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Gender and sexuality in contemporary Greek theatre: red-light landscapes and city legends

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GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY GREEK THEATRE:
RED-LIGHT LANDSCAPES AND CITY LEGENDS

Lina Rosi

ABSTRACT: The article explores the representation of female sexuality, in particular prostitution and its association with urban landscapes. The subject forms part of a wider research venture examining the different ways in which contemporary Greek theatre depicts and discusses the female body, female discourse and women's experiences. The analysis of recent productions focuses on two major points: first, on the mise en scène of the prostitute body and, second, on the way in which each production exposes the association between the characters' biography and the geography and history of the city. Our aim does not lie in discussing the productions' ideological views on the issue of prostitution and the contemporary sex industry, but in exploring the mode in which the stage narrative operates as a field in which the life story of these women is first heard and performed and then incorporated into the collective narrative of the city's history. The productions discussed are *Η τελευταία μάσκα*–*Fallimento* (*The Last Mask–Fallimento*), based on a text by Kostas Logaras, adapted for the stage and directed by Thodoros Terzopoulos (2006); *Η γυναίκα της Πάτρας* (*The Woman of Patras*), based on a text by Giorgos Chronas and adapted for the stage and directed by Lena Kitsopoulou (2010); and *Γκάμπυ* (*Gaby*), based on Gabriella Ousakova's autobiography, adapted for the stage by Anastasia Tzellou and Kirki Karali and directed by Karali (2015).

Winter is coming again, and night appears once more
The Parthenon is weeping and Omonia Square is getting wet
Two drops and I get drunk and start from the beginning.
Prostitutes are alone and men are lonely.
Never count your errors and your sins
Your passions are statues on Aiolou and Athena streets.
The nights, when I am sleeping, the statues are awake
And fearing my passions, I hide them from them.¹

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¹ *Nocturnal Statues* is a song from Manos Hadjidakis album *The Ballads of Athena Street* (1983). The lyrics are by Aris Davarakis.

Manos Hadjidakis' album *The Ballads of Athena Street* comprises a series of songs dedicated to the most erotic street of the Athenian town centre. These songs narrate real and poetic images and stories from the night walks in the surrounding streets and alleys. As the composer notes:

Athena Street is the heart of Athens. And Athens is the heart of the nation [...] The street has a lot of tavernas and many more brothels, there are cinemas for those seeking solitary sexual pleasure, and dark hotels for an immediate sexual relief – like a first aid response [...] *The Ballads* are [...] a musical recording of our marginal impulses.²

The history and the legends of the city, those related to “our marginal impulses”, serve as an introduction to the present article, which focuses on the representation of prostitution and its association with urban geography. The subject forms part of a wider research venture exploring the representation of gender and specifically the different ways in which contemporary Greek theatre depicts and discusses the female body, female discourse and women's experiences.

By exploring particular productions that present stories related to the life course of prostitutes in specific urban settings, our focus lies in two related issues: firstly, the representation of the body and, secondly, the different modes in which these productions display the association of the prostitutes' personal life course with the geography and history of the city. Our aim does not lie in discussing the productions' ideological views on the issue of prostitution and the contemporary sex industry, but in exploring the mode in which the stage narrative operates as a field in which the life story of those women is first heard and performed and then incorporated into the collective narrative of urban history.

Sexual activity occurring on the margins of the social norm and its core figure, the prostitute, has always attracted the attention of writers and artists. The most common representations reflect wider social stereotypical views of prostitutes as either victims of abuse or as emancipated, self-motivated women. The prostitute body does not possess some fixed traits and meaning. On the contrary, it is redefined according to the dominant discourse of every historical period and, in this light, the prostitute either becomes the subject of her own discourse or remains the object of patriarchal ideology.³

² The composer's note is included in the CD (Lyra 1983). Auguste Corbeau, in his novel entitled *Péva* [(Rena), Athens: Patakis, 2017, p. 9), which deals with the life adventure of an Athenian prostitute, uses as a motto some verses from another song of the same album, entitled *Marianthi of the Winds*.

³ Shannon Bell provides a detailed discussion of this issue, and draws a genealogical narrative focusing on the different meanings assigned to the prostitute body and, therefore, the social identity of prostitutes, covering the range from the ancient hetaeras to the postmodern

The exotic approach to the sexual margins has been a dominant trend since the nineteenth century, a period when, according to Michel Foucault, sexuality became the object of systematic surveillance and scientific definition, through various discourses that demarcated gender identities and sexual practice according to a moral, economic, social, political and medical set of rules. The prostitute is a dominant figure in modernist literature and avant-garde art and is also closely associated with the development and the mythology accompanying the emergence of large cities.⁴ According to Shannon Bell, it is in this period that the major traits of the prostitute identity were delineated, placing it opposite to what is considered female normality.⁵

As an incarnation of *uncanny strangeness*, the prostitute has in every historical period and in a variety of modes expressed divergent aspects to the forms and the performance of female sexuality, undermining or empowering the rules of heteronormativity.⁶ Second-wave feminist theorists have often developed different arguments on the construction of gender identities and the ways of defining female sexuality. In this light, prostitution has become the object of an intense debate among contesting groups of feminist theorists, being an ideal vehicle for the discussion of issues such as sexuality, desire and the representation of female bodies. On the one hand, the prostitute has been described as the symbol par excellence of violence inflicted on the female body within the context of patriarchy and the dominance of heteronormativity. On the other, the growth of the movement of prostitutes and sex workers in that

era and the prostitute performance artists. *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. For her argument and methodology see, in particular, pp. 1–18.

