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ANCIENT WARSCAPES, MODERN WARS

INVESTIGATING SCENOGRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS OF *TROJAN WOMEN* IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE



ABSTRACT: Focusing on Euripides' *Trojan Women*, we investigate distinctive cases from its rich performance history —mainly in Greece and Cyprus during the period 1965–2010— which go beyond essentialist frameworks of reception to activate a contemporaneous cultural presence of the play and re-imagine its grim landscapes of war and refugeehood. In the early post-war period in Greece, revivalist theatrical conventions and fixed representational codes were utilized disregarding global trends of updating anti-war themes by using contemporary experiential material. Since the early 1970s, and especially after the junta period, the ancient warsapes of Troy have been reinterpreted more freely through ecumenical and/or culture-specific contemporary references to modern wars. As varied experiences of warfare were transcribed on stage through adaptation strategies, as well as directorial, and in particular scenographic formulations, greater visibility and impact of the play's themes of war devastation and refugeehood has been achieved. Performances of *Trojan Women* from the 1990s onwards frequently display intentions of cultural and political commentary —or even intervention— providing more diverse stage versions with contemporary local and/or global references. The main areas for this contextualization of the real in contemporary Greek theatre were the Balkan region and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia Minor and Cyprus, next to other international war zones and conflicts.

TROJAN WOMEN have been allusively connected to the historical brutalities of the Athenian siege of Milos in 416 B.C., whilst the play's bleak subject matter and mood could also find a broader parallel in the Peloponnesian war (430–404 BC);¹ hence, the play is thought to echo the intense, experiential anti-war sentiments of its author. In our dystopic twenty-first century present, Euripides' warning on the aftermath of war seems still re-

1. See Croally (2007).

lently topical with the current Russian invasion of Ukraine and the millions of displaced unarmed refugees flooding Europe, adding to ongoing refugee flows from the long wars and conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Palestine, South Sudan, Congo, to name a few. And into this media world of ours, people are being constantly exposed —albeit indirectly and passively— to warfare on a global scale. So, perhaps more than ever, we need to accentuate the importance of *Trojan Women* for shaping audience responses and fostering pacifist sensibilities. Regarded as one of the most powerful anti-war plays ever written denouncing the plight of women in war,² it has reached a prominent position in the second half of the twentieth century.³ With rich and varied performance histories on the global stage, *Trojan Women* has played a leading role in demonstrating the reawakened political potential of Greek tragedy in the late twentieth century.⁴ Moreover, McDonald has from early on brought to our attention how often ancient Greek drama has been reinterpreted in modern performance and that Greek tragedies have often been staged in theatre to comment directly or indirectly on contemporary life.⁵ The play's challenging dramatic representations of mythic Troy as a landscape of war and destruction, as well as its all-female Chorus of captive refugee women suffering the atrocities of warfare have been reimagined through many different directorial and scenographic perspectives. It has been staged to convey both universal and context-specific references, while the global presence of the play is attested through its numerous and multifold, intercultural, psychological, political and feminist stage readings.⁶

As Hardwick asserts, “in modern performance ‘faithfulness’ to a unified interpretation of an ancient text is no longer a defining criterion”.⁷ Moving onwards from essentialist readings and “from notions of ‘legacy’ to include also the values and practices of the present and future creativity of classical culture”,⁸ *Trojan Women* continue to resonate today mainly due to the play's still topical anti-war themes, the commonalities of past and

2. McDonald (1992) 7.

3. Most scholars agree that *Trojan Women* achieved critical recognition, both as literary drama and as script for theatrical performance, in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, see Goff (2013) 78.

4. Hall (2004) 18, 19 ff.

5. McDonald (1992) 1, 6.

6. Decreus (1999) 245 ff.

7. Hardwick (2003) 112.

8. Ibid.

contemporary warfare and the ever-present refugee problem: depicting and performing the spectacle and the destruction of war in opposition to the military ideal while voicing ideas of pacifism, humanitarianism and feminism.⁹ According to Foley, “Greek tragedy permits a political response to irresolvable, extreme situations without being crudely topical”, hence it is often used “as a facade for staging political protest or a response to a particular political climate”.¹⁰ In other cases, it has even been used more overtly as modern or contemporary political commentary.¹¹ In this context, we aim to investigate major trends in the performance history of the play, exemplifying cases of both convergence and differentiation between global and local staging trends. Beginning with legacies of contemporary contextualization on the global stage, we will consequently focus on key performances of *Trojan Women* in Greece and Cyprus during the period 1965–2010, indicative of such reimaginings of warfare and refugeehood.

These will be investigated primarily under the prism of scenography and costume design to discuss and problematize common representational conventions, as well as to identify their transformations. Concerning Greek theatre in modern times we observe that the play’s performance history was initially based upon a more essentialist scholarly text-based approach, characteristic of the historicist constraints in the reception of the classics in Greece; this approach was diversified and expanded mostly from the post junta period onwards (after 1975).¹² On the whole, by focusing on stage design/scenography we aim at examining a less explored field of expertise in theatre practice that has not yet been fully investigated concerning classical reception.¹³ Within the context of dominant visual culture, we argue that scenography and costume design are significant cultural practices enabling a holistic understanding of performance, while directly impacting audiences

9. Two much referenced, influential productions paradigmatic of such tendencies are Tadashi Suzuki’s and Andrei Serban’s; these were widely toured on the global stage and have also elicited a significant volume of scholarship: Tadashi Suzuki chose to use *Trojan Women* in a Japanese setting depicting the agony following the post-atomic Hiroshima (see McDonald 21ff.); La Mama’s production, originally directed by Andrei Serban, is characteristic of an ecumenical approach and the experimental revisioning of the classics during the 1970s, see <http://thetrojanwomenproject.org/history-of-la-mamas-1974-trojan-women>.

10. Foley (1998) 2.

11. See Hall (2004) 19 ff.; also, McDonald (2017) 47–48, on an American political version of *Trojan Women* set in Vietnam.

12. On this topic see Konomi (2011).

13. See Konomi (2011); for a preliminary discussion see also Monaghan (2010).

and theatre artists. They are also important parts of the surviving documentation of the performance, used for its future reception and dissemination. Furthermore, directorial approaches are often based on innovative and/or updating scenographic practices to visualize the director's vision of the play, support an adaptation, or cultivate a contemporary aesthetic signature of the performance.¹⁴ It can be argued that along with the translation or adaptation, scenography and costume design are perhaps the most readily identifiable aspects of theatrical production yielding the possibility to represent on stage facets of our material and cultural experience and to have a direct impact on audiences.¹⁵ This essay will testify to the diversity of scenographic approaches and will emphasize, as well as problematize, some of the main strategies of stage (re)presentations used by scenographers and costume designers as active cultural agents, in their interactions with other cultural contexts, not least as processes of cultural and political commentary and intervention.¹⁶

STAGING THE TRAGEDY OF TROY: LEGACIES OF CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTUALIZATION

In our investigation of the legacies of contemporary contextualization for *Trojan Women* Hall's argumentation is foundational concerning the well established tradition of social activism via theatrical means in British theatre: since the beginning of the twentieth century, in the context of socio-political liberalism, the Greek plays have been coloured with all sorts of progressive political correlations — feminist, anti-colonial, pacifist.¹⁷ Moreover, modern interpretations and anti-idealistic views of the ancient world fostered a renewal of ideological and aesthetic aims in the 1950s and 1960s, when the weight of the traumatic experience of World War II was still painfully fresh, while at the same time “the new critical attitude of the 1930s towards classical texts began to be applied”.¹⁸ The proliferation of performances of *Trojan Women* in German theatre after WWII appears to specifically highlight the anti-war content of the play, pointing at a conscious effort for artistic

