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Feeling Queer in Translation: Credibility and (dis)order in the Asylum Process

Abstract: This article discusses the interweaving of queerness, affect and translation in the asylum process, focusing on the role of legal representatives. Through 16 semi-structured interviews with asylum lawyers in Greece, it explores their collaborative work with queer asylum seekers in preparing a “credible” account. Approaching legal preparation as a process of translating applicants’ emotions into what is legible and recognisable by the authorities, it critically addresses translation not only as a mode of straightening queerness and linear compliance with authorities’ expectations, but also as a (dis)orderly affective space and a fragmented temporality where unpredictable queer stories can be told, performed and (possibly) become audible. Reflecting on the performativity of (dis)order, this article argues that translation constitutes a site of potentiality for queerness not only oriented towards the future, but, through the embodied liminality of (un)becoming queer, it suggests a queer future in the present.

Key words: queerness, asylum, credibility, affect, translation

Introduction

Under the current strict EU migration policies, asylum still remains one of the very few institutional pathways for migration and movement. Following the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015, asylum in Europe has progressively evolved into an increasingly lucrative economy for national states and private investors, particularly through the establishment of massive, remote, now closed, controlled and highly securitised refugee camps at Europe’s borders.¹ Despite this profitable enterprise, neoliberal European governments closely aligned with Europe’s neofascist, far-right shift have recently intensified efforts to restrict movement and access to asylum. Under the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, set to be fully applicable

by June 2026, these restrictions take shape through externalisation agreements with non-European countries, fast-track border and return procedures (even for children), legal fictions of non-entry at the borders, and, as recently voted by the Greek parliament, even temporary suspensions of the Refugee Convention for certain nationalities.² These legal mechanisms, aimed at preserving a purportedly safer, thus whiter, Europe, work to exclude the racialised and classed, dangerous “others” while Europe remains open only to the “good” and privileged migrants, those who can purchase golden visas and own property. This increasingly restrictive and exclusionary asylum economy is premised, reproduced and sustained by the legal division between (the minority of) the so-called credible refugees, those represented as “real/deserving”, who need to be saved from their allegedly backward societies, and (the majority of) the non-credible migrants, those represented as “bogus/undeserving”, cast as opportunistic invaders, from whom Europe must defend itself and secure its borders.

Within this exceptional apparatus, despite the rise of neoconservative, anti-feminist agendas targeting non-normative queer and trans subjects, queer refugees often remain the golden cases and the pride trophy of white saviorism. Even as EU states wage political and legal wars against queer and trans subjects domestically, they remain eager to “protect” queer refugees when persecuted by the non-white, non-European, backward “others”. In this way, through asylum politics, instrumentalised persecution of queer refugees legitimises ongoing colonisation, reinforcing the cultural border between the progressive, civilised Europe and the backward, oppressive Global South. However, queer refugees’ inclusion in the imaginary of the “European queer heaven” is far from unconditional. To be granted “protection”, queer asylum seekers must prove to asylum authorities that they are “genuinely” queer, demonstrating their exceptionality and deservingness. Through a demanding credibility assessment process, conducted by European experts, which verifies authentic queerness and secures Europe’s borders from the threat of the bogus sexual others, applicants should establish

their sexual truth. Failing to do so before authorities, their claim will be rejected as non-credible, and they will be rendered deportable to their countries of origin.

Within this apparatus, under the biopolitics of credibility, which produces and distinguishes between the assimilable, real queer refugees and the bogus, disposable sexual others, to be recognised as credible, applicants should reproduce a discursively narratable, coherent, and homogenous sexual identity. A well-structured, identifiable and categorisable queerness which as proximity to whiteness, according to neoliberal sexual politics, is what gives access to citizenship, rights and, in particular, asylum. As previous literature on queer asylum has shown, to prove their genuine queerness, applicants are expected to conform to the ideal of the “good”, white, and happy sexual citizen who has supposedly lost their individuality, autonomy, and sexual freedom under oppressive, authoritarian regimes, and thus deserves protection within European (neo)liberal democracies.³

However, within the asylum politics, sexual citizenship is not only governed through reason, but also through feelings and emotions.⁴ Over the past decade, in response to developments in EU laws and policies, asylum authorities progressively shifted the focus of the examination from applicants’ sexual practices to their feelings and “inner emotional journeys.”⁵ Thus, according to the recent feeling-centric rules of credibility, applicants are expected to narrate a linear emotional trajectory from oppression to liberation and elaborate on their feelings of shame, suffering and trauma in their purportedly backward countries of origin, juxtaposed with feelings of liberation, happiness and pride in asylum countries where they can freely express their queerness.⁶ In this way, through their assessment as credible or not, applicants’ feelings are validated, regulated and controlled, forming an apparatus of affective sexual citizenship and truth.

This “affective turn” in the asylum framework is not only onto-epistemological, reflecting authorities’ expectations of what sexual truth “is” and how genuine queerness should

be felt and experienced, but also methodological, as decision-makers, in their effort to assess asylum claims' credibility tend to base their assessments and mediate their decisions through what they describe as intuition, gut feeling, and the atmosphere of the interview.⁷ Through their affective assessments, caseworkers (re)produce a common *sense* of what it feels to "be" queer. However, within this affectively homonormative apparatus of asylum, emotions do not only racialise and exclude. Affect, and in particular queer affect, as that which is antipossessive, shared and collective, circulating among bodies, incapable of being owned, challenges the identitarian apparatus of "possessive individualism"⁸ on which the asylum process is premised. Despite authorities' expectations for a clearly structured, monolithic, and discursively narratable identity, accompanied by certain privatised, pre-defined feelings, applicants do not only find, synthesise, and construct an assimilable queer identity but they also lose, trouble, dismantle, and (un)do queerness.

Aiming to contribute to a burgeoning scholarship on the affective biopolitics of migration, in this article, I discuss on the liminality of affect and queerness not only when assessing credibility, as previous literature has focused,⁹ but also when preparing a "credible" asylum claim. Through 16 semi-structured interviews with asylum lawyers who assist and represent queer asylum seekers in Greece, one of the main entry points in the EU, I view the process of preparing for an asylum interview as a process of "translation", during which applicants' emotions and affective experiences must be translated into what authorities can read, taxonomise as genuine queer identity and recognise as credible.¹⁰

However, according to my interlocutors, translation is not always a predetermined process of straightening queerness, and an epistemologically violent orientation towards an exclusionary and assimilationist version of sexual citizenship. Even within the normative structure of asylum, during their encounters with the applicants, asylum lawyers inhabit liminal positionalities of both reproducing and resisting the asylum system's normative violence and

they produce critical counter-stories and counter-archives of feelings that trouble and disturb the affective regime of identitarian sexual truth, challenging a possessive and essentialist understanding of queerness. Thus, my aim in this paper, through my interlocutors' accounts, is to focus on queerness in translation -and on translation as queer- as a relational intimate space of (dis)order, questioning the neoliberal affective linearity of predictability and taxonomy within and beyond legal structures.