⁴ The theatrical stage of the period hosted several notorious femmes fatales, such as Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, George Bernard Shaw's *Kitty Warren*. There is an overabundance of relevant studies. For a brief introduction, see, Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, pp. 40–72; Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: the Politics of Loitering", *New German Critique* 39 (1986), pp. 99–140 (especially 118–127). For some introductory comments on the diverse discourses of the period concerning sexuality, see Richard A. Kaye, "Sexual Identity at the Fin de siècle", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 53–72.

⁵ "At conscious and unconscious levels we hold contradictory images of the prostitute body [...]. Each of these images is formulated in contrast to the determining side of the female dichotomy: the respectable woman in her various manifestations." Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, pp. 71–72.

⁶ Phil Hubbard, *Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West*, Farnham: Ashgate, 1999, p. 4.

same period served as a strong case for the theorists supporting the opposite viewpoint, which claims that in many cases the professional choice of sex work has an emancipatory effect and conveys the intention of those women to gain full control of their bodies.⁷

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provided a new perspective in this debate, as the idea of performing gender, that is, of defining the way in which the body is materialised and constituted, often allows the possibility to see ways of challenging or undermining the norm. It leaves a slight crack, a minimal potential of resisting the norm, a possibility for those bodies that are "unthinkable, abject or unlivable" to become bodies that matter.⁸

The discussion of gender performativity brings to the fore the notion of spatiality. Gender is performed and signified in (social) space and sexual identities are indissolubly linked to particular public and private spaces within the territory of the city. It is in this light that we may better understand the association of prostitution, of "marginalised" sexual activity, with particular locations.

Geographer Phil Hubbard explores in detail the association of prostitution and urban space, maintaining that the urban areas in which relations of immoral or transgressive sexuality are performed are always defined in opposition to the

⁷ For a comprehensive presentation of the relevant literature concerning the diverging feminist views on prostitution, see Maggie O'Neill, *Prostitution and Feminism: Towards a Politics of Feeling*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001, pp. 15–41. For a more thorough discussion of the major feminist arguments, see Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, pp. 73–98.

⁸ "If gender is constructed through relations of power and, specifically, normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings, how might agency be derived from this notion of gender as the effect of productive constraint? [...] How precisely are we to understand the ritualized repetition by which such norms produce and stabilize not only the effects of gender but the materiality of sex? And can this repetition, this rearticulation, also constitute the occasion for a critical reworking of apparently constitutive gender norms? [...] Thinking the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself [...] Given this understanding of construction as constitutive constraint, is it still possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies? This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. How, then, might one alter the very terms that constitute the 'necessary' domain of bodies through rendering unthinkable and unlivable another domain of bodies, those that do not matter in the same way." Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. x–xi.

private spaces of familial/moral heteronormativity and described by employing a number of negative (or “exotic”) terms.⁹ The prostitute is one of the strongest symbols of urban life, since, on the one hand, she represents freedom of sexual choices while, on the other, she incarnates corruption, decadence and urban disorder.¹⁰

Therefore, the prostitute is seen and described as the Other of the city, as the figure exposing the boundaries of heteronormativity in the public space. Yet, in the case of prostitutes and sex workers, as in that of minority groups and their spatial location within the city, the marginal urban places where they are usually situated also operate as heterotopias – places of resistance – wherein a voice of dissent is articulated and heard, a voice that challenges and undermines the dominant discourse on morally acceptable sexual practices.¹¹ As these women move around the urban landscape, in and out of the boundaries of their own geographical territory, they create their own mapping of the city, providing an alternative view of its official geography.¹²

Recently, there have been several productions on the Greek stage dealing with this subject.¹³ The ones we have chosen to discuss emphasise the association

⁹ Hubbard, *Sex and the City*, pp. 6, 32–33.

¹⁰ “If sexuality has always been crucial in the urbanisation process, implicated in the construction of a range of urban spatial practices, the female prostitute, a sexual presence in the city, remains unquestionably the most potent symbol of urban life. On the one hand, the prostitute represents the sexual freedoms and opportunities possible in an urban realm characterised by heterogeneity, anonymity and the coming together of different moralities; on the other, she symbolises the degeneracy, disorder and incipient collapse of urban life.” *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 186–189.

¹² According to the “walking rhetoric”, as Michel de Certeau defines it, as pedestrians cross the urban landscapes, they map them out providing their own version of these spaces. These topographic narratives present the different locations and their surroundings from a different viewpoint that diverges from the dominant (formal and institutionalised) geography of the city. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 97–110. Hubbard underlines the resistive operation of the walking practice which becomes a powerful means for marginalised people, and for prostitutes in particular. “Rather than using spaces of sex work to directly oppose forces of law and order, it seems that many prostitutes seek to re-work and divert these spaces to create an alternative meaning of space – a space that has its own alternative morality, rhythms and rituals which are often invisible to outsiders.” Hubbard, *Sex and the City*, pp. 172.

