

Trans/forming the Greek theatrescape: Translation for performance as representation

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the translation and staging of Paloma Pedrero's *La llamada de Lauren...* in Greece (2017–2019). The play was staged at a time marked by conflicting forces: on the one hand, Greece was taking significant steps forward for transgender people, recognising basic rights and freedoms, and on the other, discriminatory practices and gender-based violence were still a very present reality. In this context, Fenia Apostolou, a director who made headlines with her story as a trans person, and Maria Hatziemmanouil, a well-known translator of Spanish theatre, decided that it was the right time to stage Pedrero's play. Based on the agenda pursued by the agents themselves, as reflected in the paratextual materials studied, the present paper discusses the role of translation for performance in going against prevailing normative practices and constraints, ultimately effecting change. The study shows that Hatziemmanouil sees translation as a performative, transcultural, and political practice. Thanks to her translation and Apostolou's staging, systemically underrepresented groups have become more visible, and the discussion regarding gender, sex(uality) and identity in Greece has been enhanced, proving that translation and/or performance can contribute to the trans/formation of perceptions and major changes in societies.

KEYWORDS

Theatre translation, performance, representation, gender, sex(uality), identity, queer, *La llamada de Lauren...*, contemporary Greek theatrescape.

1. Introduction

Fenia Apostolou, 'the only Greek trans theatre director' as featured in newspapers and journals of the time, staged Paloma Pedrero's *La llamada de Lauren...* (1984: *Lauren's Call...*) in Greece, in 2017. The performance made a considerable impact leading to its staging for a second year in a row and to the leading actor receiving the 'Trans and Gender-Fluid Visibility' special award of the 2018 Athens Queer Theatre Awards. The play was staged at a time marked by conflicting forces and their interplay: on the one hand, it saw significant changes in the social landscape of Greece, radical revisions in the legal and institutional framework related to gender and sexual identity, and the emergence of a new gender-informed audience. On the other hand, it witnessed a rise of homophobic and racist attacks, paired with a proliferation of voices against queer movements, and the growing presence of a patriarchal rhetoric of sexist and nationalist containment. When interviewed¹, both Fenia Apostolou and Maria Hatziemmanouil, the Greek translator, underscored that it was "the right time to stage Pedrero's play in Greece" (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023); M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February, 2023).

Questions thus arise about the translation of gender, sexuality, and identity and their politics for the Greek stage. Why was it "the right time"? Has the translation of the play become a site of resistance and activism through its (re)production and (re)presentation of different configurations of narratives and meanings (Baker, 2010, p. 27)? Has it provided the space for the audience to break away from binary thinking and sex-gender conforming bodies and experiences, thus dismantling expectations and assumptions based on discourses of patriarchy and authority? Has the translator

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attempted to find other ways to represent in/through translation? Have conceptions of gender, sexuality, and identity been challenged and renegotiated? Inspired by Judith Butler and ‘gender performativity’, this paper sees translation as performed and signified in social space, as a performative and political act invested with power, as “a public action” (Tymoczko, 1999, p. 296). It also sees translation as a constructing and “structuring concept” (Harvey, 2014, p. 6), as a site of struggle that shapes the way people see and construct their world.

Focusing on the agents involved in the staging of Pedrero’s play in Greece, or what Chesterman (2009) calls “cultural pioneers” (p. 15), with a special emphasis on the structure-agency relations in the translation process, and drawing on recent research on queer(ing) translation (Epstein & Gillet, 2017; Baer & Kaindl, 2018), this paper discusses the role of translation and translators in increasing the visibility of systemically underrepresented groups, presenting experiences, and opening up options. By examining the Greek translation and staging of the play in the context and time in which they are situated, and based on the agenda pursued by the agents themselves, as reflected in the paratextual materials studied, this paper ultimately explores the role of translation for performance in going against prevailing normative practices and constraints, ultimately effecting change.

2. Intimating transgender themes

In the 1990s, Paloma Pedrero was one of the most staged new female Spanish playwrights worldwide. Starting in the mid-1980s, Pedrero became known for her two-character, metatheatrical plays bolstered by engaging narrative, plausible situations, and realistic dialogue, and dealing with issues of personal and sexual identity (Zatlin, 2001, p. 193). *La llamada de Lauren...* is such a play, mirroring Pedrero’s wish to deconstruct gender, challenge stereotypical views of gender roles and discourses of power, and contest gender norms; at the same time, it reveals her need to employ forms in her writing that question “traditionally masculine modes about male themes” present in the work of other women playwrights of the eighties who deliberately adopted a more woman-centred approach aiming at reinforcing a female discourse in theatre (O’Connor 1990, p. 387). In *La llamada de Lauren...* Pedrero draws attention to male sexuality in marriage, a subject not investigated by women playwrights before (O’Connor, 1990, p. 389). By employing cross-dressing as one of her narrative techniques, and portraying male vulnerability and nudity, Pedrero casts light on the impact effected on men, and by extension on all people, by gender norms established arbitrarily by society. Unsurprisingly, when the play came out it caused heated debate and controversy stemming from the strong reaction and criticism of mainly male critics and spectators. In her Prólogo to the 1987 Spanish edition, Patricia O’Connor notes that older male spectators and critics found the blunt approach to the subject of sexual identity challenging, highlighting that they were shocked that a woman dared to deal with such an intimate issue (1987, pp. 15–16). They could not understand, O’Connor stresses, that a man could go through a gender/sexual identity crisis without being homosexual. On the other hand, women’s reaction to the play was positive (p. 16).