14. See Rodosthenous (2017) 16-19.

15. On the impact of translation/adaptation see Rodosthenous (2017) 21; McDonald (2017).

16. See Hardwick (2003) on the main reception cultural processes 107 ff.

17. Hall (1999) 62.

18. McDonald (1992) 3.

negotiation aiming toward a nation-wide redemption or sublimation of the guilt of Nazi crimes.¹⁹

The politicization of modern readings of Greek tragedy proliferated in the post-war period, and more so after the social reformist tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ For example, in French theatre, *Trojan Women* has been used for its ideological and political anti-war potential to express the anti-colonial sentiments of the liberal intellectual world against the war in Algeria. According to Sartre, who produced his famous adaptation, the play had always a specific political significance: “it was a condemnation of the war in general and the colonial expeditions in particular”.²¹ Moreover, the experiential, contemporaneous perspective acquired centrality for important theatre artists reworking the classics, like the French auteur director Antoine Vitez.²² Updating the spatio-temporal context of the play may involve a shift in the dramatic space of an adaptation of the play²³ or it can be applied solely at the performance level, as the director’s and/or the scenographer’s reading and interpretive point-of-view. In many ways, tragedy appears to be increasingly “acting as a mirror in which the [...] audience can see its own social and political problems reflected”.²⁴

More specifically, a wide range of war and conflict-ridden places of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries like post-atomic Japan, Vietnam, Northern Ireland, the Middle East (Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan), Cyprus, the Balkans (and in particular former Yugoslavia), post-soviet conflicts, and so on, have inspired adaptations of the play and have influenced their staged performances.²⁵ For example, the notion that “Northern Ireland was Troy for contemporary Irish writers” is reflected in the Irish version of

19. Konomi (2011) 66-67.

20. McDonald (1992) 3.

21. *Θέατρο* 19 (1965) 64; Sartre (1967).

22. As Vitez has characteristically quoted: “to me tragedy is like a statue, which is broken, thus we cannot fully grasp its meaning, but we need a modern look, a route from the present to the past”, see Varopoulou (2002) 456. His third version of *Electra* (1986) was designed by Yannis Kokkos as a homage to painter-scenographer Yannis Tsarouchis; it was placed in modern Piraeus—in a setting capturing various aspects of the modern Greek reality—and it remains a key example of introducing a modern perspective to a classical text.

23. For example, in Tony Harrison’s *Common Chorus*, a trilogy adaptation with extracts from *Lysistrata*, the *Trojan Women*, and Harrison’s *Aphorisms*, the setting for the *Trojan Women*’s defeat is a nuclear power plant in England; see also Goff (2013) 91-104.

24. Hall (1999) 61-62.

25. See for example British director Katie Mitchell’s influences of Eastern Europe and the war in the Balkans, especially Bosnia with her *Phoenician Women* (1996), *Iphigenia in Aulis* (2004) and *Trojan Women* (1991).

Brendan Kennelly (1993).²⁶ Moreover, the politicization of tragedy is often associated with a kind of re-historicizing, “an absolute displacement of the axes of drama to another historical region”.²⁷ This was the case with the Irish adaptation by Aidan Carl Mathews which was set in 1945 in the ruins of a still-smoking Berlin featuring matching period costumes; adopting Hölderlin/Brecht’s *Antigone* model, it sharply focused the audience’s attention on an emblematic historical period for the theme of warfare and its consequences in modern times.²⁸ Another notable example among the play’s modern treatments and adaptations is Charles L. Mee’s *The Trojan Women* (1994) providing a more modern, updated outlook on war: to this end, he included original interviews with Holocaust and Hiroshima survivors.²⁹ More recently, Femi Osofisan’s play *Women of Owu* (2004) although it is set in 19th century Africa, is also inspired by the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition.³⁰

Turning to the play’s performance history, since the early 1990s, in the wake of the tragic events in former Yugoslavia, a notable trend has been to use the charged and conflict-ridden geographical and cultural region of the Balkans and Eastern Europe as a modern historical context, and a metaphor for troubled Europe. Hence, Katie Mitchell’s production at the Gate Theatre, London (1991)³¹ used Serbo-Croatian and Georgian songs and melodies in the performance of the choral parts, along with corresponding costume elements by Peter Ruthven Hall. The production manifested that the cultural space of the Balkans and Eastern Europe could offer a suitable and prolific framework for conceptualizing modern stage presentations of ancient drama.³²

In the late 1990s and well into the twenty-first century, another notable direction has been to interweave Muslim culture-specific context and even more direct Middle-Eastern visual references in the play. Consequently,

26. Jones (1999) 107-108; see also Goff (2013) 104-115.

27. See Sampatakakis (2014) 442.

28. Jones (1999) 111 ff., 114.

29. His play is based on Euripides and Berlioz, titled *Trojan Women: A Love Story*. See <https://www.charlesmee.org/trojan-women.shtml>; see also Goff (2013) 109-115.

30. See Osofisan (2006) vii; Goff (2013) 122-135. *Women of Owu* sets the story in 1821, after the conquest of the Owu kingdom by a coalition of other West African states.

31. See <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/productions/production/1269>; Mitchell’s second take at *The Women of Troy* premiered at the National Theatre in London in 2007, see the production reviews: Billington (2007); Spencer (2007).

32. Macintosh (1997) 364-365.

Katie Mitchell's second take at the play in 2007³³ was read in the inescapable context of the Iraq war.³⁴ Annie Castledine's Gulf War version of the *Trojan Women* at National Theatre in London (1995) had been more explicit: there, in a modern analogy of the Athenian superpower, the Achaeans were presented as US Marines, while scenography quite realistically depicted a bombed-out landscape, a war zone with destroyed concrete buildings; interestingly, the stage designer Iona McLeish was seemingly inspired also by recent news footage from Bosnia.³⁵ More recently, there has been a shift to a more pronounced experiential aspect of the production —more specifically of the performers— influencing the overall staging. Hence, the traumatic witnessing of the armed conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Syria has been voiced by a group of Syrian refugees themselves, known as the Syrian Trojan Women, whereby they narrate their own stories through their adaptation of Euripides' tragedy.³⁶ Other companies like Outside the Wire, have also investigated a similar experiential perspective utilizing "ancient Greek drama as a forum for modern military dialogue".³⁷ For *Trojan Women*, another notable example, is the re-imagining of Andrei Serban's revisioning of the 1970s³⁸ as a durational global project bringing together transnational experiences of conflict and war: the La MaMa's Great Jones Rep *The Trojan Women Project* involved Albanian, Cambodian, Guatemalan, Mayan, Roma, and Serbian artists in a new version that materialized in 2019 after five years of work with artists in Kosovo, Cambodia and Guatemala.³⁹

33. *The Women of Troy*, premiered at the National Theatre in London in 2007, see the production reviews: Billington (2007); Spencer (2007).