¹³ We may add several productions on this subject. For example, two recent productions of Alekos Galanos’ *Τα κόκκινα φανάρια* (*Red Lanterns*): by the National Theatre in 2012–2013, directed by Konstantinos Rigos and by the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus in 2015, directed by Nikos Mastorakis (and with a slightly altered title *Παράνομα φιλιά–Κόκκινα φανάρια*

of prostitution with the urban landscape, referring to historical or legendary prostitutes who were identified with the particular cities in which they lived. Their life course and their *polyphonic* stage versions create an alternative cartography of their home cities, on which we discover place names and “monuments” that are not included in the official maps. Besides, in all three stage narratives the material relation between the characters’ body and the city is very clearly marked.¹⁴ The productions in question do not aim at a realistic psychological portrayal of the protagonists nor do they attempt a political or sociological approach of the subject. They rather focus – each from a distinctive artistic and ideological perspective – on bringing out the legendary position that these women hold. Moreover, the individual aesthetic and artistic choices of the directors and dramaturges further enhance this legendary aspect of the three historical figures and validate the alternative mapping, through which the protagonists’ biographies are incorporated into the official version of the city’s history. Nonetheless, whereas their intentions are similar, the artistic orientation of each director is entirely different. This divergence has also been the decisive factor in choosing them. Each performance presents a totally different perspective on female sexuality as it is imprinted on and rendered evident by the actors’ bodies.

[*Illegal Kisses–Red Lanterns*]). In both cases the directors, quoting the popular 1963 film based on the same play, underlined the “legendary” aspect of the story, the way in which it has been recorded in the collective cultural imaginary and haunts the landscape of the notorious Trouba, the former red-light district in Piraeus. The exploration of the dark, erotic alleys of the city of Ermoupolis (Syros) in the nineteenth century, based on historical and literary sources, was the subject of another production, *Ermoupolis: Display of Lights*, in which director Eleni Georgopoulou in collaboration with the Polis Theatre Company presented at Neos Kosmos Theatre in 2004. The abused body of Raraou, metonymically associated with the body of post-war Greece, is the subject matter of Pavlos Matesis’ novel *Η μητέρα του σκύλου* (*The Daughter*), which was adapted for the stage by director Stavros Tsakiris in 2015, who also highlighted the identification of the abused body with the national territory. In a similar way, director Nikaiti Kontouri presented in 2018 the stage adaptation of *Rena* by Auguste Corbeau, the imaginary story of a prostitute whose biography follows the course of historical events from the interwar years until today (see n. 2).

¹⁴ “The body and its environment [...] produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed “citified”, urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body. [...] The city is one of the crucial factors in the social production of (sexed) corporeality [...]. The city provides the order and organization that automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies.” Elizabeth Grosz, “Bodies–Cities”, in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997, pp. 241–253 (here 242).

The first example, *Η τελευταία μάσκα–Fallimento* (*The Last Mask–Fallimento*), was produced as part of the cultural programme organised for Patras, European Capital of Culture, in 2006. The performance was based on a short text written by poet and novelist Kostas Logaras, who is from Patras, and adapted for the stage and directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos. After its premiere in February 2006 at Patras Old Poorhouse, it was then performed in Germany and at the Attis theatre in Athens. The performance presents the final hours of Patrinely, the phantom of the city of Patras, narrating the traumatic events of her life, a few hours before she is going to be burnt as the queen of the carnival.

Logaras uses as a point of departure a real incident, a story that took place in Patras in the 1960s. Maria of Manzar (Litsa Giannopoulou), a well-known prostitute in the city, murdered the child of her lover, a well-off citizen, in revenge for deserting her. The writer combined this real incident with the legend of Patrinely, the ghost of the city's castle, that according to tradition walks around the city's streets at night predicting the evils that would befall Patras.¹⁵ Moreover, Logaras ascribed a mythological allusion to the protagonist's story, mainly through her association with the carnival, the city's most prominent public festival.¹⁶ According to him, "these mythological elements [...] created the appropriate atmosphere for the protagonist of the *Last Mask* to act, to carry her own passion, to perform her own sacrifice and become the contemporary pharmakos needed to purify the city".¹⁷

Despite using the real story of Maria of Manzar as a point of departure, neither Logaras in the text nor Terzopoulos in the performance concentrated on her figure. On the contrary, what was highlighted is the mythological and metaphorical aspect of Maria of Manzar/Patrinely, who, being madly in love like a tragic heroine, decides to die and tear her body into pieces, punishing in this way her lover.

¹⁵ For more information about Patrinely's legend and its use by Logaras, see Gogo Papadaku, "Πατρινέλα: Το ...φάντασμα που 'έσωξε' την Πάτρα, τρόμαζε τους νέους, και έγινε μύθος, ποίημα και θεατρική παράσταση..." [Patrinely: the ... ghost that "saved" Patras, scared young men and became a myth, a poem and a theatre performance...], *The Best*, 22 March 2015, accessed 11 September 2019, <http://www.thebest.gr/news/index/viewStory/322160>. Nikolaos G. Politis includes a very short reference in his book *Οι παραδόσεις του ελληνικού λαού* [Traditions of the Greek people], vol. 1, Athens: Ta Nea, 2013, pp. 318–319.

