convey a warning: Pentheus' prejudice and blindness to other, nuanced perspectives on the cult eventually lead to his downfall, whereas the soldier and the messengers demonstrate flexibility in changing position. The lesson implied here is: do not judge too quickly about members of other groups, and allow yourself the time to re-evaluate your own beliefs.

The second chapter changed perspective, with a focus on the women's behaviour as described by the two messenger speeches. Undoubtedly, the women must have evoked an eerie feeling in the audience by tearing apart the cattle, brutally raiding the villages at Cithaeron's foot and eventually murdering their own king. This has often been interpreted as an exhibition of the god's influence. I have argued that this uncanniness is enhanced by the fact that their behaviour is psychologically plausible. Irving Janis' developed his theory of groupthink in the context of disastrous political decisions of the twentieth century, but his analysis of flawed decision making, he argued, could be extrapolated to any cohesive social group. In fact, we have seen that all conditions for groupthink are met in both messenger speeches. Throughout both messenger scenes, the image of one collectively operating group is emphasized, with a similar build up in structure: the unity and conformity of the group increases in the beginning of both narratives, reaching a climax at the point where the women carry out their atrocities.

The women exhibit several of the symptoms of groupthink as well. They perceive themselves as superior, with Agave even claiming that Kadmos has the best daughters of all, demonstrating the lack of awareness of what is really going on. They assume they are invulnerable, as is implied in their blind obedience to kill animals, plunder villages and murder Pentheus, and which is also expressed through the messenger's observations of the impregnability with which they act. Moreover, deviant information does not take hold: Pentheus' entreaty and emphasis on his real identity fail to disrupt the close-mindedness and

uniformity pressures in the group. This all invites the spectator to reflect on decision-making in highly cohesive groups, more so because it is contrasted to the more elaborate and rational decision-making that especially the herdsmen exhibit. The psychological probability of the situation, thus, implies a second lesson: such behaviour may really happen in the reality outside the theatre.

A diagnosis of groupthink, however, would be meaningless if we do not also take into account the cultural-historical context in which the play was written and performed. Therefore, the third chapter has examined the implications of the Theban group's presentation as sick and mad in context of the Greek conception of disease. On one hand, the group is explicitly defined as suffering from an altered mental condition, by the use of οἶστρος and words with the root μαν- and φρεν-. On the other hand, their behaviour closely corresponds to the symptoms as described by the Hippocratic authors of sick people in general. More specifically, we have seen that the audience was invited to draw a connection to the plague that hit Athens 430 B.C, hence presenting the women's behaviour as a collective disease. On the whole, the frame of collective sickness and madness suggests a situation of calamity and, as such, a warning about the dangers of a group.

In terms of accountability, the Greek audience would at any rate have held the women responsible for making the mistake of denying Dionysus' divinity, which caused their insanity in the first place. But the examples that we have seen in Homer and in other tragedies, demonstrate that similar questions were asked about responsibility and μανία in Greece as we are exploring nowadays. Whereas μανία is sometimes used as a way to easily duck the consequences of one's actions, it appears to have been an excuse that made some sense.

What this tells us about group functioning in the *Bacchae*, then, becomes clear if we examine the extent to which other characters recognize the women's insanity. An analysis of the expression of the women's identity, as well as an analysis of the verbal instances of frenzy, has demonstrated that Dionysus, the soldier and both messengers acknowledge the divine frenzy that the women are thrown into. The chorus knows this too, as they themselves urge the hounds of Λύσσα to madden the women. Pentheus, significantly, does not. This brings us back to the message that was conveyed in the first chapter about stereotyping: again, Pentheus is blind to what is really going on, and the audience sees this. This obviously enhances the tragic effect of the play, for Pentheus does not know what other characters (and the audience) do know. But he does not even attempt to adopt a perspective that may absolve the group from

(partial) responsibility. Rather, he continues to assail them *as women*, in their 'normal' state of mind. Would he have been more open to other perspectives, the events may have turned out to be less catastrophic.