The play features a moment of crisis in the lives of a young couple that leads to consciousness-raising. Pedro and Rosa are celebrating their third wedding anniversary, a date that coincides with the night of dressing up and the town’s carnival taking place in the streets outside. The play begins with Pedro alone in the apartment



getting ready for the evening. He puts on the soundtrack to the film *To have and to have not* (1944) in which Lauren Bacall sings the song *How little we know* in her distinctive, husky voice. He gets dressed in a female outfit accompanied by a wig, silk stockings, and high heels. When Rosa returns home, she is bemused and impressed by her husband's transformation, but she does not hesitate to help him put the finishing touches to his outfit. While she is off to put on her clown costume, Pedro asks her to wear a man's suit he has hired for her instead, and tells her that for one night only, he wishes to be Lauren Bacall and Rosa to be Humphrey Bogart. The choice of Hollywood's iconic couple is not accidental. On the one hand, Bacall, the glamour girl, was known for her enigmatic femininity and vulnerability to Humphrey's love. On the other hand, Bogart represented the perfect image of a man, being known for his unflinching masculinity. Both are rather archetypal figures of gender alluding to the stereotypical roles that Pedro and Rosa are expected to enact in marriage and in society.

While carnival is a time when everyone can transform into anyone, losing their identity through masking, and enjoying themselves free from rules, in Pedrero's play disguise and performance provide the space also for confessions, uninhibited dialogue, and the revelation and articulation of deeply held feelings. The couple is forced to confront the sheer reality of Pedro's unhappiness with the hyper-masculine role imposed on him and the pleasure he gets from being Lauren. When he asks Rosa to seduce him as part of the game they are playing, Rosa is not comfortable in her role of the male seducer. Pedro, on the other hand, seems to enjoy being seduced as a woman. He even forces Rosa to use the dildo he has given her as an anniversary present and perform a sex act on him. Rosa cannot stand this role-playing anymore and leaves their apartment in shock. The game of switching genders though is revealing of Pedro's need for self-discovery; he attempts to accept himself and be true to his identity. For, when Rosa returns and engages in discussion with Pedro sharing her concerns, the latter confesses that when he was a young boy, he used to dress up in women's clothes together with his sister. But one day, his father saw them playing, slapped them both and accused his sister of turning Pedro into a homosexual. Since then, Pedro decided to play the role of macho man to order. However, he is tired of pretending and the oppression that goes with it — he likes dressing as a woman, and, as he says to Rosa, this does not mean he is gay. Through these intimate moments of crisis and revelation and Pedro's "ambivalence of gender roles" (Zatlin, 2001, p. 194), Pedrero invites the audience to reflect on one's sexual and personal identity that is inextricably linked to the roles they perform and contingent on the models enforced upon them.

The play ends with Pedro going to the carnival while Rosa is left confused in their apartment and all alone. No resolution is offered but Pedrero leads the audience to a questioning of the rigid nature of traditional gender roles and their impact on people's lives: What does it mean to be male or female? Who is to decide on their meaning(s)? How does one 'perform' or 'do' gender (Butler, 1990, p. 33)? Is gender performance defined and affected by social and cultural expectations and established practices? Is gender performed differently in the public realm? How is identity formed and transformed in the context of social interaction? How do stigmatised identities develop and function? In this light, this paper seeks to investigate how the Greek translator and director have addressed these issues and Pedrero's intention(s).



3. Queer theatre and performance in contemporary Greece

In October 2017, a new law on gender and sexual identity was accepted by the Greek Parliament (Law 4491/2017) allowing people to change the gender listed on their identity cards and other official identity papers at will. While it raised political tensions, the move was hailed by the transgender community as a much needed and important step forward. It not only drew attention to the discrimination and challenges its members have to face on a daily basis, but it also addressed some of their demands. Until then, LGBTQ-phobia was rife in all aspects of life — in politics, in the media, and on the streets. And people wishing to change how their gender is officially defined had to prove they had undergone sex-change surgery and psychiatric assessment. The new bill offered them the opportunity to do it following a simple declaration in court. And though LGBTQ-phobia was still evident in Greek society, after a string of victories, there was a sense that things were moving in a positive direction. However, in September 2018, a well-known activist, drag performer and columnist, Zak Kostopoulos/Zackie Oh, was brutally murdered, in broad daylight in Athens, shattering illusions and hopes. It was an event that led people to the streets to protest against rights violation and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community. Hence, by the time Apostolou's *La llamada de Lauren...* was staged for a second year, a “growing and very dynamic radical ... queer movement” had begun to “gai[n] unprecedented momentum” (Papanikolaou & Kolocotroni, 2018, p. 144) calling to action against discriminatory practices and gender-based violence.