¹⁶ For more information concerning the creation of *The Last Mask*, see Penelope Chadzidimitriou, *Θεόδωρος Τερζόπουλος: Από το προσωπικό στο παγκόσμιο* [Theodoros Terzopoulos: from the personal to the global], Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2010, p. 145, n. 46.

¹⁷ Author's note, performance programme of Kostas Logaras' *The Last Mask–Fallimento*, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos, Attis Theatre, Patras 2006.

Living through the absolute passion and having transgressed the human limits of clearly defined divisions and boundaries, Patrinely becomes a Witch, a Goddess. Like Medea, after failing in the world of human relations governed by human morals and attachments, she returns to the realm of the divine: she becomes a wooden statue [...] and is worshipped as a Death Mask.¹⁸

However, it is a mask belonging to the atmosphere of carnival reversal. She is burnt and punished, like the queen of the carnival.

Terzopoulos decided to stage the story of Maria of Manzar/Patrinely by placing a chorus of seven male actors, without the participation of an actress, something that allowed him, as he maintains, to leave aside matters concerning gender and concentrate on the deeper side of things.¹⁹ The chorus of the seven actors who “share” the heroine’s narrative on stage, accompanied by very few props – some shiny old fashioned metal buckets, pieces of red cloth and large coins – and by the particular diction and choreography of the Attis actors, end up creating a very impressive stage image of the woman, the public body of the prostitute, which ultimately identifies itself – becomes one – with the public body of the city.

The respectable citizens of Patras, Patrinely’s clients and participants in the yearly carnival celebration of the city,²⁰ formally dressed in suit and tie, step onto the stage, each holding a shiny bucket from which they take out a red cloth. During the performance, at different moments they use the red cloth to purify the stage, that is, the city, from shame or from the blood of the murdered child in Maria of Manzar’s story. Both the bucket of water and the cloth are cleaning tools and, at the same time, the necessary items found in every “red light” room.

Later, the actors take out of their pockets large coins, symbolising the fee they have to pay as brothel clients, or the money of Maria of Manzar’s wealthy

¹⁸ Kostas Arvanitakis, performance programme of Kostas Logaras, *The Last Mask-Fallimento*, directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos, Attis Theatre, Patras 2006.

¹⁹ “This choice directed me towards Brechtian V-Effekt, a device that was necessary in this particular mise-en-scène [...] By achieving the distance, the critical detachment and the absence of sentimental identification one is able to avoid melodramatic tendencies and above all avoid the identification with Patrinely’s violent drama, which would not have been evaded had a woman actress played the role. It was therefore an excellent solution which helped me discard the idea of gender and gave me the choice to focus/concentrate on the deeper side of things.” “Θ. Τερζόπουλος: Πατρινέλα ή εκπόρνευση γένους αρσενικού” [Theodoros Terzopoulos: Patrinely or male prostitution], *Η Καθημερινή*, 11 February 2007.

²⁰ An important aspect of their identity, according to Dimitris Tsatsoulis’ review of the Athens performance, “Η πρόταση” [The proposition], *Νέα Εστία*, no. 1795, December 2006, p. 1179.

lover.²¹ Then, they start reciting the heroine's enraged speech to the city and its inhabitants. It is a speech full of curses that she – the wooden statue of the city's witch – speaks on the eve of the carnival, the day when she is going to be burnt. This time of the night is, nonetheless, a moment when everything is permitted, a moment that, according to Logaras, “justifies the abolition of every reasonable thinking, the expression of an unconscious world, its release and the overthrow of legal order”.²²

Patrinela is identified with the city as her body is gradually transformed into a “battlefield”: the inner conflict of the protagonist is reflected on the body of the city, which is divided “half in light, half in darkness”. Following a climaxing rhythm, her words manage to overturn the map of the city: “Sewage lies on the top and men on the bottom [...] on the left there is the port, on the right the church [...], on the right one sees the wetland, on the left Saint Andrew's church [...] on the upper side lies Votsi Street and on the lower side Gotsi Street.” In the end, Patrinela sells off the pieces of her body and dies while her (carnival) effigy is burnt in the city centre.²³

From being an object of the male gaze,²⁴ Patrinela's public – shared – body becomes the prey that the citizens of Patras devour, these hypocrites who “will burn me in the night like the whore of Manzar and the next morning will honour me like the Virgin Mary”. Her body, like the body of Patras' phantom, is visible only through the voice of the chorus, the voice of the city. Terzopoulos, by means of the alienation effect, passes from the real story to its metaphorical transformation and from the material, physical body to the geometric choreography (of the anonymous bodies) of the chorus.

²¹ For more details on the real story, see Papadakou, “Πατρινέλα” [Patrinela].

²² While the enraged speech of the heroine is heard by the men of the chorus, one actor remains at a stage corner, as auditor-spectator, commenting on what he sees and sometimes repeating words or phrases from the narrative.

²³ The reversal and disintegration is also reflected on the actors' movement, in the way the men's chorus “no longer forms a consistent body and each actor detaches himself from the others, in order to express the successive states/conditions of the woman-effigy”, as Dimitris Tsatsoulis aptly comments in “Το νεοελληνικό έργο” [The modern Greek play], *Νέα Εστία*, no. 1789, May 2006, pp. 981–982.