34. Goff (2013) 116.

35. On Castledine's take on *Trojan Women* see indicatively these reviews: Morley (1995); Brown (1995).

36. Fifty women refugees from Syria, all forced into exile in Jordan, came together in 2013 to create and perform their version of the *Trojan Women* that premiered in Amman and toured in the UK (2016). The women had never acted before, and the project functioned also as a psychotherapeutic process; See also the awarded documentary on this production, *Queens of Syria*, <https://www.trojanwomenproject.org/copy-of-queens-of-syria-uk-tour-1>

37. See Klein (2017) 147-164.

38. Created by Andrei Serban, Elizabeth Swados, and the Great Jones Repertory Company, *Trojan Woman* (originally part of *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy* (1972) premiered at La MaMa in 1974 to critical acclaim. Using a mix of ancient and indigenous words and phrases, it created a new, non-literal language with sounds, rhythm, music and gesture. Serban's staging physically involved the audience throughout the piece, turning them into participants and witnesses, not just spectators — see <https://www.lamama.org/programs/the-trojan-women-project>

39. Ibid.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF STAGING WAR AND REFUGEE
THEMES IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY GREEK THEATRE

As Hall aptly observed, Greek drama played an important role in helping the British explore their socio-political conflicts and problems, a key function of the genre also in fifth-century B.C. Athens.⁴⁰ We would not be able to make easily such a straightforward connection with regard to modern and post-war Greek theatre, as the staging of ancient drama explored mostly the ritual, philosophical and poetic dimensions of Greek tragedy. Overall, until the very last decades of the twentieth century contemporary Greek theatre has not openly and systematically explored the political and social dynamics of ancient drama. As with other aspects of Greek cultural life engaging the ancient past, in performances of ancient tragedy for the most part, “modern Greece is absent, and what is projected is a monumentalized approach to ancient drama that is consistent with the general monumentalization of Greece, its placement in a de-historicized myth-space [...], cut off from the current socio-cultural conditions of the modern Greeks — direct recipients of the performative event”.⁴¹ In the various entanglements of ancient Greek, as well as of diachronic Hellenism, “it seems that every attempt to ‘historicize’-update ancient drama and especially tragedy was thwarted”.⁴²

Classical tragedy in Greece from the beginning was widely approached as “a greeting of the old and a rejection of the new”:⁴³ however, this is not the critical gaze backwards, through which, according to Benjamin, Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* is affecting the ruins of history and their perpetual accumulation.⁴⁴ The nation’s imaginary was largely involved in a blurred ethnocentric view of its distant and idealized past, where the concept of national heritage was artificially perpetuated by recreating ‘authentic’ images promoting a naturalized Hellenicity/Greekness.⁴⁵ In the specific context of *Trojan Women*, this registers as a missed opportunity to create resonance with contemporary audiences, as correlations with significant audience temporalities —the present and the recent historical past as containers of real,

40. Hall (1999) 64, 63.

41. Tsatsoulis (2015) 316; see also Hamilakis (2019) 130.

42. Sampatakakis (2014) 439.

43. Opposing the trend in American theatre observed by Hartigan (1995) 2.

44. Benjamin (2003) 392-393.

45. See Sampatakakis (2013) 37-41.

lived experience— were absent. The history of twentieth-century Greece consists of a long list of involvement in warfare and conflict: World War I and the genocide of Greeks in Asia Minor, World War II and the Greek resistance to the Nazis, the civil war and the subsequent long political divide, the military junta, the invasion Cyprus, to name the most important. The rejection of this modern history onstage was an aesthetic, cultural and ideological choice, bearing witness *ex silentio* to direct and indirect censorship strategies. Furthermore, the repulsion of traumatic experiences off stage—in particular within the hegemonic classical culture— caused the significant exclusion of collective remembrance, and eventually hindered the possibility of healing collective trauma at the level of a collective post-memory involving classical reception.⁴⁶

Following World War II and the civil war in Greece (1946–1949), a regime of “precarious democracy”⁴⁷ was established through which the country was gradually led to a seven-year dictatorship (1967–1974). In the above climate of socio-political conflict and division, performances at the festivals of ancient drama were seen to establish an expression of cultural hegemony and a national “affair of the prestige of the Greek state, combined with tourism”.⁴⁸ Hence, the official aesthetic direction of the post-war period was revivalism, effected by using fixed representational elements regarding classical antiquity which did not favour a critical and “actively present” classical reception.⁴⁹ Alternative directions for classical reception were voiced in the post-war period mainly by the liberal artistic environment of *Theatro Technis* and its founding director Karolos Koun, influencing in turn other independent theatre groups and theatre artists.⁵⁰ Koun himself had renounced dead forms of the past calling for the discovery of forms capable to speak to the modern spectator.⁵¹

46. The concept of postmemory was introduced by Hirsch (2012). Inspired by Holocaust survivors, this concept describes the relationship of subsequent generations of survivors, and those who witness historical and collective traumatic events, with the above experiences. These events are internalized and ‘remembered’ indirectly through stories, images, and other reminders and remnants of family experiences, see Hirsch (2012) 106, 107.

47. Clogg (1992) 142 ff.

48. Fessas-Emmanouil (1999) 49.

49. Hardwick maintains that “classical texts, images and ideas are culturally active presences” (2003) 112.

50. See for example the establishing performance of *Theatro Stoa* with *Trojan Women* during the junta, in 1971, directed by Thanasis Papageorgiou and designed by Phaedon Patrikalakis.

51. See Koun.

The subject of war and war survival —with its inescapable ideological and political affiliations— was a particularly sensitive issue in post-war Greece, a phenomenon that has been analyzed quite thoroughly in relation to Greek filmography;⁵² instances of direct and indirect censorship have also been well documented.⁵³ Representational styles and approaches of *Trojan Women* display right away a marked discrepancy with the prominent anti-war theme of the play. Although the war and the refugee problem⁵⁴ were long-standing issues of modern Greek reality in the twentieth century, it proved challenging to transcribe collective experiences into the performance history of the play generating a modern perspective for staging tragedy. The effect of dysfunctional archaeology, the obsessive turn to the past constituted a privileged view as performance events and cultural products were preferably “visualized in their desire to reflect the authentic heritage of the past”.⁵⁵ The popular ‘Grecian’ style of the first two post-war decades and the seven-year dictatorship (1967–1974) was accepted as the main staging convention of its time, concerning classical plays, whilst also the stage presentation of any alternative and/or contemporary reference was discouraged. A notable exception was the groundbreaking experimental version in 1977 by Yannis Tsarouchis that followed the path of modernization and directly correlated experiential reference to contemporary socio-political reality in mid-1970s Greece.⁵⁶ However, even in the radical post-junta period, Tsarouchis’ visionary version was ill-received by critics, as too modernizing in its approach to classical tragedy.⁵⁷

52. See Tomai (2006).

53. Such is for example the case of the costumes by scenographer Pavlos Mantoudis for *Electra* (1968) at the National Theatre of Greece that were disparagingly described as ‘Balkan’ or ‘Bulgarian’; the scenographer was later fired and was never commissioned again to work at the National Theatre. On this see Fessas-Emmanouil (1999) 54.

54. A long lasting nationwide trauma, refugeehood escalated after the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922). According to the 1928 census, in a total population of 6.204.684 inhabitants, the number of refugees was 1.221.849, amounting to 19.7% of the total population (compared to 124,698 before 1922).

55. Sampatakakis (2013) 38.

56. This seminal production will be not extensively discussed in this article, since it has already been the subject of another article, see Konomi (2015) 372–397.