Discussing translation as a queer space of (dis)order and exploring asylum lawyers' liminal positionalities in their effort to translate applicants' feelings, my intention is not to romanticise or fetishise disorder as the queer negative, minoritarian opposite of order, nor to argue for an affirmative, optimistic, monolithic politics of hope and wholeness. Drawing on translation as an affective-through-discourse and discursive-through-affect site of (un)doing and (un)becoming, what I seek is to explore the performative in the (dis)order, asking: What does this (dis)order of things (promise to) do? And so, through this analytical lens, this article discusses how queerness in translation, as an embodied and collective experience of the present and a poetic, utopian world-making horizon of the future,¹¹ could constitute a liminal space and a fragmented temporality that transcends the dilemma between, on the one hand, queerness as the politics of an impossible future and, on the other, assimilationist sexual politics as the only realistic solution of the present.

In this effort to unfold the liminality of queer affect in the asylum process, I draw on José Esteban Muñoz's conceptualisation of queerness as a collective futurity and a utopian horizon of world-making that refuses the tyranny and cruelty of the here-and-now. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz associates the here-and-now with assimilationist, reformist, and ameliorative sexual politics, while dreaming of a different, queer, utopian future that is not yet here. However, my encounters with my interlocutors, emphasising the present's dialectical relation to the future, suggest a collapse of the distinction between these two temporalities, pointing to

an intermediation of one through the other. Translating applicants' experiences, asylum lawyers, even while navigating the epistemic violence of the asylum system, inhabit liminal positionalities, spaces and times through their collective work with applicants. This article therefore explores how the urgency of the here-and-now within the normative structure of asylum transforms the present into a fragmented, unfinished, imperfect and opaque queer future, and a poetic and utopian, collective not-yet-here in the here-and-now that refuses to be postponed.

Methodological note

Drawing on feminism and queerness as political, low, affective theories, and on affect as a critical and embodied decolonial epistemology, in this article I seek to call into question presumptions of objectivity on which the legal process of asylum is premised, often reproduced in depoliticised, positivistic academic apparatuses. On the contrary, I approach knowledge from below, as an openness to the unregistered and a situated modality of (un)learning amidst emotions. Despite the difficulty of theorising queerness and affect, since queerness can never be fully captured and remains open to a continuing critique of what it excludes,¹² and emotions, as collective, shared experiences, are constantly circulating and transforming,¹³ I view theory as deeply personal and political. Challenging the idea of theory as stable, static, rational and detached, produced only in white-centered academic institutions, I understand it as an everyday embodied practice that emerges in the gaps, the silences, and the discontinuities of what remains unregistered by the dominant narratives on migration and asylum. Thus, recognising that the asylum context in Greece is quite specific and particular and without claiming any generalisation, homogeneity, or universality, in this article I attempt to theorise queerness and affect, as portrayed in my interlocutors accounts, from below, as a situated knowledge of the ephemeral, the partial, and the incomplete. For this reason, I do not look for an objective representation of the asylum system and a verifiable truth but I rather explore the unverifiable

potential of queer affect focusing on paradoxes, ironies, uncertainties, surprises, and the queerness of translation within and beyond legal structures.

To explore the interweaving of queerness and affect in the asylum apparatus, I conducted 16 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with asylum lawyers, which took place from July 2023 to June 2024. Having worked in the field as an asylum lawyer myself, this essay is driven by my personal experience that prompted me to write on the epistemic violence of this process and explore the transformative potential of its ruptures and discontinuities. Therefore, although this study is not an ethnography, it is intermediated and informed by my previous experience in the field. During my encounters with my interlocutors, with whom I have worked on the same premises, waited outside the same asylum offices, and experienced the same frustrations in refugee camps and detention centers, I could sense the atmosphere they were describing. Very often my affective responses became analytical tools to unfold my interlocutors' accounts. Thus, in my effort to explore the affective biopolitics of translation, my analytical lens is oriented on these affective tensions in our encounters, approaching the interview as a queer space and a means of addressing the complexity and messiness in the field without trying to reduce or stabilise it.

The method of analysis that I used in this research was thematic analysis. However, I approached thematic analysis not as a way of taxonomizing accounts into predetermined categories. On the contrary, through a feminist, counter-archival approach, my focus was on what is absent from the colonial archive of asylum under which queerness is measured as a proximity to whiteness, homonormativity, outness and pride. During the repetitive reading of the empirical material my focus was on the unrepresentability, aporia, and the unsaid in my interlocutors' accounts. Approaching both the asylum process and this study as archives of the ephemera instead of static and rigid structures, I deployed thematic analysis as a method of troubling the abstraction of systemic analysis and as an assemblage of discourse and affect. An

assemblage not in the sense of assembling words and feelings into a tidy narrative, but rather as an attempt to disassemble the dominant narratives of the process and focus on the marginal, the fleeting and the unfamiliar.

Emotional stories, fragmented identities

My 16 interlocutors (whose names have been pseudonymised) were all Greek lawyers aged between thirty and forty-eight. Nine of them held master's degrees. Their experience in refugee law ranged from five to eight years, with three of them specialising in queer asylum law. Having worked as a lawyer in the field for over six years, I connected with my interlocutors through my existing network and the snowball technique. All of them worked with Greek and international NGOs and did not represent asylum claimants in a private capacity. Three were based on Greece's hotspot islands, while five of them had previously worked at the Greek borders.

Approaching identity through a disidentitarian analytical lens, during the interviews my intention was neither to directly ask my interlocutors about "their" queerness nor to disclose "my" own queer positionality. While self-identification, self-disclosure, and coming out are often regarded as the only valid modalities of queerness within neoliberal, identitarian frameworks of gender and sexuality,¹⁴ I sought to resist reproducing the dominant "out and proud" narrative, trying to complicate the tidy categorisation of identities. Nevertheless, during our discussions, the topic of asylum lawyers' own queerness often came up and three of my interlocutors (Foteini, Anna and Matina) self-identified as queer. They expressed a notably heightened interest in the subject, frequently reflecting that even they might struggle to meet authorities' expectations and "pass the credibility test."

Another recurring theme in our conversations was their feelings of fatigue, exhaustion, and burnout, highlighting the added pressure from the strict deadlines especially imposed by

border procedures. These feelings were familiar to me, echoing my own experiences as a lawyer working on the Greek hotspot islands. Many of my interlocutors expressed frustration, and sometimes even numbness, from operating within a violent system, where they had seen numerous cases unfairly denied. As Aliko poignantly expressed,

It feels like hitting a wall, and after hitting it so many times, you're bleeding and need to recover to keep going. I mean, sometimes I hear the stories with a lot of detachment. The other day, I called the detention centre to ask for the phone number of the medical unit because a gay client of mine had attempted suicide and was taken to the hospital. I asked the responsible employee for the number, and she replied, "What do you need it for?" I explained that one of my clients had attempted suicide, and she said, "Oh well, everyone here has tried to kill themselves. Do you know how many people here have attempted suicide?" I mean, who even says something like that? But unfortunately, you develop this cynicism.

On some occasions, my interlocutors also described how they experience the system's violence themselves. Several commented on the precariousness of their work, often being employed through short-term programs and frequently shifting locations. Others noted instances of humiliation particularly from second-instance administrative judges. As Matina shared,

Nowadays, the role of the lawyer has become almost derogatory. In the committees, they often don't even read the case file. Instead, we end up discussing things like why applicants don't go to other countries, and what we're supposed to do with all these migrants. So, tell me, where's the line? Should I file a complaint? But then, how will they treat me in the committees? Which of my cases will be granted asylum? Just recently, I had a case of a trans woman from Colombia, and the judge told me, "Since she speaks Spanish, why doesn't she go to Spain?" Just think about how confident they

feel in their position of power to speak like that to the lawyer representing an asylum seeker.