Within this context, in 2017, there were around 30 performances in Athens that focused on queer issues and themes. Some of these performances were quite successful (staged two and three years in a row) proving that the time was perhaps ripe for the honest representation of taboo issues onstage and that the Greek audience — straight and LGBTQIA+ — was interested in attending theatre productions that reinforced the dialogue about gender, sexuality, and identity. Theatre provided the crucial space for such stagings and the Greek audience with diverse experiences — something that the other media, such as the Greek cinema or TV, did not (Boskoitis, 2017b). Yet, as Menelas Siafakas and Manolis Vamvounis, founders and co-organisers of the Greek Queer Theatre Awards, argue:

it [was] not a golden age for queer theatre in Greece because the behaviour itself of people working for and at the theatre was and still is of concern and very much an open question. News releases on performances avoid even mentioning terms such as “gay” and refer to “plays of idiosyncrasies” (in Boskoitis, 2017b).

From performances being suspended — because the production company got annoyed by press reports that pointed out the queer elements of the plays and their staging — to queer plays making it onstage thanks to the untiring and incessant efforts by directors and actors towards their success (as cited in Boskoitis, 2017b), contemporary Greek theatre witnessed many changes amid also political, social, cultural, and economic transformations of the time.

3.1 *La llamada de Lauren...* amid attempts to metamorphose the Greek theatrescape

La llamada de Lauren... was staged for the first time in Greece in October 2017, closing in April 2018 after two extensions. It became a hit, opening again from

September 2018 through January 2019, with all nights being sold out. 2018 was actually the most important year for queer theatre in Greece with more than 75 queer performances focusing on transgender identity, queer people and family and social relations, and the freedom of expressing one's sexuality. It was in this context that Apostolou's staging was received as a work of remarkable value and hailed as the road to trans awakening, culminating in Ioannis Athanassopoulos, the actor playing Pedro, receiving the 'Trans and Gender-Fluid Visibility' award of the 2018 Athens Queer Theatre Awards. That year's Awards with the motto 'Act-React' were dedicated to Zak Kostopoulos and aimed at urging artists to act in and outside theatre and react to conservatism and society's racism. Greek queer theatre was called to (re)present diversity, gender identity and people's freedom to self-identification ('Queer Theatre Awards', 2018). In the wake of Kostopoulos's death and assaults at theatres where queer performances were taking place, it was stressed that such performances were more important than ever in that they acted as visible sites of representation ('Queer Theatre Awards', 2018).

Apostolou, a director, choreographer, actor, and dancer, was looking for a Spanish play that had not been performed in Greece before. She thus contacted Maria Hatziemmanouil, a well-known translator of Spanish plays in Greek, who suggested two plays. Apostolou read both and decided to direct and stage *La llamada de Lauren...* leading the cast in her self-funded production. The fact that Pedrero's play features a man and a woman as protagonists reinforced her decision as she had already had in mind the two actors to enact the roles; she had worked with them before, and they shared a code of communication that enabled them to understand one another without putting everything into words (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023). According to Apostolou, "through rehearsals, the deep study of the psyche of every character, and [their] communication, that is the yeast that helps the team rise to the occasion, the core of the play revealed itself" (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023), showing to her the way she should direct actors. As she underlines, she does "not like adaptations; she follows "the plot and concept of every play and leads actors in a way that will permit them to be faithful to the intention first of the playwright and then of her own" (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023). And this is what she did in the case of her staging of *La llamada de Lauren...*

But Apostolou is not simply a Greek director — she is 'the only Greek trans theatre director'. At least, this is what most, if not all, newspapers and journals of the time featured in their headlines (e.g., LiFO, T-zine, etc.). Antonis Boskoitis (2017a), a journalist and director, stresses that the "peculiarity of this performance is not the play itself ... not that so many straight people have watched it, but the fact that it is directed by Fenia Apostolou, the only transgender woman who works as a director in Greece." It was the first time that a play directed by Apostolou used "a trans aesthetics" (Boskoitis, 2017a) and it was almost certain that she would find herself identifying in many ways with the protagonist, even if she had not set out to hold up a mirror up to her life. In the interviews she gave for the performance, she shared information about her childhood, her inspirations and gender transformation, and how she became a performer and a director. As Apostolou notes, her identity, much like Pedro's, was repressed and contained (as cited in Boskoitis, 2017a). She spent years acting as a man in real life, playing female roles only onstage, without daring to live the way she wanted, without being the woman she knew she was (F. Apostolou, personal

communication, 12 March 2023). Thus, during this project she could not help but see herself reflected in Pedro's story, see her true self trapped in years of oppression.