57. For an extensive discussion of the production see also Konomi (2011) 296–317.

FROM REVIVAL AESTHETICS TO SCENOGRAPHIC PLURALISM:
ATTEMPTS AT VOICING EXPERIENCE AND UPDATING

The belated presentation of *Trojan Women* in modern Greek theatre, in 1965, was partly due to the ideologically charged cultural context described above, as well as to the unfavourable, anti-heroic treatment of its subject. The revivalist trend culminated in the inaugurating performance of the Epidauros festival by the National Theatre with *Hecuba* (1955) directed by Alexis Minotis with Katina Paxinou in the homonymous role; but it also influenced the 1965 premiere of the *Trojan Women* ten years later, directed by Takis Mouzenidis.⁵⁸ Both productions featured the trademark fixed architectural stage designs by Kleovoulos Klonis and the neoclassical stylized costumes by Antonis Fokas;⁵⁹ this had become an important manifestation of the monopoly of the National Theatre's aesthetic on the Epidauros festival productions until the post-junta period: the investigation of the ancient stage (skene) and the ancient dress. In *Trojan Women*, the destroyed monumental palatial facade of Troy was combined with elegantly pleated tunics and striking 'barbaric' decorative patterns for the captive women. Despite these dominant conventions, the lack of realism concerning the atmosphere of warfare and refugees was pointed out by the majority of the critics as one of the biggest flaws of the production. The unprecedented negative review of Fokas' stylistically impeccable costumes forced him to make drastic changes in the Chorus costumes, resulting in a more grave, monochromatic, version without added decorations; while the Phrygian hats marked a common cultural origin of the 'barbarian'.⁶⁰

In the post-junta period, such staging conventions were remodelled via an eclectic historicism that picked upon various periods of Greek history, with references to Hellenicity extending well beyond the classical to the archaic, as well as to the byzantine eras. In other cases, the turn to Asian and oriental costume influences started to explore the eastern links of modern Greek culture, and elsewhere it was characterized by vagueness and exoticism. In the production of *Trojan Women* (1979) by Theatro Technis, some of these tendencies were put to work,⁶¹ while the local, as well as

58. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 214-32.

59. Konomi (2011) 205 ff., 575-76.

60. Ibid. 225 ff.

61. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 322-44.

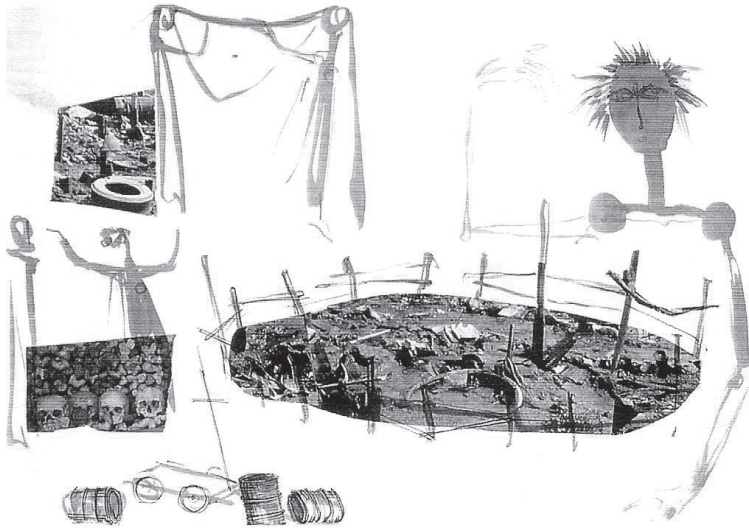


Fig. 1. Dionysis Fotopoulos, sketch-collage for the stage design of *Trojan Women*, directed by Karolos Koun, Teatro Technis, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus, 1979.
Source: D. Fotopoulos, *Stage Designs-Costumes*, Athens (1986), 104.

the global anti-war messages of the play, emerged poignantly at the core of the directorial vision.⁶² According to the influential Greek director Karolos Koun, the political and realistic dimension goes beyond the ritual or existential content of the play.⁶³ Even though his outspoken intent for updating seems to have remained overall incomplete in the production —expressed in a more generalized and abstract manner— Koun and theatre designer Dionysis Fotopoulos made a conscious choice to locate the action of the play in a timeless refugee camp (fig. 1).⁶⁴ Fotopoulos' eclectic scenographic rendering created a militaristic environment —a circular open camp fenced with poles— with the use of a moderate expressionist vocabulary and diachronic references. The scenographic shift from the monumental facade of the

62. In Koun's own words: "In *Trojan Women* it is one of the few times that my directing came out so easily [...] as the old traumas of memory, from the devastation of war and the current tragedies (Palestine, Vietnam) worked associatively and the spirit of the theatrical performance of the text was based on current images and situations [...] My own life experiences from the Asia Minor disaster and the two [world] wars, had already prepared me to accept the play as a piece of my own life", *Πιζοσπάστης* (1979) 7/8/1979.

63. *Πιζοσπάστης*, 7/8/1979 and *Βραδυνή*, 7/8/1979.

64. See Konomi (2011) 336-338.

ruined city to a war prisoners' refugee camp highlighted more accurately the modern perspective on the play's core theme. Critics typically characterized this staging of *Trojan Women* as a "fenced" or "expressionist camp", and even as a "memory of a camp", a "corral for humans" or a kind of barbed wire landscape.⁶⁵ In addition, Fotopoulos took an oriental turn to costume design in terms of aesthetics, using dark colours and Bedouin-like kaftan shapes for the female costumes, headbands and primitive styled macramé necklaces; all these elements were used in conjunction with male costume referencing archaic Greek military dress.⁶⁶

In the production of *Trojan Women* directed by Giorgos Michailidis and Anoikto Theatro (1977) as a bare outdoor staging at Lycabettus Theatre with costumes designed by Giorgos Ziakas,⁶⁷ the director saw the play "as a lament in the indivisible Greek time", succeeding in "balancing the lyrical and epic element of tragedy".⁶⁸ This may explain the director's choice of a middle ground that aimed to create a mixed timeless style rather than the direct expression of Asia Minor refugee experiences. Michailidis' directorial point of view did not go for a purely modern orientation, despite the politically infused ambience of the play. According to him and Ziakas, the best image of the performance was a 'memory scene' of Asia Minor: the opening scene featured a procession of refugee women approaching from afar carrying their bundles of belongings; they were accompanied by soldiers with torchlights creating a ceiling of smoke over the refugees illuminated by a distant projector.⁶⁹

Pluralism in relation to the scenographic aspect of *Trojan Women* was further manifested by the production directed by Andreas Voutsinas for the National Theatre of Northern Greece (1989).⁷⁰ Fotopoulos' second take on the stage and costume designs of the play displayed a disposition for nearly cinematic realism, as he continued his investigation of the contemporary

65. *Ta Néa*, 23/8/1980; *Πρωινή*, 18/8/1979; *Η Καθημερινή*, 14/8/1979; *Ta Néa*, 7/8/1979.

66. Fotopoulos' designs presented also several commonalities with Michalis Kakoyannis' film adaptation *The Trojan Women* (1971), designed by Nicolas Georgiadis; other critics like Varopoulou commented on Fotopoulos' aesthetic influences from both Pazolini and Kakoyannis (*Πρωινή*, 18/8/1979).

67. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 317-325.

68. Lignadis (1977).

69. The staging of the 'memory scene' was inspired by the 1922/Asia Minor bleak narrations by Michailidis' father, a refugee and a witness of the Smyrna catastrophe: "A crowd comes from afar and tears the air with its cries" (*Η Βραδινή*, 1977).

70. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 418-431.

image of ancient drama initiated earlier on with *Plutus*.⁷¹ The stage depicted an apocalyptic post-war landscape visualized as a car cemetery founded upon the poetry of “melted everyday objects”;⁷² the car, a common object of everyday life, was imposed as an autonomous aesthetic and expressive value, but also as a means of introduction into an environment of modern dystopia. The strong contemporary take of the setting was combined with timeless costume forms with modern and contemporary touches, sometimes referencing twentieth-century military uniforms and urban dress, utilizing post-Brechtian aesthetics. For this production Fotopoulos created deeply affective stage figures: Cassandra emerged as a leading figure of the woman-victim of war and rape in a distressed negligee dress and a military coat, next to Hecuba sitting on a pile of rags with her short-cut hair in mourning.