Our conversations, as the one with Matina and Alik, were frequently emotionally intense, with lawyers sharing feelings of loneliness, despair, and abandonment, exposing their vulnerability in ways that deepened our connection. As Anna told me at the end of our discussion, “Our conversation is a great joy because I’ve been alone here for so many years, with no one to discuss these things with. Now that I’ve talked about them, I feel like they exist.”

Overall, my interlocutors showed strong support and solidarity with asylum seekers. However, there were moments of scepticism, where they judged applicants’ trustworthiness. Instead of adopting a clear, fixed, and coherent position, my interlocutors were navigating a space between compliance and resistance within a structure they both critique and uphold, with some also reflecting on how their perspectives had changed and evolved over the years. Reflecting on this ambiguity in their narratives and our communication, my intention in this essay is not portray asylum lawyers as unified, decisive, autonomous subjects. On the contrary deploying affect as a liminal analytical tool, I explore how this affective (un)learning resists comfortably occupying the fixed and well-structured identity reproduced in the asylum system.

Affective objectivities

According to the legal requirements of the asylum process, its core aim is an objective and impartial assessment of the claim’s credibility, in which decision-makers’ subjectivity, as trained, knowledgeable experts, should be kept to a minimum.¹⁵ Contrary to legal analyses that frame credibility assessment as a two-fold exercise, dividing the subjective element, shaped by the caseworker’s personal and culturally formed biases, from the objective element, defined as an impartial evaluation based on universal standards, according to my interlocutors,

credibility assessment constitute, in fact, a site where the subjective and the objective intersect and mediate one another.

Recent scholarship on migration and asylum, drawing on feminist and queer epistemologies, which challenge presumptions of objectivity in legal apparatuses as the reification of white-centred, logocentric, masculinist logic and the normalisation of invisible gendered, racialised, and classed privileges,¹⁶ has already explored its discursive and affective production.¹⁷ In that vein, my interlocutors further elaborated on the affective biopolitics of credibility. As some of them pointed out, despite the guidelines' insistence on an objective and impartial assessment, the credibility of a claim is not fixed and measurable but shifts and can take various forms depending on the predisposition of the decision-maker. As Maria explained, "Credibility is like Russian roulette. The caseworker's disposition play a huge role. There have been cases where the circumstances were almost identical but with two different caseworkers, the decisions were completely different."

However, this not always predictable predisposition does not depend solely on caseworkers' individual subjectivity. Although the asylum system is premised on the idea of an impartial, individualised assessment of the applicant's credibility by the caseworker who need to limit their personal biases, some of my interlocutors challenged both the process's monolithic subjectivism and objectivism. On the contrary, they highlighted how objectivity, through its affective production, constitutes a space where the personal and the political meet.¹⁸ As they argued, through its legality and lawfulness, a rather public politics of disbelief, instead of individual biases, is turned into a personal struggle, both for the applicant to be believed, and the caseworker to conduct an individualised, impartial assessment. In this way, as they emphasised, racist and antimigratory national and European politics, as reflected in laws and policies, are reduced to an objective lack of individual applicant's credibility. Under the far-right turn in EU migration politics, objectivity is intermediated through (homo)national

feelings of suspicion toward “bogus migrants”, which play a crucial role in securing Europe’s borders. Lisa, in her account, highlighted objectivity as an exclusionary process of disposability and deportability, arguing that “all of the antimigration policy, racist sentiment and the political will to reject asylum cases is channelled into the credibility assessment, as the caseworker can provide as a valid reason of rejection that they just didn’t believe the applicant.”

As my interlocutors argue, the current exclusionary and restrictive EU asylum policies and the general turn to “state of emergency” discourses shape significantly the way caseworkers assess applicants’ credibility. According to Maria’s critique, the actual “truth” has little to do with the possibility of recognition of an account as credible. As she put it,

Many times, biases come from the caseworkers themselves, but often it’s also driven by specific policies, like a quota on how many positive decisions should be issued proportionally per month. Based on this, caseworkers try to justify what doesn’t stand on its own and will latch onto anything, even the smallest detail, to build an entire rationale for “untrustworthiness” on something trivial.

Under the pretext of impartiality, exclusionary feelings of objectivity, through the current (not-so) emotionless laws and policies securing fortress Europe, as Matina describes below, performatively shape the decision-makers’ credibility criteria. As she argued, the new stricter framework, under the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, cultivates an atmosphere of disbelief toward applicants,

What should be said is that the processes align with the anti-migration policy promoted by the government and the EU, also through the New Pact. This policy trickles down to the caseworkers, and their ease in rejecting claims as non-credible is completely tied to both European and national policies regarding refugees and non-white LGBTIQ+ individuals.

In this process, emotions operate as sticky¹⁹ and metastatic mechanisms through which homonational sentiments are transmitted. Credibility is thus sensed and objectivity is felt by caseworkers legitimising hostile anti-migratory policies. According to my interlocutors, caseworkers' affective assessments function as a space for the circulation of national, racialised feelings of objectivity normalising border-violence and exclusion through the rejection of asylum claims as non-credible. In light of the fear of the massive intrusion of "bogus migrants" and potential abuse of the asylum system, rationalism and reasoning, in their affective production, are imbued with the nationalist politics of necessity and urgency in which, racism, is not only a derivative of biopower but a prerequisite for how it operates.²⁰

In this way, as my interlocutors account portray, caseworkers apply credibility rules neither in a linear, predictable fashion with predetermined outcomes nor conduct a wholly subjective, individual and autonomous assessment. Rather, credibility assessments become a contested site where the personal and the political intersect, revealing the complex entanglements of power, identity, and resistance. In that regard, caseworkers' affective objectivities of credible queerness are neither subjective, produced in a decontextualised vacuum, nor produced linearly and one-dimensionally through migration laws and policies. Instead, the production of objectivity, through the circulation of exclusionary, racialised feelings, precede their assessments and is impressed upon them in a performative process, never fully predictable. Through this impression, an affective register is opened which is neither unconditionally subjective nor is it simply formed by asylum policies, but its rather a space where the personal is affectively intermediated through the political and vice-versa producing an affective common sense of "objectively" credible queerness.

Exploring this affective apparatus of credibility, one of the central questions that arose during my discussions with my interlocutors was how queerness should be experienced and performed by applicants to be sensed as genuine by caseworkers. As highlighted in the relevant

literature,²¹ and argued by my interlocutors, following the “affective turn” in queer asylum, applicants are expected to reproduce in their accounts an affective trajectory from oppression to liberation. To align with caseworkers’ expectations, applicants must emphasise the emotional harshness of discovering their sexual identity in their purportedly oppressive and backward countries of origin, juxtaposed with feelings of freedom, happiness, and pride in Greece. As Areti noted, “I always encourage applicants, ‘Whenever you get the chance, make sure to comment on how what you’re describing makes you feel. Always remember to talk about your fear, your anxiety, your trouble and distress in your country’”.