However, as Apostolou emphasises, what was of importance to her was that “her transgender identity or her characterisation by the media as a ‘trans creator’ would not overshadow the play” (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023). Especially when her “ergography had nothing to do with trans and genderqueer subjects” (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023); a deliberate choice on her part as she did not wish the audience and critics to constantly draw links between her own personal life trajectory and her work. Yet, she refuses to agree with journalists when they claim that her fight is personal, not political. As she argues, it “is political and it is performed onstage, through art. I am not the kind of a person who marches with a banner to protest against discrimination. My rebellion takes place onstage, not on the streets” (as cited in Boskoitis, 2017a). What is certain is that by directing this play, Apostolou became the epicentre of discussions and headlines in Greece raising the interest of the audience and turning the performance into a success. As noted by Boskoitis (2017b), Apostolou “continued onstage the dialogue started on gender identity with the bill voted.” But, as he also maintains, the success of both Apostolou and the performance lies in the fact that they focus(ed) on human oppression. An oppression that does not have to do with gender discomfort only but, equally importantly, with broader social stereotypes too.

This explains, perhaps, why both Apostolou and Hatzimmanouil feel it was the right time to stage Pedrero's play while many might think (and this has been indeed one of the questions asked during interviews) that a play written in 1984 is outdated in 2017–2018. But, as already discussed, Greece still had difficulty dealing with issues that went against core values of society. Even the new bill, though acknowledged as a historical step forward for transgender people that recognised basic rights and freedoms, met with strong opposition from many fronts which considered it threatening for basic institutions such as the family. Transgender people continue to face a broad spectrum of discrimination in both the private and public sphere with people in Greece finding it hard to openly discuss issues regarding (their) gender, sexuality, and identity. In the words of Apostolou, the play “shows how devastating it is to not feel well in your own body while trying to conform to a normativity defined by society which you cannot acknowledge nor escape” (as cited in Ralli, 2018). Both Hatzimmanouil (personal communication, 19 February 2023) and Apostolou (personal communication, 12 March 2023) contend that the Greek audience was shocked at Pedro's confession of not being happy in his role as a man and it was shocked at watching onstage a man asking his wife to use an artificial penis and penetrate him. The fact that Apostolou did not have them use a typical dildo, but a phallic effigy of an actual stripper made the act even more provocative while revealing her wish to subversively challenge cultural and social institutions by channelling a person's — perhaps everyone's — complicated opinions of sexuality. It was her response to Greece's

neoconservatism which attacks social citizenship by making gender-binary role models the standard for a virtuous life and citizenship; artists thus [she claims] reject these role models and the narratives that reframe reality and use instead body language, gestures, mimics, and symbolism to effectively communicate the intended message (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023).

Pedro seeks his identity beyond *stereotypical* gender roles and prevalent views about gender, and Pedrero, as well as Apostolou and Hatziemmanouil, want to urge every member of the audience to set off for their journey of self-discovery while trying to answer questions regarding, among others, the way gay, bisexual, and transgender people experience homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023; M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023). How are new and older generations of people in Greece responding to the current situation? What about the new generations of LGBTQIA+ people? Have recent legal reforms changed the overall situation? Do they actually find themselves on the cusp of a new era — an era which truly acknowledges people’s right to identify themselves as they please? These and other questions come alive thanks to the story of Pedro which merges into a tapestry of narratives, interpretations, and emotions. As both Apostolou (personal communication, 12 March 2023) and Hatziemmanouil (personal communication, 19 February 2023) maintain,

theatre is social intervention. Actors onstage, the director, and the audience are guided to substantively engage with parallel discussions about the topics in question and shape—both individually and collectively—an experiential performance that calls the audience into reflection and transformation in response to their role(s) in society and in their personal life.

4. Where queer writing meets translation and performance

Playwrights, translators, and directors are cultural agents and social actors not isolated from each other, but interdependent. The dynamic and fluid relations they share shape and are shaped by their identities, beliefs, values, and practices. These social actors are embedded in transformative and constantly redefined relations, in “a relational order” along with larger social formations (structures, systems, discourses, etc.) reconstructing each other (Powell & Dépelteau, 2013, p. 3). In this vein, the choices made by Hatziemmanouil, Apostolou, and Pedrero are not only a product of “structure” and individual “agency”, as described by Powell and Dépelteau (2013, p. 3)², but also of the existing relations among them and each other’s actions.

Pedrero visited Greece, in January 2018, accepting the invitation of Apostolou to attend her performance. They gave interviews together, with Hatziemmanouil acting as their interpreter. The issues that have been of concern to Pedrero and Apostolou have to do with people’s freedom to self-identification. They both ask: “Do we want to live free? Can we stand the responsibility that lies with this freedom? Do we have the right to self-identification? Are social stereotypes powerful enough to determine a person’s life course even life itself?” (cited in Ralli, 2018). These are some of the questions that have brought them together and which lie at the core of the play. As Paloma Pedrero revealed in one of her interviews while in Greece:

I always notice how traditional gender roles in relationships are not working for people. The typical role of man and woman castrates both sexes. ... This is why I have been wondering, ever since I was young, whether there can be a relationship in which the roles of man/woman will not be fixed and rigid, but ambiguous so that there will be no categorical absoluteness between the two sexes, and this sort of Manicheism will no longer exist (in Ralli, 2018)

And she clarified that her aim with writing *La llamada de Lauren...* was to pose a more general question:

Where do I belong? [...] [E]ither our parents or institutions like the church and society have cloaked us with personality traits making us think they are our own. We think they are inborn, whereas they are not our choice. [...] the conventional way with which society treats issues related to gender identity is a great source of unhappiness for people (in Ralli, 2018).