BALKAN ECHOES AND THE WEIGHT OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE ONSTAGE

The Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) were often described as Europe’s deadliest conflicts since World War II; they were marked by many war crimes including genocide, crimes against humanity and extensive rape of war victims. These tragic historical events in the Balkans could not leave Greece—as a neighbouring country, part of the region—indifferent. Subsequently, it also impacted Greek theatre directors and designers providing a concrete source of inspiration for updating plays like *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* via a more poignant and topical referential frame. A case exemplifying this trend was the lean, poetic-realistic and discreetly modernizing production of *Trojan Women* (1993) by Teatro Technis.⁷³ Deeply permeated with the atmosphere of the concurrent war in the Balkans, the production was also characteristic of the felicitous collaboration between director Giorgos Lazanis and artist-scenographer Kyriakos Katzourakis: his scenographic proposal complemented successfully the spirit of the *mise-en-scène*, while being faithful to his trademark artistic idiom of critical realism. With an absolute

71. In *Plutus* (1985) directed by Luca Ronconi at the Epidaurus festival, the scenography worked within the realm of a kind of cinematic realism, as a seminal object of modernism, the car, was introduced as a scenographic element in the orchestra.

72. See Fotopoulos’ quote in Fessas-Emmanouil (1999) 298.

73. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 449–459.



Fig. 2. Kyriakos Katzourakis, maquette painting for the stage and costume design of *Trojan Women*, directed by Giorgos Lazanis, Theatro Technis, Ancient Theatre of Epidauros, 1993. Source: programme of the production.

economy of means, Katzourakis opted for a battlefield landscape on stage, deeply effective in its simplicity; he utilized realistic but also conceptual and metaphoric means: a bloody orchestra drum, on which the spears of warfare are nailed (fig. 2). His scenography for *Trojan Women* showed thematic relations and similar concerns with his artwork, *The Temple*; Katzourakis had been working since 1991 on the subject of immigrants and refugees,⁷⁴ successfully articulating an eloquent Balkan context experientially charged by the recent historical events. The opening and closing scene of the civilian refugee crowd with bundles of belongings and suitcases in hand played a key role in the creation of evocative kinesthetic imagery with updated content.⁷⁵ The setting did not aim at faithful pictorial depiction —concentration

74. Kounenaki (2001) 21-25: “Looking at his previous works, it is ascertained that he has been dealing with the issue of immigrants at least for a decade. Creating his *Temple* in 1991 he placed people who have been uprooted from their homeland in a temporary shelter [...] in the sanctuary of a church. Painting turned from a personal affair into a place of meeting and dialogue on hot social issues. Katzourakis himself noted: ‘My goal is to create a space with a deeper sense of reality and not to make documentary recording. The artistic discourse coexists with the theatrical. The people of the *Temple* meet the real persons’. In 1997 followed his *Portrait*; again a mix of painting with theatre — its heroine, a second generation refugee woman, who lived on the outskirts of the city”.

75. *To Παρόν* (1993).

camp, detention centre, military settlement— and the realistic description of the women's captivity in physical terms; scenography rather created a poetic and psychological landscape that condensed the women's past and present. The costume approach was influenced by post-Brechtian aesthetics, while the loosely modernized costumes were based on modern dress and military coats. Katzourakis elucidated his aesthetic choices explaining that the sharp social content of the work and the proximity of reality led him to solutions of austerity, absence of volume and monumentality, as well as the rejection of the mythical dimension:

How can one dare to dream and make artistic forms of slaughter, humiliation, and rape of civilians? [...] What poetry, what painting, what music can develop their form, when everyone closes their eyes to the persecutions of immigrants everywhere, even here in the homeland of Euripides? Austerity is not a style. The absence of weight, of volume in the image, is not an artistic point of view. All that is so close to us that its mythical space, its poetic aspect fades and self imposes its presence.⁷⁶

Thematically and ideologically, no other tragedy proved more capable to create links to the drama of former Yugoslavia than *Trojan Women*. A production of the play that stands out concerning its experiential and intercultural scope was mounted at the National Theatre of Belgrade (1996)⁷⁷ during the period of the civil war and the dismemberment of former Yugoslavia.⁷⁸ It was an initiative of Greek director Irini Konidari, creating an intense and direct artistic dialogue with audiences sensitive to the explosive historical situation, as well as to the straightforward correlations of the production with its socio-political environment. In the period following the partition of the country and the civil war, *Trojan Women* “functioned as a kind of cleansing, while the play proved also prophetic for what followed”.⁷⁹ Moreover, Konidari had her personal experiences of living through the refu-

76. From the scenographer's note in the production's theatre programme.

77. The production premiered at the National Theatre in Belgrade (3/5/1996) and toured during the summer to Greece; the production was revived in 1999, on the tragic occasion of the NATO bombings in former Yugoslavia, and all proceeds were donated to humanitarian aid for war victims. See an extensive discussion in Konomi (2011) 541-544.

78. *Trojan Women* played to great success; as the director of the National Theatre of Serbia, Alexander Berdzek quoted: “Something terrible happened during the war. The theatre was constantly full; but all people react to the sufferings of war in the same way, to its pain.” (*Ελευθεροτυπία* [1996]).

79. *Ελευθεροτυπία* (1999).

gee drama in Belgrade at the end of 1995, when, after the Krajina and Knin incidents, 250,000 refugees flooded the Serbian capital. As she recalled:

The entrances to the city were full of caravans of refugees, the spectacle was shocking, before my eyes passed the uprooting of '22, the Pontians, the Cypriot...[but also] most of the actors were refugees themselves from Bosnia or they were hosting refugees in their homes.⁸⁰

In 1999, a week after the bombings ended, Konidari travelled to the devastated areas of Serbia from Budapest to Belgrade seeing unforgettable images. Emerging “through the open graves and the black-clad women she saw mourning for their dead, regardless of race or religion”,⁸¹ the production drew from the historically charged cultural space of the Balkans, the local experiences and the cultural codes of the region, without being limited only to the theme of the recent war. The intercultural approach was primarily concerned with the organic connection of the two cultures through common elements such as the Orthodox religion, folk rites and live traditional folk music.⁸² The overall cultural context of the performance accentuated a sense of a common Balkan history with the recurring drama of uprooting, immigration and warfare.

With a large chorus of thirty women, the *mise-en-scène* followed the spirit of the Brechtian tradition — however Konidari avoided taking advantage of the disturbed psyche of the Yugoslav actors-citizens eschewing a naturalistic depiction.⁸³ Nevertheless, in the performance, the Serbs were faced with their expatriation: in a moving variation of the ending, the chorus’ members remained motionless instead of leaving the stage — a metaphor for the homeland— giving a message of return and perseverance.⁸⁴ The aesthetic approach of the production was also controversial; performers refused to wear modern suits, distressed clothes and military coats, stating

80. *Μακεδονία* (1999).

81. *Ελευθεροτυπία* (1999).

82. Renaissance was a well known band in Serbia that performed traditional polyphonic songs live, which were harmoniously integrated into the body of the performance. These songs created a successful intercultural mix with their combination of ancient Greek dramatic text and Serbian musical tradition.