²⁴ A merciless and fierce gaze which has already started to devour her and condemn her as being impure, the shame of the city. “I have seen this gaze in the eyes of politicians, in the gatherings of artists, in commercial exchanges, behind the church pews, even in the gaze of poets.” The extracts from the text come from the recorded performance (since the text has not been published). Many thanks to Dimitris Tsatsoulis for providing me access to the performance material.

While the real story of Maria of Manzar is integrated in a theatrical narrative about the mythological figures and legends of the city of Patras, the story of Panorea, famous prostitute from the same town, is spoken on stage directly, in the first person, as she narrates her life to Giorgos Chronas. The poet and writer met Panorea in 1983; somebody introduced her to him thinking she had very interesting stories to tell. Three years later Chronas arranged a series of interviews where she narrated her “lifetime, as she used to say”.²⁵ *Η γυναίκα της Πάτρας* (*The Woman of Patras*) was staged for the first time in 2006,²⁶ but it was the 2010 production, a monologue directed by Lena Kitsopoulou and with Eleni Kokkidou in the leading role, that made Panorea’s story widely known.²⁷

Chronas has often insisted on the authenticity of Panorea’s evidence, claiming that the only thing he did was to transcribe the interviews without intervening in the flow of her narration, adding only the necessary punctuation for the written version. The way he manipulated his material and his admiration for Panorea almost erased his own voice.²⁸ As Pavlos Matesis aptly observes, when one reads the biography, one wonders:

is it the author who decides what his heroine will say? Is it she who guides her writer (a wise and experienced writer, nonetheless, who chooses to be guided)? The maenad of Patras did him a favour and allowed him to listen to her. Only that. She almost forbids him to be, to feel like an author; he can only be her listener.²⁹

Chronas is indeed very experienced, having conducted many similar interviews. As an attentive listener, he has recorded, “with the accuracy of a tape recorder”, the testimonies of many people from the world of popular culture.³⁰

²⁵ Giorgos Chronas, *Η γυναίκα της Πάτρας: Διηγείται η Πανωραία* [The woman of Patras: Panorea narrates], Athens: Odos Panos, 1989, p. 230.

²⁶ This first performance was put on in October 2006, by the Theatro Patras–Omada Drasis tis Technis theatre group and directed by Periklis Vasilopoulos, at the Old Poorhouse, as part of the cultural programme organised for Patras, European Cultural Capital in 2006.

²⁷ The performance premiered in October 2010, at Vasilakou Theatre in Athens. Later it went on tour to many cities in Greece and was very well received. What most critics note is the extraordinary acting of Eleni Kokkidou and the way she succeeded in making this exciting biography heard on stage.

²⁸ Christos Paridis, “Ο Γιώργος Χρονάς μιλάει για τη γυναίκα της Πάτρας: [Giorgos Chronas talks about *The Woman of Patras*], *Lifo*, 3 February 2010, accessed 11 September 2019, <https://www.lifo.gr/mag/features/1968>.

²⁹ Pavlos Matesis, “Μια διαρκής κραυγή, μια κραυγάζουσα αγκάλη” [A lasting cry: a crying embrace], performance programme, Vasilakou Theatre, 2010, p. 25.

³⁰ “Having conversed with many persons, I possess the important privilege of having often witnessed some people suddenly opening up; such was the case with Giota Gianna [...] Kaiti

Director Lena Kitsopoulou brought to the fore what she thought is the core element of Panorea's character: a person who led a rather painful life traversing the harsh landscape of post-war provincial Greece and who was accustomed to performing many different roles. She therefore positioned Kokkidou within a setting defined by her particular aesthetic of loud colours, popular "burning" love songs (*καψουροτραγουδα*) and of exuberant movements on stage, reminiscent of Pedro Almodóvar's visual style.³¹ Kitsopoulou explains that their only intervention in Panorea's narrative was the chronological classification of the narrated events.³²

Chronas attentively followed Panorea's life course on the marginal landscapes of post-war Greece, showing, like many intellectuals of his age, respect for the popular marginalised community that he considers as deeply authentic (and exotic). On the other hand, Kitsopoulou perceived Panorea's case as an example of the excessive emotional encounter with the world that every woman can experience.

Panorea is not a whore; above all she is a woman, a human being,
that has been in love and has suffered, as we all have. She teaches us

Dali, Beba Blanche. All of them people we consider popular and cheap, but whom I consider magnificent." He further explains that this was the reason why he chose this title, which alludes to Dionysios Solomos' poem *The Woman of Zakynthos*. She reflects the struggle between good and evil. "She is a demonic figure but at the same time she talks about God. 'Demonic' in the sense of unique" (Paridis, "Ο Γιώργος Χρονάς μιλάει" [Giorgos Chronas talks]). Haris Megalinos also comments on the forwardness of Panorea's speech as Chronas has rendered it. "You should bring to mind other books with a similar subject matter [...] and you will understand what makes this book different; it has not come out from the drawer of a socially sensitive or politically progressive author, but stemmed from the almost clownesque boasting of a woman who gets stirred from her own words in front of Giorgos Chronas [...] not because she wishes to prove that she is special and worthy, but in order to empty in full the burden of her life in front of us." "Ένα βιβλίο σχεδόν 'αχειροποίητο': Ένα θεατρικό έργο με 'μηδέν λιπαρά' [An almost "not made by human hand" book: A "zero fat" play], *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 26 March 2010, accessed 11 September 2019, <http://www.enet.gr/145056>.