People, Pedrero stresses, can be reborn and transform. And this means life and growth (cited in Ralli, 2018).

When asked about her approach to translating the play, Hatziemmanouil pointed out that she wished to “respect the intention of Pedrero and convey the message(s) of the text” (M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023). In her words, “much like writing, translation too can mediate the (re)construction of sexuality”, and the translator can decide either to confirm or challenge gender and sexual identities while (in)visibilising their ambivalence (personal communication, 19 February 2023). She does not believe that her sex and gender (female/woman) or her sexuality (heterosexual) affect the way she translates and/or the decisions she makes. As she repeated, she “never wants to intervene in the text” let alone when this text, and by extension its translation, can enable people, through inclusion and representation onstage, to express themselves freely, to be encouraged to live the way they want and need to, being true to themselves (personal communication, 19 February 2023). Hatziemmanouil also made clear that she did not allow censorship or self-censorship to affect her translation of sex and sexual-related terms, and/or her use of the ‘f-word’ in the target text.

Considering that her translation came out in an anthology of Spanish plays translated into Greek in 2010, that is, seven years before its staging, Hatziemmanouil could have revised it given the changes witnessed in society and the differences in the perception of gender/sex and other identity markers. However, she chose not to do so (M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023). She maintained that the play was urgent and more timely than ever; and the same was true about its translation in Greek and its staging by Apostolou. Hatziemmanouil also clarified that Apostolou did not ask for any changes nor changed herself anything — Pedrero’s original text was their guide. However, she did stress that both “played their part in the change occurred in Greek society” (M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023). Given that Hatziemmanouil and Apostolou worked in different historical periods compared to the one in which Pedrero and her play were situated, Hatziemmanouil unsurprisingly commented on the transgressions and slippages of meaning that inevitably occur reminding us that the meanings people make when they read are not neutral nor obvious. Translation and performance can provide sites of representation, resistance, and reform that “can trigger shifts in the perception of identities and related roles in society” (M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023), which leads Hatziemmanouil to conclude that “translation is a queer praxis itself” (M. Hatziemmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023).

In this vein, when Pedrero uses the term *maricón* and *maricones* in the play, Hatziemmanouil opts to render them in Greek as *πούστης* [*poústis*, ‘faggot’] and *αδερφές* [*aderfés*, ‘sissies’] accordingly. Her choices do not rely only on the slur term used by Pedrero (*maricon* means ‘queer, fag, poof, homosexual’), but also on the web of negative connotations these words have in Greek. Hatziemmanouil facilitates readers to identify with Pedro’s emotional state from the very first pages by using words that still “hurt, intimidate, and upset” gay men in Greece, who reject them as

abusive and wish to be called γκέι³ ‘gay’ instead (Kalovyrynas, 2021, p. 397). These words, among others, along with the violence they unleash and the trauma they cause, have been a matter of debate in Greece for more than a decade now (Kalovyrynas, 2021, pp. 397–399). Hatziemmanouil wants to challenge the quotidian vulgar usage of both Greek terms, calling readers and later the audience to negotiate their ‘resemantisation’. The literal translation of αδερφή [*aderfī*] is ‘sister’ in Greek and it is pejorative (part of the vernacular vocabulary used to describe sexual deviancy and/or effeminate mannerisms) denoting a gay man who is worthless and an object of derision that cannot be taken seriously. Thus, when Rosa sees Pedro dressed up as a woman and says to him: “Como siempre has dicho que los que hacían esto eran todos maricones...” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 31) ‘You have always said that those who did this were all faggots...’, Hatziemmanouil translates it into: “Γιατί πάντα έλεγες πως όσοι το έκαναν ήταν αδερφές...” (Pedrero, 2010, p. 11) [‘*Giati pánta éleges pos ósi to ékanan ítan aderfés*’, ‘Because you have always said that those who did this were all sissies’]. Just like Pedrero, she too highlights that Pedro denied his true desires as they did not fit with his image of a macho man in society and, worse enough, he used offensive words to refer to people who did pursue their desires and passions. As far as the word πούστης is concerned, it is also derogatory and used as “a tool of oppression and conformity” (Kalovyrynas, 2021, p. 397), originally being used to refer to a male prostitute. Nowadays, it means ‘faggot’ and it is one of the words most often used in Greece to refer disdainfully to homosexual men.