83. Konidari said that “in any case, the essence of Euripides identifies with contemporary events. The identification is done automatically, the experience is a burden that the actors carry and it has already become a garment, their second skin”, *Ta Nêa* (1999).

84. *Μακεδονία* (1999).

that “we are tired of weapons and refugees”. By contrast, the production promoted a rather austere, timeless, and neutral style. The stage retained a formal and expressive generalization in response to the explosive historical conjuncture, without, however, avoiding altogether the disturbing atmosphere of violence and war. The setting of the play itself was composed of “wood, ashes, fires, iron rods, broken toys and dismembered dolls”; costumes were “soiled with soot, ash and dirt”.⁸⁵ The ancient tragedy was intrinsically linked to contemporary refugee drama, without the use of radical innovations and visual tricks. As Konidari pointed out: “Euripides was surpassed by the magnitudes of modern horror”.⁸⁶

Another production with similar concerns and intertextual orientation drawing upon Balkan historical and experiential content was staged at Teatro tis Anoixis (2002) titled *Trojan Women — The Long Journey*, directed by Yannis Margaritis.⁸⁷ The script was a poetic intertextual composition of Euripides’ *Trojan Women* interwoven with excerpts from Thea Halo’s book *Not even my name* — the book describes the painful experiences of persecuted women from the Pontic Greeks ethnic group including references to the ‘death marches’ they were subjected. In this production “the dramatic characters of Hecuba–Cassandra–Andromache conversed in the form of elegy with the tortured female characters of Halo’s book”.⁸⁸ Margaritis elaborated on the intertextual encounter of the characters:

Through the encounter of Euripides’ tragic heroines with Halo’s tortured women, we try to compose the absolute-unspeakable pain, to hear how the cry of despair becomes a song, to see the desperation of the uprooted refugees —and especially of women— being transformed into hope.⁸⁹

Aiming for a sense of trans-Balkan culture, the director collaborated with artists of Balkan origins like Romanian-born set designer Carmencita Brosbogiou, Croatian musician Zlatan Claritz and Sergio Gaka for lyrics. Halo’s narrations blended with Euripides’ polemic and contemporary Balkan experience.⁹⁰ Balkan music and melodies, the intimate indoor setting, as well as

85. *Ta Néa* (1999).

86. *Ibid.*

87. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 491-498.

88. *Xώρα* (2002).

89. From the director’s note in the programme of the production.

90. As the director’s note read: “at a time of intense social upheaval, at a time when the global landscape is changing through desperate immigrants, we want, with the help of artists

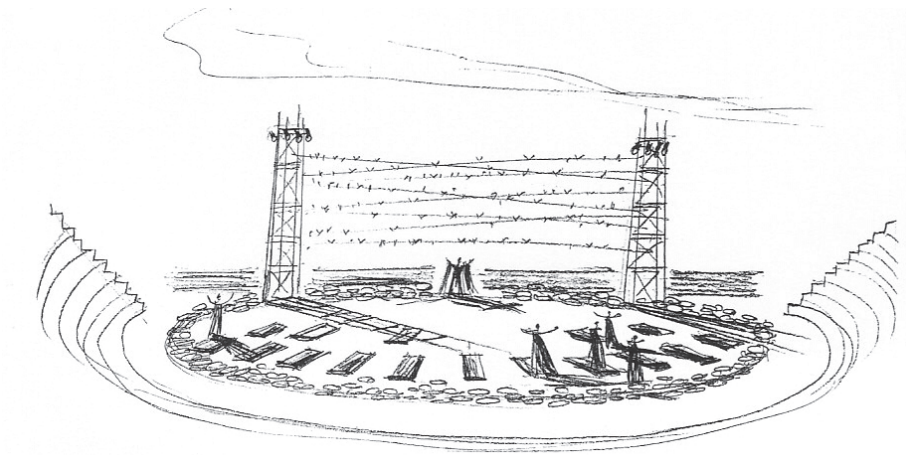


Fig. 3. Giorgos Patsas, sketch for the stage design of *Trojan Women*, directed by Antonis Antipas, Aplo Theatro, 2001. Source: Archive of Giorgos Patsas.

the chorus' costumes, all contributed to the effectiveness of the directorial vision; Brosbogiou's scenography and costumes combined post-Brechtian and neo-expressionist aesthetics.⁹¹

The production of *Trojan Women* by Aplo Theatro (2002) directed by Antonis Antypas, with sets and costumes by Giorgos Patsas and music by Eleni Karaindrou is an example of more understated Balkan correlations paired with more explicit militaristic iconography (fig. 3).⁹² The production put forth an aesthetic of poetic realism exhibiting influences from Theodoros Angelopoulos's cinematic universe, thus echoing visually and musically his Balkan itineraries through land abandonment, war devastation and refugeehood.⁹³ The scenography of Giorgos Patsas made optimal use of the outdoor staging to create a poignant landscape of war: the scenography rendered with iconographic eloquence a military concentration camp and the condition of confinement. The setting blended expressionist nuances with details of raw realism: stuffed sacks as protective embankments, barbed wire, control towers and searchlights. The tall metal pylons joined by

from the Balkans, to resist the complacency of television aphasia and redefine our relationship with the big questions that History confronts us on a daily basis".

91. Konomi (2011) 496.

92. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 471-481.

93. Both Giorgos Patsas (production and/or costume design) and Eleni Karaindrou (composer/music) were long-standing collaborators of Theodoros Angelopoulos. For the globally acclaimed film director see <https://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/>.



Fig. 4. Photograph from the production of *Trojan Women* designed by Giorgos Patsas, directed by Antonis Antipas, Aplo Theatro, 2001.
Source: Archive of Giorgos Patsas (photo by Kostas Ordolis).

barbed wire overshadowed the stage, creating a universal image, a modern symbol of war denunciation. While the stage was visually and material-wise updated, costumes were kept more timeless, highlighting a core psychological-expressive theme: the wounded and abused captive women. The chorus costumes consisted of long printed dresses and loose long coats that were complemented by headwear resembling bandages soaked with blood — distressed make-up and bandaged hands completed the picture of the chorus costumes (fig. 4).

CYPRUS/TROY AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The production history of the play has also been variedly linked to the late twentieth-century traumatic realities of the Turkish invasion and the bisection of Cyprus. In particular, the specificities of the Cyprus problem and the collective, ongoing trauma of the Turkish invasion and division of Cyprus have deeply affected Greek Cypriot productions of *Trojan Women*. In 1982, eight years after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the first production of the play by the Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOC) was directed by Nikos Charalambous, with set and costumes by Giorgos Ziakas;⁹⁴ it was ma-

94. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 373-91.



Fig. 5. Giorgos Ziakas, scenography for *Trojan Women*, directed by Nikos Charalambous, Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOC) 1982. Source: Archive of Giorgos Ziakas.

terialized in a still charged historical context, albeit using unconventionally expressionist and elliptical forms, as well as allegorical space. The director chose to convey the play's anti-war message to an emotionally charged contemporary Cypriot and Greek audience, in an indirect, poetic way as a 'memory', keeping the distinctive tonality of collective mourning; he rendered the funeral of lost Troy with purely theatrical means, eschewing any intention of realistic representation. Complementing this vision, Ziakas achieved the modernization of the stage as a post-war art 'environment': his scenography depicted an open landscape, an expanded sculptural environment (fig. 5). Ziakas took on the directorial neo-expressionist quest for an allegorical space; he covered the earth with endless meters of whitish thick canvas, promoting the use of cloth as the main scenographic material and creating a total environment with multiple interpretations (shroud, frozen land, salt pit, covering).⁹⁵ The sparse stage objects used were mostly everyday objects and specimens of Cypriot folk art (jars, handicraft stools, clay pots). Furthermore, Ziakas made an essential contribution to costume design, with regard to the invention of a silhouette close to human measures. Ziakas utilized the Cypriot handicraft tradition by proposing a straighter silhouette, loosely delineated and close to the human scale. This humanized silhouette was put together by a variety of knitted fabrics by women in the refugee camps of Cyprus. Hence the experiential reference to the brutal aftermath of the war in Cyprus was symbolically and conceptually interwoven in the materiality of the costumes' handmade fabrics. Without resorting to previous morphological stereotypes, Ziakas' original proposition for the

95. Ibid. 380 ff.

play displayed a thought-provoking combination of contemporary artistic trends and traditional elements.