³¹ Set and costume designer Tatiana Souchoroukof made an important contribution to the creation of this Almodóvar-like aesthetic.

³² "Λένα Κιτσοπούλου (θεατρικό 'Η γυναίκα της Πάτρας') [Lena Kitsopoulou (Theatre: *The Woman of Patras*)], *Cityportal*, 14 September 2010, accessed 11 September 2019, https://cityportal.gr/details.php?article_id=20117. In the book the narration is indeed spontaneous and on many occasions Panorea repeats or goes back to former incidents, without always respecting a sort of order or sequence. The lack of coherence and the repeated recourse to particular incidents brings to the fore and highlights her own effort to direct herself, by choosing those she considers as major events in her life. On some other occasions the repetition is rather mechanical and helps her enter a role appropriate for the narrative circumstances.

that we – the respectable ones – are also whores. You also love your profession and very often you “sell” it, in order either to survive or to be recognised, exactly the same thing that we do in our job.³³

Therefore, in *The Woman of Patras* Panorea’s authentic voice is the protagonist: from the standpoint of her old days in a small apartment in the upper districts of Patras, she narrates her life story and guides us to the landscapes of all the cities she visited. The most important element in the performance is the way in which Kokkidou hosts and changes the colour of Panorea’s voice through her diction, facial expression and body movement. Most reviewers praised Kokkidou for her acting skills and successful way in which she interpreted Panorea.³⁴

The actress crosses the stage and addresses the audience as if they are her guests, in a stage setting with bright colours and few props: a large bed, many religious icons on the wall – connoting Panorea’s obsessive relation with religion – and a kitchen table. The different masks the actress adopts to wear and her successive transformations enhance her passionate and unrefined speech and, at the same time, highlight the harsh experiences the protagonist has been through. At some stage during the performance there is also a distorting mirror, which disfigures the contours of her body, further reinforcing her natural “protean aspect”.³⁵ Panorea’s character also possesses another powerful survival weapon, a sharp sense of humour that allows her to see the world and, most importantly, herself through an ironic and demystifying perspective.

The actress constantly addresses the audience, creating the impression of responding to its reactions. The narration of her life story is often interrupted (and adorned) by more than a few songs, since Panorea’s second job was that of a singer. The picture that Kokkidou creates is that of a body in perpetual movement, possessing a particular agility, a body in absolute accord with the voice that “describes” it. Time and time again, Panorea explains how she ended up in prostitution, for financial reasons; she had to find a way to survive, but also for the bodily pleasure she was deprived of when she lost her first husband. Indeed, the relation with her body is exceptional: she talks openly and with

³³ Director’s note, performance programme, Vasilakou Theatre, 2010, p. 11.

³⁴ See for example, Thymeli, “Δύο μονόλογοι στο Από μηχανής θέατρο” [Two monologues at the Apo Michanis Theatre], *Ριζοσπάστης*, 3 March 2010; Grigoris Ioannidis, “Θέατρο που διασώζει το φευγαλέο άγγιγμα του ανθρώπου” [Theatre that safeguards the fleeting human touch], *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 16 January 2010; Savas Patsalidis, “Ένα χαρμάνιασμένο σώμα” [A yearning body], *Αγγελιοφόρος της Κυριακής*, 3 October 2010.

³⁵ Savas Patsalidis, for example, thinks that Kitsopoulou has overloaded the performance with “postmodern materials” which in the end looked like a foreign body. “Ένα χαρμάνιασμένο σώμα” [A yearning body].

ease about the abuse and the humiliation it endured, without pitying it. On the contrary, being obsessive with cleanliness and religion, she no longer has guilty feelings and is therefore able not only to take care but also to derive pleasure from her body.

Panorea visited almost all the outskirts of the post-war Greek cities and had first-hand experience of their secret stories. Her insistence in always placing the stories she heard and the people she met in specific geographical locations is typical. While in her narration she frequently repeats the same incidents or facts, she almost never gets her geography mixed up. Having retired to her small apartment in Patras, she builds her life story up and crosses once again the map of Greece. From Aigio to Patras, to the Athenian neighbourhoods, to Agrinio, back to Patras in the Ities district and the neighbourhood around the public slaughterhouse, then to Pyrgos, Nafpaktos and back to Athens.³⁶ For Panorea, every single sign on the map corresponds to a different story, a meeting with her friends or a transaction with her clients: doctors, policemen, her stepmother, the elderly poor women she employed, the police chief, US Navy sailors, respectable Patras businessmen, clergy (*παπαδαριό*). Her speech, related through Kokkidou's voice and accompanied by familiar popular songs, is inscribed in history, transformed into a sort of collective testimony that guides us through the "myths and legends" of post-war Greece.