And then, when Pedro refers to what his father said to his sister when he found them playing in women’s clothes [“Vas a hacer de tu hermano un maricón” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 57)], Hatziemmanouil once again draws on a colloquial Greek phrase—θα τον κάνεις πούστη—rendering the sentence (Pedrero, 2010, p. 23) as “Τον αδερφό σου θα τον κάνεις πούστη” [*Ton aderfō sou tha ton káneis pousti*], ‘You will turn your brother into a faggot’, clearly centring readers’ attention on the complex and nuanced ways in which both gender and sexuality are inscribed in languages. This has been one of the worst fears for a father in Greece — that one will turn his son into a gay man — and it has been used (along with its variants — “I will not allow anyone to turn my son into a faggot”, etc.) throughout the decades in films, plays, TV series, and in fiction, evoking emotions, memories, and reactions. This way Hatziemmanouil, much like Pedrero, subversively shows that we are not born men or women; we learn our gender roles and acquire gendered identities through social processes over time.

Judith Butler (1988), among other theorists (Braidotti, 1994, 2002; etc.) who have highlighted that gender is fluid, argues that it “is real only to the extent that it is performed” (p. 527). That is, gender exists because it is produced through a set of reiterated performative practices that are symbolic and material (Butler, 1990, pp. 43–44). Since gender is constructed, “could it be constructed differently?” (p. 10), not supporting a dominant ideology and/or what is considered and presented as *natural*? Could societies and cultures promote more gender models pertinent to the multiple meanings of gender? On a similar note, José Santaemilia (2018) invites us to consider that words are “but provisional labels (referring to sexual identities, desires, or pleasures) that emerge in local discursive practices” (p. 21). The fact that Hatziemmanouil decided to use two terms that are culturally loaded with negative connotations and reflective of meanings that are time-and-place specific mirrors her wish to show that these words can be reappropriated and reclaimed, they can be resignified and positively connoted, while allowing for sociocultural norms and

practices to be criticised. It may not be far-fetched to suggest that by deciding to use two instead of one term (Pedrero only uses *maricón* in the singular and plural form), Hatzimmanouil wanted to engage readers (and in turn, the audience) in the discussions held in Greece regarding the words used to refer to homosexual and gender-diverse people and the urgent need to renegotiate their meaning and contextually determined semantic weight.

Christopher Larkosh (2011) suggests that “all gender and sexual identifications, wherever they are represented in the translation process, are poised for a [sic] extended discussion” (p. 4). Working across languages and cultures and witnessing all gaps present in the spaces in-between invites translators and other social actors/cultural agents to reconsider the ways in which they think about gender and sexuality within established disciplines; at the same time, it challenges their own “sense of gender and sexual positionality” and provides them with “new possibilities for cross-identification with others, not only across the often imperfect binary oppositions [...] but also in relation to those gender and sexual positionalities once considered by many as ‘ambiguous’ or ‘in-between’ in relation to such conventionally fixed binaries” (Larkosh, 2011, p. 4). When Pedro places Rosa on top of him and asks her to penetrate him [“Métemelo. ... ¡Métemelo! ... Penétrame, por favor... Penétrame” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 51)], Hatzimmanouil renders it as “Βάλ’το μου. ... Βάλ’το μου! ... Γάμα με, σε παρακαλώ. Γάμα με” (Pedrero, 2010, p. 20) [*Vál’to mou. ... Vál’to mou! ... Gáma me, se parakaló. Gáma me.*], ‘Put it in me. ... Put it in me! ... Fuck me, please. ... Fuck me’. As far as the rendering of *Métemelo* is concerned, she opts for the most obvious, literal translation. But when it comes to the rendering of *Penétrame*, her choice reveals her intention to use a stronger, evocative verb in Greek that would get readers’/the audience’s reaction directly. (Stereo)typically women use the phrase “fuck me” and men say “I want to fuck you” which are closely linked to the more passive and more active roles they usually assume in a sexual activity. By having Pedro use this phrase [*Γάμα με*], Hatzimmanouil challenges the phallogocentric perspective from which people are instructed to interpret and articulate the world (Mukherjee, 2011, p. 135). She reinforces Pedro’s enactment of female identity that emerges from a subjugated self into a female subject, wielding agency through traditional stereotypes; she aims at subverting familiar gender practices by rendering them strange, while denaturalising gender on and off stage.

Gender expectations and heterosexuality sustained by socio-cultural norms and conventions can thus be parodied thanks to writing and translation which proffer sites for reconfigurations of meaning (Misiou, 2023, p. 139). As William Spurlin (2017) argues, “the meanings negotiated and produced in translation are not simply embodied in textual structures alone, but ... are located culturally or transculturally” (p. 176). In this light, translation is “an important tool for knowledge production about sexual difference and for the decolonisation of desire” (Spurlin, 2017, p. 181). Hatzimmanouil herself sees translation as a performative, transcultural, and political practice rather than merely as a linear practice of conveying messages in another language and culture (M. Hatzimmanouil, personal communication, 19 February 2023). In alignment with Pedrero’s intention, she has allowed for the recreation of discursive spaces and for those underrepresented to become more visible, and have their voices heard onstage.