The specific historical context of the 1974 Turkish invasion became a more explicit reference for the second production of *Trojan Women* by the Cyprus Theatre Organization, directed by Giorgos Mouaimis (2003);⁹⁶ his *mise-en-scène* displayed an admirable synergy with the award-winning scenographic proposal of Harris Kafkarides.⁹⁷ Interestingly, Mouaimis' metatheatrical approach aimed at audience defamiliarization from the play's intense lyrical and emotional content: the *mise-en-scène* presented the performance in its construction — for example, the stage is set up also as a rehearsal space, with the four women of the chorus and Hecuba reading the play around a rehearsal table, while the episode with Cassandra sprang from the above condition as a central dramatic episode of the play. Utilizing the meta-theatrical concept of the *mise-en-scène*, Kafkarides set up an abstract performance space, which, however, was infused with intense affective content, creating direct references to the audience's collective memory and shared trauma.

For his stage design approach, Kafkarides combined realistic and abstract rendering, in the mixed media style of a contemporary installation or performance artwork. The main device for Kafkarides' scenography was using a charged direct visual image: real war victims' photographs of Cypriot missing people (*agnooumenoi*) that have been used in most invasion protests in Cyprus. It was not a symbolic gesture, but rather an indexical function of the photographs themselves which also implicated the use of the stage space and the overall staging. The numerous black and white photographs created collaged posters on the walls or were piled on stage generating an ambience of street protests (fig. 6).⁹⁸ At the beginning of the performance, two large single sheets of nylon formed a makeshift tent holding piles of these photos. After the transformation of Poseidon into the director-observer the ropes holding the canopy were loosened scattering the photographs all over the floor and creating two translucent curtains with a central opening. The scattered photos were later on swept by members of the chorus to the perimeter of the stage. The rest of the stage objects alluded to the meta-theatrical concept of rehearsal: piano, rehearsal tabletop on tripods, foldable black metal

96. For an extensive discussion of the production see Konomi (2011) 498-503.

97. With this scenographic proposal, Kafkarides won a distinction at the 10th International Scenography Exhibition in Prague Quadrennial 2003.

98. See Kafkarides' model at the Cyprus Theatre Museum <https://www.archaiologia.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/10.troades.JPG>

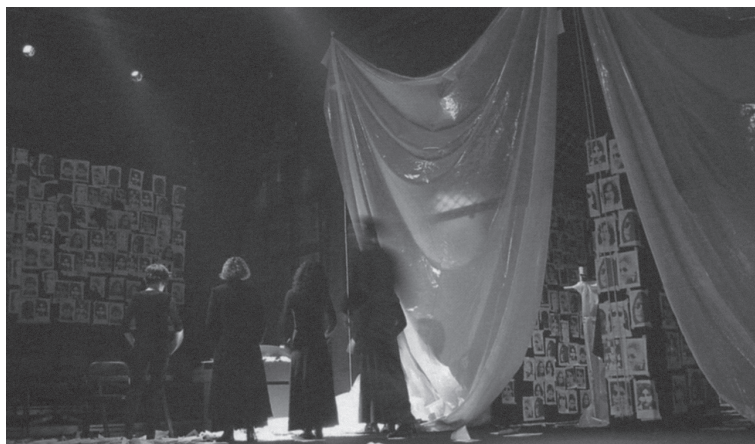


Fig. 6. Photograph from the production of *Trojan Women* designed by Harris Kafkarides, directed by Giorgos Mouaimis, Cyprus Theatre Organization, 2003. Source: Archive of Cyprus Theatre Organization.

chairs, a director's desk. The photographs together with the transparent plastic 'curtains' transformed a post-theatrical rehearsal space into a shared space of collective memory, activating an experiential and culture-specific context, incorporating dimensions of the collective trauma of Cyprus.⁹⁹ By contrast, in his costume design approach, Kafkarides avoided culture-specific references; the simple and strict costume colour palette was kept close to a post-Brechtian timeless, or transcendental aesthetic. Indicatively, the women of the chorus started with similar long dark overcoats and wide hair ribbons, to end up with modern underwear and slip dresses.¹⁰⁰

Apart from the war traumas of Cyprus and the Balkans, other regions like Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq provided disturbing experiences of ongoing armed conflict and warfare in the extremely troubled geopolitical area of the Middle East.¹⁰¹ With the Iraq War still waging, it was an inescapable context

99. The exhibit note reads: "Walls, columns, shop windows, all covered with the photos of missing persons. Smiling faces, addresses, phone numbers, personal details. All creates a mosaic of loss and tragedy", *PQ* 2002 (2003) 108-9.

100. *Ibid.*

101. To briefly quote some, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ongoing since 1948 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967; the Gulf War (1990–1991) was the US-led war against Iraq, in response to the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait; the Iraq War lasted from 2003 to 2011, with the war in Iraq involving ISIS lasting from 2013 to 2017, also known as War in Iraq; the Lebanese Civil War lasted from 1975–1990 with its Syrian Occupation of Lebanon (1976–2005); the first Libyan Civil happened in 2011 and the second Civil War was waged from 2014–2020.

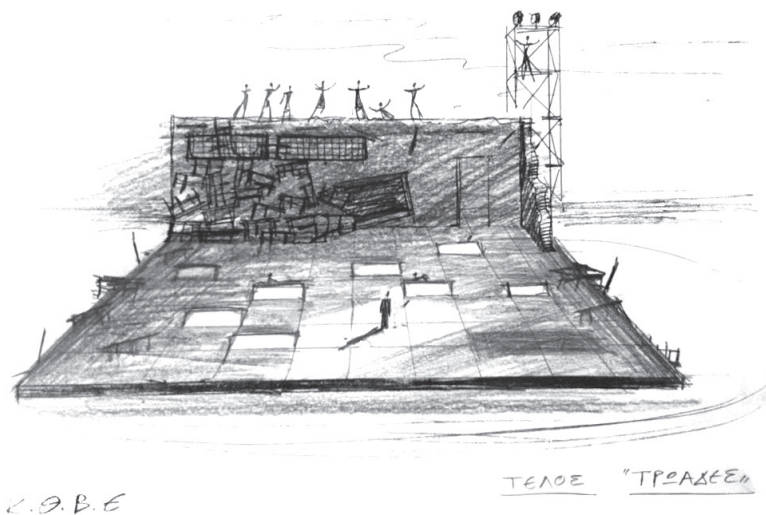


Fig. 7. Giorgos Patsas, sketch for the stage design of *Trojan Women*, directed by Nikaiti Kontouri, National Theatre of Northern Greece, 2009.