Lastly, we have discussed the implications of Euripides' use of imagery and the way this invited the spectator to reflect on the dangers of group association. The comparison to birds, first of all, enhances the idea that the women are instable and 'fluttering'. Second, in synergy with the chorus, both messengers compare the women to individual foals and fawns, whereas they are described as hunting dogs, led by a κυναγέτας, too. The possibilities of role reversal that are inherent to the (Greek conception of the) hunt adds to the play's suspense. For the women specifically, the fact that they perceive themselves as hunters adds to their presentation as mad, as the hunt of the type at which is hinted in our play was preserved for men. This anomalous self-perception thus confirms, or rather refines from a Greek cultural-historical perspective, the idea that emerged in the second chapter, that high cohesion can cause members of a group to drift from reality.

The reversal of roles tells us something more about group functioning. Hunting usually included dogs chasing a prey into the net of the hunt leader. The repeated emphasis on the absence of nets or other hunting tools for the women, as opposed to the 'civilized' hunting that Dionysus and Pentheus (who do use nets) represent, makes their hunt even more anomalous. I have argued that this enhances the image that the women really *become* these hunting dogs, blindly obeying what their leader commands them to do. The movement from individual animals in a calm state into a collective pack of hounds once they start their violence, suggests the potential power of the herd-feeling, confirming what emerged from our reading of the group as exhibiting groupthink as well. Lastly, we have seen that Euripides' use of ὄχλος is significant, as in Euripidean drama, it often denotes the threatening nature of a group, also in non-religious settings, something that seems to be confirmed by Thucydides' use of the term.

Further research

This thesis has examined the group dynamics of a group that is conspicuously absent from the stage. Yet, throughout the whole play, the spectator witnesses on stage a group that strongly resembles their Theban counterpart: the chorus. Despite differences between the two, the principal one being the voluntary worship of Dionysus of the chorus, many scholars have emphasized the blurring distinction between the two groups, inviting the audience to see the

chorus, to some extent, as an onstage substitute for the Theban women.[133] It is tempting to think, therefore, that of many of the aspects that we have discussed regarding the Theban group, the spectator was presented with an onstage example. It would be a useful addition to scholarship on the *Bacchae*, I think, to examine in what way the chorus reinforces, modifies or perhaps even depreciates the implicit messages about group dynamics that have been demonstrated in this thesis.

Consider, for instance, that parallel to the movement towards destructive and violent behaviour that the Theban women exhibit twice, the chorus exhibits the tendency to become more aggressive as well. Arthur has convincingly argued that the tone of the chorus becomes fiercer and more aggressive as the play progresses, starting out from quiet submission and leading up to violent opposition.[134] While the audience may already feel the uncanniness by the messenger speeches alone, consciously or unconsciously aware of the psychological probability of the behaviour, the idea that groups are really capable of this kind of changes is perhaps underlined by an actual example on stage. And what about the expressed affinity of the chorus with wine (142, 423, 535)? Does it confirm for a spectator the plausibility of Pentheus' allegations towards the Theban group? Or does it make a case for the fact that not every group is similar and should not be treated as such, confirming the implicit message about stereotyping? In terms of decision-making, then, to what extent does the chorus exhibit conditions and symptoms of groupthink? And what does it tell us about group dynamics that sometimes, the language of characters changes between moments when there is an in-group onstage (Dionysus and the chorus) and when the out-group (Pentheus) joins them (for instance, 614 and 649)?

These are questions that fall outside the scope of our present inquiry. *Bacchae* is a perturbing and perplexing play about many themes, but for one, about the impact and power of groups. Like any other art form, tragedy has the capacity to provoke moments of reflection on the spectator's own reality. We may imagine leaving the theatre of Dionysus in 405 B.C. alongside other Athenians who have just witnessed the performance of the play. Did the other spectators pick up the lessons about judging other groups and the potential dangers of group association?

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[133] See, for instance, Carey 2016; Podlecki 1974; Arthur 1972.

[134] Arthur 1972, who claims that this change in attitude is accelerated by the palace miracles at the beginning of the third scene, as it represents the first manifestation of Dionysus' power and thus an indication for the chorus that their situation is not hopeless.

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