However, according to caseworkers’ affective objectivity, queerness outside the “European queer heaven” must not only be accompanied by tough realisation, suffering, and trauma but also be identifiable in space and time, expressed in a rational, reasonable, and well-organised, yet still moving and emotional, account. As my interlocutors emphasised, applicants’ feelings should correspond to a linear trajectory and be expressed in a coherent and well-ordered narrative. They pointed out that a suffered and emotional yet simultaneously convincing, clear, and uncontradicted account is what decision-makers expect to hear, as opposed to a messy, confused, indecisive, or fragmented one. In this way, not only are objectivity and truth produced affectively, but emotions are simultaneously shaped through reason and logic, in a process where discourse and affect meet, blur, and pass through one another. As Foteini put it,

Applicants have to provide this linear narrative in a way that satisfies the caseworker. Their story needs to be coherent, and they are expected to pinpoint exactly when they realised they were attracted to the same sex. Every time I hear that, I want to ask the interviewer, “So when did you realise you were straight?” I mean, tell me, pinpoint the exact moment. If you asked me, as a lesbian, I couldn’t give you the exact incident that handed me my “lesbian card.”

As Foteini, drawing from her personal experience as a lesbian woman, critiques, authorities' expectations of a timely, straightforward coming-out impose a specific narrative of self-realisation and awareness, as a necessary element of genuine queerness which applicants are expected to narrate. However, as she points out, queerness and the queering of communication between the lawyer and the applicant, interrupts this straight homonormative spatiotemporal linearity reproduced within the asylum apparatus.

Therefore, while authorities expect a linear, emotional description of queerness's realisation, accompanied by trauma, this straight, well-ordered narrative, as my interlocutors argued, simply, does not exist. "Life," as Nikos said, "is never experienced linearly," especially considering the embodied, emotional, and fragmented dimensions of queerness and migration. Although the process leaves no room for complex and nuanced experiences, queer migration, as my interlocutors argue, can be a controversial, ambiguous, and paradoxical affective reality, in the sense that it can be simultaneously traumatic and joyful. As Matina described, emphasising the liminality of queerness, "A person isn't just their sexual identity, nor just their trauma, they're everything together. Many people say, 'They're either resilient or they're traumatised.' No, they are both at the same time." According to Matina, applicants' experiences transcend the dichotomy of the melancholic, victimised migrant and the assimilable, happy queer refugee and remain livable and powerful, even when shaped by trauma and vulnerability, embracing contradiction as a possibility. As Lisa also highlighted,

You have in front of you a person who has suffered losses, like for example the rejection from their parents, whom they haven't stopped loving, though. And yet, in order to render their story sound credible, you're forced to plant something else on them, something that didn't happen. It's not as simple as either hating your father or loving him, both can happen at the same time.

As Matina and Lisa pointed out, within the homonational sentimentality of credibility, applicants' messy and complex trajectories are expected to be expressed in a linear and coherent manner to meet authorities' expectations. Emotions, through their epistemically violent categorisation into more or less authentic, are stripped of their indeterminacy and potentiality. In this way, as depicted in my interlocutors' accounts, emotions function as rigid normative biopolitical structures, wielding the power to determine which lives are deemed grievable and livable as genuine, and which are deemed deportable and disposable as bogus, while regulating how credible and trustworthy queerness should be felt and experienced. However, despite the rigidity of the process, emotions, as circulations and economies of feelings, as I will try to show in the following sections, are never static or unaffected, but contingent, interdependent, and in constant transformation. In contrast to the universalising, and yet simultaneously homonational, essentialism of the asylum process, emotions shift as applicants move, cross boundaries, and find themselves subject to different kinds of structures, such as the asylum system.

Translating affect

According to the affective politics of credibility, applicants are seen not only as untrustworthy but also as incapable of narrating their own "truth" without the assistance of an expert. To that end, asylum lawyers are tasked with mediating and assisting applicants organise their messy stories into a logical order, enabling them to narrate their feelings and experiences in the tidy and coherent way expected by the authorities. In their work with applicants, when preparing for an asylum interview, lawyers, seeking to meet the requirements of the process, aim to transform how applicants present and narrate their experiences, making them legible and recognisable to the authorities. As Christos put it,

The interview in LGBTIQ asylum applications is like a language proficiency certificate; the issue is not knowing the language but knowing how to pass the exam. We've had

people who told the whole truth and were rejected, and people who exaggerated and they were granted asylum. What I do is help the applicants understand what they need to say, how they need to translate their experiences and feelings so that the caseworkers can understand them.

As Christos described, while preparing for the interview with applicants, lawyers seek to “translate” their emotions into something that can be named, defined, identified, and categorised by the caseworkers. According to the logocentric requirements of the process, translating and categorising emotions is expected to produce a linear narrative of fixed, stable feelings, in order for a claim to be recognised as credible. In this sense, the preparation for the interview becomes a “translation process,” where applicants’ messy, dynamic, and ambiguous affective experiences must be taxonomised and transformed into a coherent and reasoned account.

As Foteini argued, emphasising the affective biopolitics of credibility as a process of subject formation and reality construction, emotions must not only be narrated in a linear fashion, but also experienced as such. In this productive process, lawyers, even if they disagree with, inevitably play an active role.

Our role isn’t just to support people; it’s also to mediate and interpret what’s happening. This process has a huge impact on individuals because imagine trying to present an identity that you haven’t fully formed. As part of this system, what we end up doing is training people and helping them live through this experience. Instead of asking how the process can adapt to fit the person, we focus on how the person can adapt to fit the process.

According to Foteini, the role of lawyers is to train applicants on how they should experience their queerness in order to be recognised as credible by the authorities. As she

argues, this process is not just legal training, but it also performatively shapes applicants' feelings as part of their queer identity. Through the act of translating applicants' emotions, credibility becomes oriented and assessed in relation to a neoliberal model of affective sexual citizenship regulated by homonormativity, individual freedom, and success, which applicants inhabit through their assimilation into the asylum system.²²

However, according to my interlocutors, translation, as a performative process, does not always strictly reproduce and adhere to the rules of the system. As Lisa shared,

I try not to take on the role of the caseworker and get into an investigative process of evaluating claims, so what I do is simply provide information. At the same time, however, I have to prepare the applicant for what's to come and what they should say. This creates a conflict between the goal of being effective and not reproducing the violence of the process.

As I discussed with Lisa, translation for the purposes of asylum can be a liminal space of compliance and resistance, affirmation and negation and a blurring of these limits. Even within the normative limits and the epistemic violence of asylum, translation can take unpredictable directions and disrupt the colonality of system which cannot always keep control over what it imposes.²³ Translating affect, according to my interlocutors, is not always a predefined trajectory between two fixed, identifiable, stable realities -the lived and the narrated- and does not always result in the construction of a coherent, logical, and linear account. On the contrary, during their encounters with asylum seekers, this well-ordered, calculable equation often ruptures and collapse. As my interlocutors' accounts portray, translating affect often becomes an unforeseeable and relational queer space and time of (dis)order, where boundaries, borders, and linear temporalities are transgressed. Instead of a training on how to possess feelings and identities, it becomes a (dis)orderly affective space of coexistence and dispossession, a space where the limits between the original and the translated,

the signified and the signifier, the symbolised and the symbolising, the genuine and the bogus are blurred and disoriented.²⁴ As Foteini aptly put it,

Many of the questions posed to asylum seekers don't have clear answers or solutions. Often, we're searching for answers, trying to find a solution. We, as lawyers, often feel like our job is to transform applicant's story in a way that will get them asylum. But in doing so, we lose sight of something crucial: that sometimes there isn't a clear, measurable account and answer to give. That leaves you in a kind of limbo, staring into a void with nothing to fill it, and that can be unbearable. The queer experience is like this, like a chasm; you can't always fill it in. It's not something that always makes sense, and often it just doesn't. We're afraid when that happens, and we always try to cover it with a story. But sometimes what we need to do is recognise that this impossibility is just there. That we just don't know, we don't have the solution, we don't have the answer. Let's figure it out together and build something together. I don't know how much this can influence the asylum process, but it definitely impacts how we coexist and communicate with each other as equals, without getting stuck in this transactional mindset of giving and taking back.