Source: Archive of Giorgos Patsas.

to Nikaiti Kontouri's *Troades* in 2009.¹⁰² In her third attempt at classical tragedy, Kontouri undertook this “pre-eminently political project” advocating the victims of modern wars: the caravans of stateless people — refugees and immigrants, defenceless women and children.¹⁰³ She boldly facilitated this challenging connection, by removing the second stasimon and replacing it with devised texts inspired by real reportage testimonies of women victims of war, as well as turning it into a core concept for the whole production.¹⁰⁴ To further support this, Kontouri collaborated with Sotiris Danezis, documentary filmmaker and war correspondent, and Nicolas Vafeiades, chief international correspondent, to gather contemporary textual material and real testimonies.¹⁰⁵ Kontouri intensified even more the military ambience of the stage by introducing a male task force in action. Accordingly, scenographer

102. *Troades* were produced by the State Theatre of Northern Greece with Leda Protopsalti as Hecuba — all three productions were presented at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus and were widely toured.

103. Previously Kontouri had directed *Medea* (1997) with Karyofyllia Karabeti and *Antigone* with Lydia Koniordou (2002), both productions of the National Theatre of Greece.

104. As Kontouri said, “It looks like we are reporting live in a war zone”, explaining that through modern texts-testimonies of women from recent wars, in Cyprus, Bosnia, Africa, the show makes its own intervention” (Kleftogianni, 2009); see also Loverdou (2009) and Karabitsos (2009).

105. See Euripides' *Troades* (2009), the production's theatre programme, p. 30-31.

Giorgos Patsas turned the stage into a war zone similar to those mediated by war correspondence: a bombed school reminiscent of Bosnia, Iraq and all the countries affected by the vortex of war (fig. 7); and nowadays familiar scenes from wars in Syria and Ukraine. In the opening scene the prologue of the gods is read by children on stage playing in the rubble, among broken desks, tossed books and broken walls — “with their innocence, but also with the will to exorcise their fear and death”.¹⁰⁶ The scenography departed from the usual military or the civilian camp iconography to create a truly shocking stage rendering of a bombed-out school:

Schools have always been important symbols of hope. Even in the midst of violent conflict, they are meant to be places of safety, doorways held open to a better future. Perhaps this is why a bombed-out school is such a shocking sight: the blackboards broken, books scattered, child-sized tables and chairs buried under rubble.¹⁰⁷

Still, the emergence of this grim realism in classical tragedy was not so well received by many theatre critics. However, Patsas complemented his quest for raw imagery —formulated mainly by the background demolished wall— with all sorts of dynamic stage spatialities and sculptural configurations of the stage objects (school desks and chairs). In addition, the orchestra space was turned into a mixed indoor/outdoor space, providing the transitional space for the detention of the refugees and the violent actions of the male task force and was at times turned into a site reminiscent of mass graves.

ANCIENT WARSCAPES, MODERN WARS: SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

As Goff remarked, “many productions of *Trojan Women* in the late twentieth century moved audiences profoundly, especially when the production seemed [...] to identify a contemporary conflict”.¹⁰⁸ The core idea to activate a contemporaneous cultural presence of the play and render ancient warscales more visible on stage through reference to modern wars reflects

106. Ibid.

107. <https://www.peopleinneed.net/despite-the-bombs-a-hunger-for-education-in-syria-persists-5734gp>

108. Goff (2013) 91.

the contemporary turn in classical reception privileging the contemporary present and the experiential in all sorts of social, aesthetic and intellectual agendas.¹⁰⁹ Respectively, in Greek theatre several directorial and scenographic approaches since the 1970s point towards a more broadly conceived cultural politics to 're-imagining the past' and 'reconnecting to the past in the Greek present'.¹¹⁰ Similar tendencies can be observed in Cypriot theatre, despite the fact that explicit reference to the country's traumatic past and ongoing division has been to a large extent eschewed. In general, Euripides' *Trojan Women* can be argued to have played an important role in transcribing experiential material in performance, engaging the collective memory, and expressing facets of the post-memory of traumas of displacement and refugeehood to audiences of the post-junta generations. Foregrounding the stage as a landscape of war and a space for the discourse of refugeehood furthers the dialogue between classical tragedy and the modern Greek experience next to regional and global realities. Some productions derive their inspiration from contemporary, experiential contexts and geographical, cultural and/or historical specific content from Cyprus and the Balkans with their recent war histories, as well as from Asia Minor, the Middle East and Syria. Other productions share an eclectic field of ecumenical references fostering intercultural sensibilities and voicing solidarity.¹¹¹

Plays like the *Trojan Women* seem to be particularly prone to the ongoing debates about representational strategies and the politics of representation, as well as to wider ideological and theoretical debates about the relationship between art and reality, the critical role of stage practice and stage image, and the establishment of stage work as an ideological and cultural intervention as opposed to a strictly autonomous aesthetic creation.¹¹² Furthermore, under the prism of the experiential, the body and its (re)presentations emerge as a privileged field of inquiry challenging previous models.¹¹³ This discussion is further linked to the crisis of representational codes

109. On this see Hall (2004) 1-46; Hall and other scholars identify the year 1968 as a breakthrough for this proliferation of contemporary perspectives, when contemporary social, political, aesthetic and intellectual agendas began to reshape classical reception.

110. See the discussion in Tziouvas (2014) 1-28.

111. This is the case also of Theodoros Terzopoulos *Troades* (2016-2017) — indicatively see Liapis review (2017); this seminal performance will be extensively discussed in a forthcoming publication.

112. See Patsalidis (1997) 267-269.

113. See Rigopoulou (2003) 173.

at the turn of the millennium, extending well beyond a primary controversy over realism and its oppositional juxtaposition with abstraction.¹¹⁴

In a wider context, Jameson reflects on the postmodern condition as a broader symptom of our time associated with the loss of historicity and the inability of societies to achieve aesthetic and cultural representations of current reality and experience.¹¹⁵ And turning to modern scenography, Aronson considers that it often presents neither the true nor the ideal to the question of representation, rather conjoined juxtapositions of forms and images that create meaningless significations, a kind of an irrational collage: “images present or provoke stimuli but resist the logical explanations of the physical world”.¹¹⁶ However, Foster argues that we are now witnessing a return to reality in art and theory founded on the materiality of real human bodies and social landscapes.¹¹⁷ Going through the relentless wars of the various artistic avant-gardes between abstraction and neo-pictorialism, and following Lacan’s definition of the real in terms of trauma, Foster also challenges us with the perspective of ‘traumatic realism’;¹¹⁸ making a “shift in conception: from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma”.¹¹⁹

To conclude, such diverse conceptions and contextualizations of the real could prove influential to future stagings of *Trojan Women* next to other contemporary visual staging trends. The mapping of the performance histories of *Trojan Women* (1965–2010) in Greek and Cypriot theatre indicates that given aesthetic trends have been problematized through the use of contemporary contexts and experiential materials. Investigating further the performance history of *Trojan Women* from a scenographic perspective can also make a significant contribution to an interdisciplinary research framework on forms of representations of warfare and refugeehood in film, theatre and the performing arts.¹²⁰

114. Indicatively, Adorno (2002: 30–31, 249–501) writes about the perspective on Holocaust gained through new artistic forms, considering Beckett’s works more realistically oriented than other works of art, such as those of socialist realism; see also Johnson (2011).

115. Jameson (1991) 21.

116. Aronson (2005) 97.

117. Foster (1996).

118. Ibid. 127–168.

119. Ibid. 146.

120. Various publications discuss different aspects of the cinematic and literary representation of war; see indicatively: Mason–Suchoples (2015); Tomai (2006). For interdisciplinary perspectives, see for example Rellstab–Schlote (2019).

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