5. Translating and performing identities in disguise: *La llamada de Lauren...* and its impact on Greece

Two metaphors of translation as “the redressing of a body of meaning in the clothes of another language” (van Wyke, 2010, p. 18), and “as clothing put on the body of the original” (St André, 2010, p. 9), reveal its connection to non-normative sexualities and genders that challenge and subvert the heteronormative foundations of language and culture (Misiou, 2023, p. 157). According to Marc Démont (2018), a “queering mode of translation” does its best to “offer a translation that preserves the web of virtual connotative associations and, therefore, the text’s [...] potentially disruptive content, in order to open new possibilities of readings” (p. 168). Given that the meaning of both sex and gender is negotiated, the queerness of a text should resist appropriation and not be suppressed in translation, thus highlighting the potential(ities) it offers for different interpretations (Misiou, 2023, p. 157).

The translation of Hatziemmanouil clearly represents Pedrero’s thoughts, with the Greek readership and audience being encouraged to question what is behind Pedro’s disguise and mask. Hatziemmanouil too wishes to challenge how gender is viewed, just like Pedrero has done through Pedro’s gender ambivalence and free-floating gender performance. As for Apostolou, she used devices, choreography, and props to further contest the making of gender, its construction and performance and its devastating impact on people. Her deliberate use of a more realistic phallus indicates her wish to shock the audience to a state of riveted attention and to intensify the realisation of how shocking truth can be and how uncomfortable one gets when truth is not buried, when it is not replaced by pretence and silence, but rather reveals itself. And this is also why the scene where Pedro takes off the dress is choreographed in such a way that lasts 2.5 minutes, reinforcing the image of a person exposed to themselves and others (and the same happens when Pedro puts on lipstick). Translation is performative, much like gender is, and performance is translational. The translator tries to dress the text in a new language and the director clothes it in new gestures, voices, sounds, and images that transform it. Both the translator and director engage in a process of linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, and also political negotiation mediating the text and conveying its multiple meaning(s) as impacted by their own interpretation.

Both Hatziemmanouil (personal communication, 19 February 2023) and Apostolou (personal communication, 12 March 2023), much like Pedrero, reject the patriarchal system and all of its discriminatory norms and manifestations, allowing for the (re)presentation of an identity that does not conform. They take a feminist and queer approach to identify, question and challenge hegemonic hetero-homonormative discourses about gender, sex(uality), and identity. Through Pedrero’s metatheatrical role-playing game between Pedro and Rosa the aspects of which Hatziemmanouil and Apostolou have enhanced, readers and the audience alike are invited to witness a change in their perception of sexuality, desire, and eroticism, as well as of human connection and relationships. After describing the oppression through which he had passed all those years, Pedro finally confesses that he likes cross-dressing: “me gusta estar así” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 59); [‘I like being (dressed) this way’]. Even though Rosa reacts and is scared by Pedro’s revelations, Pedrero has her seek to embrace and understand Pedro in light of her love and empathy for him. As Phyllis Zatlin (1990) has noted, “Pedrero’s theatre is not overtly ideological, but it does approach traditional sex

roles and interpersonal relationships from a feminist stance” (p. 9). What is more, as Apostolou has stressed, Pedrero focuses on

a person’s deep existential need to identify with what they truly are. And she does so through a lens of normativity; that is by presenting an everyday heterosexual couple that lives its life by conforming to all social rules that have determined their roles. They have been married, they live together, they love each other, and everything seems to go as planned (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023).

Nevertheless, as both Hatziemmanouil (personal communication, 19 February 2023) and Apostolou (personal communication, March 12, 2023) note, through the language and writing style of Pedrero, the idiomatic expressions and syntax used, and the devices employed — metatheatre, disguise, role-playing — readers/the audience are enabled to follow the protagonists in different states of consciousness and the existential struggles they go through, and enter the open dialogue to which the Spanish playwright invites them. Pedrero encourages plural interpretations of the subject of gender, sex, and identity, and she has managed to engage her Greek audience too who, within the then current social reality, were affected by the performance. As underlined by Apostolou, “the dramatic tensions that held spectators’ attention until the final curtain, led to their not moving away from their seats at the end; they spent some time in the auditorium to process what they have just watched, and even attended inspiring heated debates in the foyer afterwards” (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023). In her words, Greek spectators, mostly composed of heterosexual couples, claimed they were “shocked; the play is so powerful as a fist in the stomach making [them] get goosebumps”. She also remarked that many spectators were seen crying at the end of the performance having identified with Pedro but not necessarily with his state; they too have experienced some sort of oppression closely linked to the social and political malaise on which Pedrero comments.