According to Foteini, translation as a process of translating the (un)translatable and trusting the (in)credible does not always take place between two concrete, tangible and measurable realities but it can be an affective encounter of an unfinished togetherness between the claimant and the lawyer. Translating something into something else, even within the boundaries of the asylum process, as a shared, affective, and embodied encounter, can constitute an open possibility, something impossible to know and predefine and an invitation into a space of uncertainty and coexistence. At odds with the politics of predictability, certainty, individuality and efficiency, translation, as Foteini argues, can be a surprise, a dwelling in liminality, an openness to the unknown and an unproductive collective moment of queer failure.

Instead of a process of stabilising and taxonomizing applicants' experiences and emotions to render them legible and recognisable, translation could be a space of (dis)order, a destabilisation, disturbance and defiance of asylum system's hierarchies, taxonomies, and preconceptions. Rather than reproducing a "transactional mindset" and an instrumentalist normalisation of individualised, privatised, neoliberalised sexual rights, translation as a queer potentiality can become, as Foteini put it, a relational and collective modality of coexisting in uncomfortableness, and a condition of possibility for imagining a different world (dis)order. Thus, as a mode of getting familiar with the unfamiliar, even within the violent normativity of asylum, translation constitutes, in Foteini's words, a question with no answer and a problem without a solution. In this way, translation for the purposes of asylum becomes, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has poetically put it, both "necessary and impossible", a liminal positionality and a persistent epistemological preparation for translating the untranslatable, not something that one cannot translate, but something we collectively never stop (not) translating.

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From this perspective, translation can be understood as an invitation into a politics of transitivity: An attempt to challenge the idea of a linear and straight passage between two fixed realities that dominates asylum process and a refusal to situate it in relation to a destination, a final form, and established configuration of a credible queer identity.²⁶ On the contrary, translation can become an invitation to undo the idea of a bounded, genuine identity, and a way to imagine queerness as a space for uncertainty, experimentation, contradiction, and surprise. As Foteini argued, translation can be a disorientation and a decentering, a process of being undone, disposed by the other and by what we know and expect,²⁷ what she describes as a "queer chasm"; a refusal to deliver certainty and validate the idea of genuine queerness, through solidarity and collectiveness; a decolonial positionality of instability, impurity, indeterminacy and contingency that defies asylum process's claim for authenticity, binarity and categorisation.

This dwelling in liminality, as Foteini put it, is not a comfortable place to inhabit and settle ourselves in, but a constant dismantling, a disturbance, a destabilising, and a continuous renegotiation which can never be determined and fixed.

My focus in the next sessions will be on this controversial and paradoxical character of translation as a simultaneous process of compliance with asylum system's affective normativity, put it otherwise a process of straightening queerness, but also an enabling affective practice of transgression, transformation and queer relationality.

Straightening queerness

During my encounters with my interlocutors, many of them described how, in their endeavor to translate applicants' experiences so they are readable by the authorities, they often reproduce the process's rigid taxonomies, inhabiting the role of the investigator. As Natasa shared, one of her main goals in her meetings with applicants is to determine whether the applicant is truly queer and actually telling the truth, or if their expressions of emotions are fraudulent, pretentious, and instrumental in their effort to take advantage of the asylum system. As she said,

What the interviewer will wonder during the interview, I will have already wondered it many times before. Sometimes applicants come to us with a ready-made story, telling us, "I left my country because I am gay, for it's forbidden in Islam." But then, you start reading through it and put them through multiple filters because you know there's abuse of the system. Just because someone tells a story, looks down and cries, doesn't mean they're telling the truth.

As comes from Natasa's account, in order to assist an asylum claim, lawyers need first to be persuaded that the applicant is trustworthy. This trustworthiness, similarly to caseworkers' objectivity, is affectively mediated. However, in this affective orientation toward "genuine

queerness,” emotional intensity itself, as Natasa said, is not enough.²⁸ In order to be believed as credibly queer, applicants need to be oriented toward certain emotions that conform to the idea of the sexual citizen lawyers have in mind. Furthermore, as Anastasia highlighted, lawyers do not only assess credibility affectively, through a common *sense* of how queerness should be experienced and expressed, but also effective legal assistance itself is an affective task. As she put it,

How you feel about the applicant and the case greatly impacts how you handle it. Even though I’m typically doing the same work everywhere, I notice that my feelings affect how I write. For one case, I might write more personally because I’m deeply involved, while for another, I might write accurately, but more generally because I am detached. There’s no way to do this work without emotion. Now, what you feel for, that’s a big political discussion. Justice is emotional, and these cases are a perfect example.

During our conversation, Anastasia focused on the sentimentality and affectivity of legal representation. According to Anastasia, to feel and recognise something as credible, one must be sensitised in this way. This sensitisation and orientation toward certain feelings, as Anastasia points out, is not a neutral, ahistorical development of apolitical emotional bonds that occurs in a vacuum, but rather a political economy of feelings. In her account, Anastasia rejects the idea of emotions as fixed essentialist ontologies and instead approaches them as political circulations of feelings that form an affective ordinary of genuine queerness, not only for caseworkers but also for lawyers.

Within this political economy, feelings that trouble the affective ordinariness of queerness as an immutable, stable and static sexual identity which gives access to rights cannot be easily recognised as credible.²⁹ In our conversations, my interlocutors emphasised the requirement of a fixed, binary identity, particularly in gender identity asylum cases. As Foteini rhetorically wondered during our discussion,

How can someone be trans if they don't want surgery? How can someone be a woman with a penis? I've had clients who went to their interview and said, "I'm planning to get the surgery," even though they had no such intention. And that's what we train them to say, because that's the only way you can be trans. There's a huge difficulty in understanding anything outside the binary. You're either a man or a woman.

Foteini in her account emphasised binarism and normative expressions of gender as the measure of applicants' credibility which resonated with the understanding of many asylum lawyers. However, in the neoliberal asylum system, common sense about queerness is not stable and immutable, but, through its affective definition, can be adaptable and resilient to developments, while still maintaining its exclusionary character. On the contrary to what Foteini in her account emphasised as the reproduction of rigid identities, a narrative which is still prevalent within authorities' expectations, exclusionary asylum politics can be resilient and adjustable enough, to include and normalise emerging queer identities, while simultaneously reproducing exclusions and the normative violence of taxonomy. As some of my interlocutors argue, although authorities strictly insist on the categorisability of queer identities according to homo/transnormativity, these identities can be proliferated beyond binarism, maintaining though the normative logic of a coherent identity on which the asylum system is premised. In this epistemically violent adaptation, asylum lawyers, even when they critique it, they unavoidably participate. As Christos put it,

For most trans people, it's obvious they're trans, so it's easier. However, I had a client, who self-identified as a trans woman, to whom I said, "Look, maybe it's better to say you're gender-fluid because the officer might be an asshole, and if you don't look like a woman, they won't believe you're a trans woman." In our meeting I told her, "I understand and respect what you're saying, but for the asylum process, you need to say it this way. Express how you feel, but with different words. For example, say that, when

I'm in a relationship, I like to take on the female role. I like feminine gestures, but I don't wear women's clothes. Say how you feel, but in a slightly different way, as we've discussed it here. And if they ask about gender, say, my ID says male, but I feel gender-fluid -neither male nor female."