Whereas *The Woman from Patra* introduces its readers and spectators to the popular quarters and the outskirts of cities, the protagonist of *Γκάμπυ* (*Gaby*), through her own encounters, unfolds the history of Athens from the interwar period to the 1980s. Contrary to Panorea, Gabriella, of Russian bourgeois descent and well-educated, chose her profession and was able to frequent a wide range of social circles in 1920s Athens, her clients ranging from shepherds to politicians. Based on Gabriella Ousakova's published autobiography, *Gaby* premiered in 2015 at Vasilakou Theatre, directed by Kirki Karali. The dominant emphasis of the performance dramaturgy is the presentation of various incidents from Ousakova's life, which are framed through implicit references, music and songs by the major episodes of history from the interwar years to the metapolitefsi.³⁷

³⁶ As she describes the different locations associated with her sexual meetings, we can observe the redrawing of the city map. "I went out in Athens, with friends, we stayed late at night and then we went to Philopappou Hill, there where they told me that on that very spot Vougiouklaki was fucking Konstantinos, [...]. I went up to the Acropolis, it was cosy in the small rooms, I also have photos at the Olympian Zeus columns. I used to go to the Stadium, to Zappeion, to Makrygianni, and to the military police station, I had many clients who were officers at the Transit Camp." Chronas, *Η γυναίκα της Πάτρας* [The Woman of Patras], pp. 139-140.

³⁷ Kirki Karali and Anastasia Tzellou are the authors of the performance text. "The performance goes through the period from 1930 to 1990, sketching out the social profile and

Gaby's relationship with Athens is represented through her various itineraries: in each scene, different encounters from her life course are presented on stage, memory images that come alive and transfer us to everyday landscapes of Athens: parks, streets and alleys, restaurants, coffee shops, patisseries and night clubs.

Gaby is a heroine fascinated by Athens. A foreigner who becomes so quickly integrated that she has her favourite spots in the city: she drinks beer in particular shops, she buys her cake from a particular bakery, she goes to a specific shop to buy her shoes, she goes dancing in a particular club, she prefers walking on her favourite streets. Gaby loves Athens and her descriptions very often make her look as a landscape fetishist.³⁸

The protagonist's itinerary, which follows the course of historical events as she experiences them from the perspective of her professional activity, is reflected in the spatial organisation of the stage setting. Centre stage is the private space of her home, with a large bed in the middle (similar to the bed in *The Woman of Patras*), a red couch, a vanity table and many photos and paintings on the walls. On the left is the kitchen and on the right the door from which her visitors enter. This round space, framed by the outer and metaphorical space of the city of Athens and its history, illustrates how Gaby went through the historical events from the perspective of her private space. Seen from a different perspective, however, the enclosed space, surrounded by the movements and the noises of the city and its history, also refers to the enclosed personal space of memory, the images old Ousakova recalls while she is writing her autobiography.

atmosphere of old Athens through the perspective of the words and the gaze of a priestess of love." Anastasia Tzellou and Kirki Karali, "Μείντε ευαίσθητοι" [Remain sensitive], in *Γκάμπυ: Θεατρικό κείμενο εμπνευσμένο από τη ζωή της Γαβριέλλας Ουσάκοβα* [Gaby: a play inspired by the life of Gabriella Ousakova], Athens: Kapa, 2017, p. 7. In order to render the story of Athens more vividly, the two authors drew their material from the books of Giannis Kairofylas about old Athens, from the current-events columns by Nikos Tsiforos and from the geographical memories of Ousakova herself (ibid., p. 93). Ousakova's life has also inspired another performance (titled *Γαβριέλλα και Ζουζού* [Gabriella and Zouzou]) by Polina Gionaki, which was staged at Aggelon Vima Theatre in 2013, directed by Kostas Ferris. Besides, her unsolved murder has been the point of departure for a promenade performance, *Γαβριέλλας rock* (Gabriella's Rock) by the Theatre group Ochi Paizoume which took place at Strefi Hill, an area close to Ousakova's house. Among the most interesting traits of this production was the different meanings assigned to the word rock. The rocks of Strefi Hill are metonymically associated with Gabriella's rock (namely her body), her solid and steady presence in Athens.

³⁸ Conversation with the director, 10 May 2017.

Yet, the most important device of this production are the three distinct selves of Gaby that coexist on stage, each representing the heroine at a different age. The director explains her choice, maintaining that each age represents a different aspect of her personality:

The emotional (Young), the professional (Middle), the witty (Old). In the early phase, her sexuality is scorched, explosive and connected to her brain and eyes. In the second phase, she is conscientious: like a secretary, a nurse [...] an employee who is, at the same time, her own boss, she struggles so that the services she offers are always of the highest level, as befitting her reputation. In the third phase, being erotic has become an effortless procedure, like a cloth permanently covering the body [...] the Old supervises with humour the two younger selves and the body reminisces its old pleasures and joys.³⁹

As for the performance dramaturgy, the three ages of the protagonist enhance the multivoiced presentation of her biography and also “enliven” the polyphonic memory, as this is reflected in her autobiography.

The director’s choice to assign the role of the older Gaby to a male actor (Angelos Papadimitriou) reinforced the theatrical aspect, which defines in general the way Gaby is presented on stage as an actress performing various roles. Gaby’s body remains hidden behind the different roles she is called to perform, like Madam Irma in Jean Genet’s *The Balcony*. However, in her case, the protean power of transformation is not inherent, as in Panorea’s example, but attentively elaborated. Her education and her social skills allow her on every occasion to create the best possible costume for the role she is asked to perform.