The very first scene of the play shows Pedro constructing a new gender identity for himself and reconstructing the role he has been made to assume via cross-dressing. He is acting gender. As emphasised by Apostolou, this demonstration of the performativity of gender that is so overt in the play is perhaps what made Greek spectators uncomfortable and stunned (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023). Pedro consciously enacted masculinity by forced choice. He chose to be “más hombre que nadie” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 57) [‘more masculine than anybody’] to avoid stigma and shame. But he does not know anymore who he is: “ahora ya no sé quién soy yo. No me conozco” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 57) [‘Now, I don’t know who I really am. I don’t know myself’]. He cannot bear to put it up any longer; he is fed up with complying with the imposed norms upon his identity: “¡Que estoy harto!” (Pedrero, 1987, p. 57) [‘I’m fed up!’].

Similarly, Apostolou was impressed by spectators who shared their indignation stemming from their realisation that “no person should live with a constructed self; a virtual self, congruent with a set of behaviours acquired in consistency with the gender-role that is socially accepted in their time” (F. Apostolou, personal communication, 12 March 2023). Thus, almost forty years after its premiere in Madrid, Spain, both Apostolou (personal communication, 12 March 2023) and Hatziemmanouil (personal communication, 19 February 2023) believe that “the play keeps breaking taboos; it keeps shattering gender stereotypes.” Pedrero unapologetically breaks conventions

and offers new options to traditional roles without constricting them and without giving certain directions, making it easier for spectators to enter a quest to find truth and reality.

The dimensions that the Greek performance of the play took were social and political. Lagging behind the rest of Europe in terms of legal rights and social acceptance of queer communities, the staging of Pedrero's play took place at a time when enormous steps were taken in Greece towards acceptance and equality with legal protections enshrined in the constitution for the first time. And this was commented on in all interviews by Apostolou who asked for more action. Both Hatzimmanouil and Apostolou were aware of the importance of this work (this is why Apostolou staged the play in other Greek cities too) which, together with other queer performances at the time, can be seen as acts of intervention that disturb, contest, and reconfigure meaning making practices that affect human beings in profound ways. Both translation and theatre are fundamentally critical and political, engaging in ongoing conversations that play with, alter, and critically comment on structural conventions and cultural implications.

6. Conclusions

The Greek staging of Pedrero's play has been used as a tool for social change, as it allowed for the exploration of issues that are often taboo or marginalised. Pedrero as well as Hatzimmanouil and Apostolou have provided a much-needed site for queer voices and narratives to be heard and presented destabilising binaries and upsetting political, social, cultural, and aesthetic norms about gender and sexuality. Translators, and also playwrights and directors, can be seen as “complex, multifaceted, embodied and continually evolving cultural and linguistic entit[ies], with desires, passions and political engagements that extend far beyond the act of translation” (Larkosh, 2017, p. 157), writing, and directing.

The fact that Apostolou became the centre of controversy five years after the second staging of *La llamada de Lauren...*, this time for her role in the performance 'Philoctetes' (written by Christos Oikonomou and inspired by Sophocles' classic work of the same name), staged in the small theatre of Ancient Epidaurus, shows that the path to equality and representation for all is still long. Apostolou played a cis female role and once again the headlines focused on her identity, reading: “the first transgender actor to perform in Epidaurus, in an ancient Greek theatre” (Open TV, August 1, 2023). A heated debate sparked on social media too, with colleagues of Apostolou even being asked whether they agree or not with the participation of a transgender actor in a play staged in Epidaurus. When asked about the negative comments tossed her way, Apostolou (Open TV, 1 August 2023) said that she “was not surprised at all and she expected the reactions that preceded and followed the performance, as her participation was heretical for the Greek society which largely remains conservative.” But the “rapturous and warm applause she received was liberating” for her (Open TV, August 1, 2023). As she emphasised, it was a historic moment for the Greek theatre and for the LGBTQIA+ community towards which she felt responsible (Open TV, 1 August 2023). In this light, it seems that as more plays, whose cast includes transgender actors, “present unconventional [...] characters authentically and without concessions in mainstream theatres, they will lay the groundwork for a more eclectic canon” (O'Connor, 2001, p. 390) and for the



construction of a fairer world. And translation can decisively contribute to this direction through knowledge (re)production, meaning (re)construction and (re)presentation, ultimately trans/forming societies and cultures.

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Data availability statement

Data pertaining to the interviews held are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Notes

¹ Maria Hatziemmanouil and Fenia Apostolou were interviewed by the author in February and March 2023. All translations of interviews given in Greek by Apostolou, Hatziemmanouil, and Pedrero are by the author unless otherwise stated.

² Powell and Dépelteau (2013) call *structure* “the constraining effects of society on human individuals” and *agency* “the ability of individuals to freely determine their own actions” (p. 3).

³ The Western concept of ‘gay’ has been borrowed into Greek as *γκέι*, revealing, as James Baer (in Baer & Kaindl, 2018) notes with regard to Russians’ use of the term (*gei*), that translation can be seen as “a site of complex negotiation, deployment, and reworking of Western symbols and images [...] as an expression of linguistic and political agency rather than an act of submission to the dominating Anglophone culture” (p. 42).