In his account Christos described an epistemically violent appropriation of the emerging, less static and rigid identities by the dominant model of a binary, fixed, trans identity.³⁰ As he described, the emergent gender-fluid or non-binary identities are incorporated institutionally as credible identities, as a sign of the adaptability, transformability, and progressiveness of a flexible asylum system, without challenging, though, its exclusionary logic, but merely through the proliferation and further assimilation of identities. As Eirini also pointed out, highlighting simultaneously the colonial logic of proliferated queer identities' assimilation,

I handled a case of a young applicant from Pakistan who, during their interview, said they were non-binary and got asylum. Beyond appearance, the fact that they were fully integrated and westernized also played a role. Despite being young, they explained to the officer, "This is my identity," and placed a lot of emphasis on being westernized. They said, "I have purple hair, tattoos, painted nails, and I can't return to Pakistan like this."

Through the incorporation and normalisation of well-defined and identifiable gender-fluid/non-binary gender expressions as additional individual identities, as Christos and Eirini described above, the asylum system, while reproducing its colonality, assimilates bodies that were previously rejected. These bodies become trophies and symbols of the new liberal boundaries of neoliberal sexual and gendered identity.³¹ Bodies that were previously illegible due to their fluidity and spectrality are progressively incorporated into a taxonomised, marketable, privatised, and narratable identity framework. However, this acceptance is limited

to forms of embodiment that can be easily aligned with the assimilationist sexual politics of ableness, outness, categorisability and productivity while those who challenge them remain illegible, unrecognisable, and excluded as non-credible. Consequently, applicants who can inhabit the identity of the “good” non-binary citizen, who is oriented toward the triangle of whiteness, happiness, and pride -a new identity that doesn’t trouble but instead divides, proliferates, and reproduces identities- can be recognised as credible and genuinely queer by authorities.

However, in a process that aims to translate queerness into privatised, individualised feelings, progressive sexual rights, masculinist visibility politics, and Eurocentric sexual citizenship discourses, the emergent is not always (un)translatable. On the contrary, this shift of the emergent into something representable apart from a restriction of possibilities, it also entails a call to challenge what is named, defined, and represented, by troubling and disordering its limits.³² In this sense, translation, beyond the representable, apart from an affirmation of asylum system’s assimilationist, progressive politics, constitutes also an openness to new possibilities within and beyond the limits of the normative structure of asylum. In the final part of this article, I will turn to queerness in translation, as it emerged in my interlocutors’ accounts, as a liminal and relational positionality that unsettles the fixed categories of neoliberal sexual politics. Rather than centring a static or recognisable queer identity, I will focus on what remains uncategorisable in queerness, beyond the bounds of the self, the identity, or the state, as a collective, nonlinear, and unfinished circulation of feelings, and as a poetic, utopian, yet imperfect and opaque, horizon. In doing so, I will explore what the (im)possibility of translation opens up, attempting a decolonial, reparative reading of translation in asylum as an embodied liminality and (dis)order.

Feeling queer in translation

According to my interlocutors, the process of preparing the interview collaboratively with applicants and translating their emotions to align with authorities' expectations of credible queerness is a constant struggle between affirming and negating the legal recognition of a normatively violent structure. Translating affect and complying with authorities normative expectations does not only reproduce onto-epistemic violence and constitutes a closure and a restriction of possibilities but simultaneously becomes the necessary term for transforming normativity.³³ It does not only entail a call for affirmation of asylum system's epistemic violence but also a call for its transgression, while transgression simultaneously entails an acknowledgement of normative given realities and their excess. During our encounters, my interlocutors observed that these seemingly contradictory positionalities -compliance with and resistance to the normativity of asylum- are not distinct or separate individual decisions, as if lawyers could consciously switch from one to the other. On the contrary, they are intertwined, with one mediating the other, blurring the boundaries between active resistance and passive compliance, as what lies beyond their rational control.³⁴ In our discussion, Anastasia emphasised this paradoxical dimension of the legal recognition of asylum as (un)justice. As she put it,

I feel that in some cases, the rejection isn't just an administrative decision from an unfair system, but is a deeper failure. I feel like I didn't manage to get the applicant the justice they deserve. So, the decision becomes a form of justice. And, of course this, I mean to fight for recognition from a system that you're rejecting as unjust, it's incredibly difficult as an everyday practice.

Anastasia, in her account, highlighted the paradox of simultaneously conforming to and rejecting the violence of legal recognition. This liminality of defending the asylum system through rejecting it and rejecting it through defending it, is not a conscious, reasoned, individual decision made in linear space and time, but rather a blurred temporality. Lisa, in her

description, highlighted this blurring of passiveness and activeness by emphasising that non-compliance with the system's requirements and resistance to its epistemic violence is not a heroic act of opposition. Instead, it constitutes an exposure to the process's material violence of disposability and deportability of migrants' bodies, as it may lead to the rejection of an asylum claim. As she said,

I have a case in mind where there was no doubt that the applicant is gay. However, he was rejected as non-credible, because he had a sort of refusal to comply with the process. During the interview, the officer was asking him questions, and he was responding sarcastically or giving random answers. But when we were stepping outside, he was only scrolling through Grindr.

In Lisa's account, irony, sarcasm, and the devaluation of the process by the applicant turn the interview into a space where translation is not always under the control of the lawyer as the active individual successfully translating but can take unpredictable directions towards queer failure. This liminality, not always consciously, can constitute a space that transcends the asylum system's normativity and exceeds the limits of legal recognition. Anastasia, in her account, similarly focused on queerness as surprise and what lies beyond legal recognition. As she pointed out,

Going back to what we were discussing about resistance, I had a case with a trans woman from Algeria who had been rejected as a gay man, and we worked together on her subsequent application. This was back when filing subsequent applications was almost impossible and could take months, even a year. So, she comes to the interview appointment and says to me, "Tell me, darling, this won't take long, right?" I said, "What do you mean? This process will take hours". She tells me, "Oh, I can't. I have something else to do, I need to leave." And she just left.

As Anastasia continues, at the time, she was disappointed by the applicant's attitude and could not understand how she could miss the interview after all the preparation they had done together. However, as Anastasia shared, over time, she came to realise that her client had been rejected by the system so many times and had been living undocumented in Greece for years, that she had found her own way outside the system, no longer waiting for its affirmation.

Queer irony, sarcasm, and devaluation were attitudes that many of my interlocutors highlighted. As they emphasised, translation, as a process of compliance through resistance, even when aligned with the asylum process's normative affective expectations, is not always a passive and agency-less act of obedience. On the contrary, it can create a queer space for the collective subversion of the asylum system's hierarchies. As Anna described, translation is not a linear, straightforward transfer of applicants' affective realities into a language that is comprehensible and legible to authorities. Instead, translation, as an affective, ambiguous, and relational space can exceed the limits of this linearity. According to Anna, translation, as an act of resistance through compliance, is a collective experience which, under the violence of the process, and without completely rejecting the necessity of legal recognition, can be a space of transgression of the legal normativity and an instant redistribution of power. As she put it,

During the preparation, you're forced to make the applicant speak in a way that the caseworker will understand. You don't let their experience stay intact -you translate it, meaning that the caseworker might not understand it otherwise, so you need to explain it in a certain way. As the system is not designed to understand applicants, I try to make the applicants understand the caseworkers. In a system that treats applicants as if they're stupid, we end up translating their experiences in a way that fits into the boxes of the caseworkers -whom, in this case, we treat as if they're the stupid ones.