Within the distanced and often frivolous atmosphere of the performance, the darker side of the life course of the real Gaby is understated, but not entirely ignored, in some scenes.⁴⁰ The songs, the men wearing masks imitating orgasm sounds and the comments uttered by old Gaby reinforce this distanced ambiance. Even the representation of her murder, when a stranger breaks in her house and strangles her, is transformed into a tender farewell scene, when the chorus of men decorates the black gown of old Gaby with flowers.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The particular incidents that the two authors have chosen bring to the fore very clearly the fact that Gaby, although she was always a leading woman in her professional space, exerted full control of her body (while providing it to others), nonetheless remained on the margins of Athenian society. Regardless of her popularity, she was always seen as a whore. It is not incidental that the play begins with the list of 101 adjectives and nouns in Greek that have been used to describe prostitutes. Tzellou and Kirki Karali, *Γκάμπυ* [Gaby], p. 9.

Returning to the issue of the alternative mapping that the prostitutes create while crossing the city, as this has been elaborated in the productions we discussed, we may draw some temporary conclusions.

Undoubtedly the major focus in all three productions is the close connection of the personal life course of the three protagonists with the city. The story of Maria of Manzar/Patrinela is closely associated with Patras: by means of the distanced choreography that Terzopoulos invents, the real Maria of Manzar wearing the mask of the carnival queen, an invisible presence that protects and threatens at the same time, is finally identified with the city. Panorea's itineraries within Patras and all the other cities in Greece draw a new map, depicting another side of the urban landscape comprising landmarks that are very rarely included in official city guides. In *Gaby*, Ousakova is depicted as a travel guide to the landscapes of Athens that Karali's generation knows only through the nostalgic narratives of literary texts and film shots. "When Gaby 'departs', every beautiful spot of the old Athens leaves with her, every affectionate disposition towards the space and its people. At least as we, the younger generation, can visualise them."⁴¹

In each performance, the public body of the prostitute acquires a different meaning. The body of Maria of Manzar/Patrinela is identified with the public body of the city; the earthy, handmade, agile body of Panorea bears the marks of the geographical landmarks of her biography; and the theatrical body of Gabriella projects images of the Athenian landscapes, as these are recorded in various personal and literary narratives.

An interesting question that arises concerns the portrayal of the protagonists: is each of them the subject of her life story or does her narrative reproduce a series of patriarchal stereotypes concerning the femme fatale figure, the sinful woman, the victim who turns into a perpetrator, Medea or Agave? In the case of Logaras and Terzopoulos, the reference to mythological figures is evident. In Chronas and Kitsopoulou's case, these stereotypes are downplayed mainly because of the queer perspective from which both the writer and the director approach the nightlife of the popular class. In *Gaby*'s case, it is evident that the subject of the narrative is Gabriella Ousakova. Karali depicts the most famous prostitute of Athens through a postmodern lens, according to which a prostitute is able to define her own, independent, political identity.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in all three productions the personal voice of the protagonist is polyphonic and gradually acquires a collective dimension. In *The Last Mask-Fallimento* this is achieved through the voices of the seven actors who narrate the story, in *The Woman of Patras* by means of the "conversation"

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 91.

between Panorea's biography and the popular songs of the period, and in *Gaby* through the three different selves of the protagonist. The passage from the personal voice to the collective polyphony implies in all three cases that the focus no longer lies on the details of a particular biography but on its incorporation (as a testimony) into the wider narrative of history.

Besides, the writers and directors in all three productions do not consider the marginal locations of prostitution as landmarks with an exotic appeal but as spaces that function like self-knowledge mirrors. In our opinion, the particular productions are driven by a desire to revisit an older period, often betraying a nostalgic feeling, and within the framework of re-examining the official narrative of history in order to shed more light on its silent pages. They attempt to transform personal and minority memories into collective monuments. Savas Patsalidis expresses in different terms a similar idea concerning the way in which the "transgressive" stories from the social margins enter the mainstream.⁴²

As a suitable epilogue to our discussion, it is interesting to refer briefly to the most popular play of post-war Greek theatre, which talks about the lives of the girls at Madam Pari's house. *Τα κόκκινα φανάρια* (*Red Lanterns*), written by Alekos Galanos, was a popular play (1961) and an even more popular film (1963). Despite the fact that the play is marked by all those traits of old-fashioned Greek realism, it still attracts the attention of many theatre directors. Besides, it has been associated more with the history of the particular district near Piraeus than with the particular stories of the women working in the brothels of Trouba.

In May 2015 some extracts from the 2013 production of *Red Lanterns* at the National Theatre, directed by Konstantinos Rigos, were presented as part of the celebration of European Maritime Day. The location chosen to serve as the stage setting was an old, deserted hotel, Loux, at 115 Filonos St, in the heart of Trouba. In this way, the imaginary narrative of the girls' lives at Madam Pari's house returned to its real setting, became a monument and was incorporated into the city's official geography.

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⁴² In his review of *The Woman of Patras*, Patsalidis talks about the way the productions dealing with these issues end up legitimising the socially marginalised. In the postmodern period we live in, "it is interesting to observe how easily the heretic becomes legalised. Once upon a time [...] there was some sort, even rudimentary, of social margin, which defined itself in opposition to the legal centre. There was an 'outer' space, which did not only allow but also promoted annoying transgressions. Today [...] everything converges towards the 'undisturbed centre'." "Ένα χαρμνιασμένο σώμα" [A yearning body].