As Anna described, through queer irony, solidarity, and collectiveness, queerness is translated in authorities' straight, rational expectations in a feminist act of resistance through

compliance. Respectively, Foteini emphasised translation as a queer process of being in coalition. As she put it, translation as a transformative process and as a way of sharing space cannot be predicted and predetermined:

And this is where the question comes: What are we fighting for? Because we're all in the same boat. Both the caseworker and I are oppressed by the same system, and we're resisting the same system. Can we find common ground? This requires a lot of effort because we're dealing with a system that promotes the exact opposite. In a system that fosters division, you have to say, I'm not just fighting for myself and my children, but for everyone -no separate measures, no special benefits for refugees, everything for everyone- for refugees, migrants, Roma, people with disabilities, everyone. That's the challenge in all the relationships we form, because everything is about relationships - creating common spaces where we can coexist, interact, and engage with each other. Spaces where both of us know, both of us don't know, and both of us don't even know that we don't know.

Foteini, in her reflection on what constitutes resistance to a normative structure that we do not have the luxury to dismiss, instead of focusing on how applicants can be trained to translate their queerness more credibly, is rather interested in translation as an urgent claim for a space of coexistence, collectiveness, and solidarity. As she argues, a way to resist the normative violence of the asylum process is to recognise that it does not affect only the applicants toward whom it is directed, but it can affect everyone. Only through a (queer) coalition that understands oppression for some as oppression for everyone can we demand political change. According to Foteini, translation is always plural and can never be singular, a collective "we" instead of the individualistic "I" that the process promotes. This way, translation, as Foteini argues, constitutes an embodied endeavor for the transformation of the current order of things and a liminal, uncertain space and time of (dis)order, where power

hierarchies and linear temporalities can be collectively troubled and reversed through a constant process of relational (un)making, (un)doing, and (un)learning.

Through this embodied reversal in Anastasia's Anna's and Foteini's accounts of compliance through resistance and resistance through compliance, queerness, as a liminal positionality is not only situated in the future, what Muñoz defines as the not-yet-here,³⁵ but as an urgent claim that cannot be postponed, it emerges as present. Without implying that the problem has been solved, lawyers' encounters with the applicants suggest an embodied, affective, and collective dwelling within an alternative world (dis)order, one that is available and feasible even within the epistemically violent apparatus of asylum. In this sense, lawyers' accounts include instances where the present meets the queer future not only as a rupture but as an ephemeral act which always returning to the body, haunts the future, ensuring it can never remain the same. For, as Muñoz argues, ephemera remain.³⁶ They are simultaneously absent and present, disrupting a predictable metaphysics of presence in a space where pretence and genuineness, authenticity and bogusness, do (not) matter because they are blurred in what is written over the body.

Conclusions

This article discussed the affective queering that can be motivated in the space of translation in the legal process of asylum through lawyers' accounts in the Greek asylum apparatus. At odds with the process's rationalisation of feelings, I approached queerness not as a fixed identity but as an affective liminality which emerges in the disorderly intimate space of translation, not wedded to the rigid dialectic of compliance or resistance to a normative structure. As something that moves us away from fixed terms such as present and future and reorients us around non-linear, non-straight, and non-metric time, what I sought to discuss in this article was this fragmented, messy, and relational character of queerness that my

interlocutors describe, as a liminal positionally, and its potential to disturb and disrupt the reproduction of the epistemic violence in the asylum apparatus.

By deploying translation as an analogy to describe legal preparation for the asylum interview through which applicants' experiences and feelings are rendered legible to the authorities, my focus was on the blurring of genuineness and bogusness and the paradoxical interweaving of the original and the translated. Although according to the affective rules of the process, translation is expected to result into a linear, homogenising and predictable transfer of applicants' feelings into intelligible discourse, through lawyers' accounts, I explored how, translation, under certain circumstances, arises as a disorderly intimate space which exceeds the limits and reverse hierarchies. As my interlocutors' accounts portrayed, during their collective work with applicants, lawyers do not only reproduce the normative violence of asylum, but, through various acts of compliance through resistance and resistance through compliance, they also create critical counter-stories and counter-archives of feelings that challenge and destabilise the regime of affective sexual truth. This way, translation for the purposes of asylum as a liminal, queer, political act and art of translating the (un)translatable and believing the (un)believable, becomes a disorderly affective space where (in)credible queer stories can be told and (possibly) become audible.

And so, what I tried to show was that translation, although never immune to the epistemic violence of the process from which it emerges, it does not automatically reproduce it, and its directions cannot always be predicted. As I argued, through my interlocutors' accounts, asylum does not only constitute a space of dispossession but can also be a modality of being dispossessed by the other, within a site of queer agency through an embodied, collective endeavour to exist in the space of liminality, opening up new world (dis)orders.

Aim of this critique, though, was not to fetishise and romanticise disorder solely as a rupture of normativity oriented abstractly toward the future, but to discuss what does this

embodied (dis)order of things (promise to) do in the present, exploring its performativity. Prompted by Muñoz, I approached queerness as a utopian, political, future-oriented horizon,³⁷ looking beyond the pragmatism and the cruelty of the assimilationist sexual politics of the here-and-now reproduced in the asylum process. However, my encounters with my interlocutors worked as a reminder of the present's dialectical relation to the future, and, through disrupting linear temporalities, an invitation to imagine a queer future without dismissing the present. Lawyers' counter-stories of feeling queer in translation constituted, under certain circumstances, counter-archives of queer (in)credibility and embodied paradoxes of non-linear temporalities. Through their accounts of (dis)order, my interlocutors encapsulated the indelible materiality of (un)becoming queer as something ephemeral,³⁸ which is simultaneously fleeting and permanent because it is written and communicated through bodies. An embodied instability of what is seemingly gone but continues to live and circulate among bodies as an ephemeral happening.

In this regard, discussing a queer feminist future in the present, my intention was not to praise the fantasy of disruption as the minoritarian against the majoritarian, especially under the current anti-migratory, harsh asylum politics, but to analyse it as the dissolution of normativity through multiple embodied endeavours of (un)becoming queer. Instead of asking how we could imagine disorders, failures, and dissonances as future worlds, my focus was on what they do as queer futures in the present. To that end, this article, through the affective liminality of negation and affirmation of a normative structure, discussed the surpassing of the binary between ideality and actuality. Approaching translation as a space where the dichotomy between the idealism of utopia and the politics of effectivity and actuality collapse, this article viewed (dis)order not as a fetishisation but as an alternative queer order of things and a queer future in the present and argued for a realist rejection of rejecting the violence of realism and pragmatism through a poetic, utopian, unfinished queer not-yet-here in the here-and-now.

Notes

Warmest thanks to Athena Athanasiou and Anna Lundberg for their thoughtful reading and reflective remarks and comments.

¹ McGuirk and Pine, *Asylum for Sale*, 1-11.

² On July 11, 2026, the Greek Parliament passed a measure suspending asylum applications for three months for individuals arriving from North Africa, mandating their immediate expulsion from the country. This was among the first actions introduced by the newly appointed far-right Minister for Migration, Thanos Plevris, who assumed office following the resignation of his predecessor, Michalis Chrisochoidis, due to his supposed involvement in the OPEKEPE scandal, one of the largest corruption cases in contemporary Greece, linked to the misuse of EU agricultural funds. Framing the situation as a “state of emergency”, Plevris (re)invoked the rhetoric of “asymmetric threats” and the “invasion” of Europe via mass arrivals, stating that “anyone who comes will be detained and returned.” see Rainsford, “Greece warns of ‘invasion’ as it halts asylum on Med route.”

³ Giametta, *The Sexual Politics of Asylum*; Murray, “The (Not So) Straight Story”; Raboin, “Exhortations of Happiness; Zisakou, “Proving Gender and Sexuality.”

⁴ Zisakou, “Feeling Queer, Feeling Real.”

⁵ Åberg, “A Requirement of Shame”; Zisakou, “Proving Gender and Sexuality.”

⁶ Murray, “Liberation Nation?”; Shakhshari, “The Queer Time of Death”; Saleh, “Queer/Humanitarian Visibility”; Zisakou, “Proving Gender and Sexuality.”

⁷ For a detailed description of this legal shift, see Zisakou, “Proving Gender and Sexuality” and Zisakou, “Feeling Queer, Feeling Real.”

⁸ Kazanjian, “Ante-Possession,” 867.

⁹ Zisakou, “Feeling Queer, Feeling Real.”

¹⁰ Deploying the notion of translation as an analogy for the legal preparation for the asylum interview, I am not particularly interested in the division between cultural and linguistic translation, what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines as rhetoric or logic. My intention here is not to distinguish between how lawyers endeavour to translate the discursive (words into words) or affective (emotions into words) aspects of applicants’ experiences and accounts to meet authorities’ expectations. On the contrary I am rather interested in their blurring and how one contains the other within the (dis)orderly queer space they share and co-create. See Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” 180-81.

¹¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

¹² Eng et al., “Introduction,” 3

¹³ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.

¹⁴ Connell, “Thank You for Coming Out Today”; Rooke, “Queer in the Field.”

¹⁵ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 9*, 14-15; UNHCR, *Beyond Proof*, 37-41; EUAA, *Evidence and Credibility Assessment in the Context of the Common European Asylum System*, 46-47.

¹⁶ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins”; Mahmood “Religious Reason and Secular Affect.”

¹⁷ According to Maya Hertogs, for instance, objectivity in the context of asylum is the affective labour that renders an applicant legible to the authorities while maintaining the pretence of (e)quality in decision-making. See Hertogs, “Affects of Objectivity”, 16. For credibility’s discursive production, although in this article discourse and affect are approached as intermediated and entangled, see, Akin, “Discursive Construction of Genuine LGBT Refugees.

¹⁸ In this section, I view the personal as political and vice versa, seeking to move beyond the tenets of second-wave feminism. Rather, I am interested in the affective entanglements of power relations and performative resistances of decision-makers and asylum lawyers that trouble voluntaristic conceptions of the sovereign and autonomous subject as always in control of their responses. See also Athanasiou, “Taking Sides.”

¹⁹ Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 120.

²⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

²¹ Murray, “The (Not So) Straight Story”; Raboin, “Exhortations of Happiness”; Zisakou, “Proving Gender and Sexuality.”

²² Giametta, *The Sexual Politics of Asylum*; Murray, “The (Not So) Straight Story”; Raboin, “Exhortations of Happiness ; Zisakou, “Proving Gender and Sexuality.”

²³ Spivak, in her reflections on liminality, complexity, and unpredictability in translation, argues that translation does not begin with full knowledge of an original, as there is no stable, self-contained source to be linearly transferred; rather, translation is a space of encounter, where the original and the translated come into relation, shaping and unsettling one another. See Spivak, “Translating in a World of Languages,” 36.

- ²⁴ Sabsay, "From Being Sexual to Having Sexual Rights"; Savci, *Queer in Translation*, 11-16; Spivak, "Translation as Culture."
- ²⁵ Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 13; Spivak, "Translating in a World of Languages," 37.
- ²⁶ In *Trans*, Jack Halberstam, drawing on transfeminist studies elaborates a conceptualisation of a politics of transitivity. Rather than framing "trans" as a fixed identity or a linear transition between binary genders, Halberstam argues for a shifting and politically generative notion that disrupts normative gender categories, bodily regulations, static identities, and institutional structures. He proposes "trans" as a mode of becoming that destabilises binaries and opens up space for alternative forms of embodiment, identification, and social organisation. See Halberstam, *Trans*.
- ²⁷ In their work, Judith Butler respectively approaches translation not as a linear transmission of meaning, but as an unpredictable, uncontrollable, and collective process of being dispossessed and undone. Rather than securing fixed meanings, translation becomes a space of potentiality, an openness to unpredictable encounters, disruptions, and possibilities. See Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* and Butler *Who's afraid of gender*. For translation as a liminal space of dispossession and being disposed see also Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*.
- ²⁸ My analysis here is deeply influenced by Sara Ahmed's work on affect, queerness and emotions. Ahmed treats affect and emotion interchangeably, framing them as part of a gendered, classed, and racialised political economy of feelings, circulating between bodies, rather than existing as decontextualised, ahistorical, or depoliticised phenomena. In a similar vein, she approaches queerness not as a fixed identity, but as a form of disorientation and reorientation: a refusal to be oriented toward institutional whiteness, normativity and align with certain objects, bodies, and futures. See Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* and *Queer phenomenology*.
- ²⁹ Akin, "Discursive Construction of Genuine LGBT Refugees"; Shakhari "The Queer Time of Death"; Tschalaer "Between Queer Liberalisms and Muslim Masculinities."
- ³⁰ Spivak, in her analysis of the politics of translation, highlights how the dominant tends to appropriate the emergent, absorbing and neutralising its oppositional force. Rather than allowing space for alterity, according to Spivak, the dominant rewards the emergent only insofar as it can be channelled into a normative alternative, thwarting its radical potential. See Spivak, "Translating in a World of Languages," 41.
- ³¹ According to Muñoz within the pragmatist capitalist politics of queer assimilation, queerness can be tolerated insofar as it remains controlled, and identities may proliferate provided they do not disrupt dominant power dynamics. Similarly, Halberstam notes that neoliberal structures and the capitalist market increasingly accommodate bodies that once marked the abject limits of the state. See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 44; Halberstam, *Trans*, 60-61.
- ³² According to Naisargi Dave, when affect is put into words and placed within a normative framework, when, in her terms, incommensurability is transformed into what is commensurable, this transformation is not only a closure or a restriction of possibilities. It also becomes a call to resist what has been confined and represented, and thus opens up new potentialities. See Dave, "Indian and Lesbian and What Came Next."
- ³³ As both Butler and Dave have argued, normativity is simultaneously a win and a loss, a threat and a promise. See Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 17-39; Dave "Indian and Lesbian and What Came Next."
- ³⁴ As respectively Spivak argues, translation, as a liminal process of subject formation and reality construction, is not always conscious or entirely under the control of the translator. See Spivak, "Translation as Culture," 13.
- ³⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.
- ³⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65.
- ³⁷ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.
- ³⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

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