

Migrant Bitter Wit: Translating a Coping Mechanism in Gazmend Kapllani's *Μικρό Ημερολόγιο Συνόρων*

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Abstract

The understanding that humour constitutes an identity marker with a positive as well as an alienating function cuts across traditional approaches to social identity theories of humour and satire. This article melds such strands of humour by suggesting a concept that may serve as a unifying principle when identifying relevant comic excerpts, namely, the concept of *migrant bitter wit*. A Greek novel by Gazmend Kapllani and its English translation will be used to illustrate how the coping functions of this type of humour may be reframed in the target text, thus resulting in a shift of voice. The ventriloquising 'migrant loser' is presented in a more accessible, sardonic light that makes the dominant rhetorical purpose of the novel more salient.

Keywords: Albanian, Greek, humour, identity, migration, satire, voice

1. Introduction

Humour Studies have had a significant impact on the field of translation with thematics and methodologies being constantly imported and operationalised in order to account for the ever-complex nature of a communicative act that by its very definition lays bare distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. Methodologically, many studies focus on the nature of jokes and how they are handled by professional translators, typically focusing on patterns of translation strategies (which are often quantified). Thematically, the less positive types of humour, such as black humour have also received some attention (Bucaria 2010), but a perceived general neglect of the hostile aspects of humour and of social class as a relevant variable remains (see Attardo 2010). This paper aims to shed light on a minoritarian perspective that has not been extensively explored in Humour Studies/ Translation Studies, namely, the perspective of migrants in creative prose.

The material that will be discussed in this article is Gazmend Kapllani's *Μικρό ημερολόγιο συνόρων* (2006) ['Small Border Diary'] and its English translation, *A Short Border Handbook* (2009). Kapllani's novel received positive reviews both in Greece and in the UK (where it was shortlisted for the TLS 2013 translation prizes; Tahourdin 2013), but there are further reasons why it is selected for analysis here. Kapllani is an author who blurs the boundaries between the representation of migration and actual lived experience. He emigrated from Albania to Greece in the early 1990s (when the borders between the two countries opened), had typical 'immigrant jobs' and subsequently became a successful newspaper columnist and academic. This book is not only his first published novel, but also the first of this post-communist generation of migrants from Albania. It combines fiction with fragments of Kapllani's personal experience and narratives of other migrants that he occasionally elaborated in his journalistic work. The book was translated into English by Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife, a translator with a comparative literature background, who, at the time of the translation commission, was herself a foreign resident in Greece and, therefore, was both familiar with Kapllani's journalistic work and identified with his agenda of negotiating unfamiliar socio-cultural contexts.¹

The motivation of characters in this novel is indissolubly linked to the hardships of changing physical/cultural location, also narratively framed by a cognitive location of in-between-ness where levity is necessary if one is to cope with such hardships. More importantly, Kapllani writes the novel in a voice that has *become* his own, as Greek is his second language. This paper will address two questions in relation to the above. First, if both serious and comic elements are important, is there a qualitative method of isolating relevant textual excerpts without resorting to a fragmented micro-analysis of individual linguistic devices? Second, if the starting point is the inevitable loss of an essential aspect of Kapllani's voice (Greek as an acquired code), then what can be gained in translation when relaying this author's voice?

¹ Stanton-Ife, personal communication, 11 September 2011.

2. Coping in style

Research in Humour Studies has traditionally focused on the concepts of incongruity and superiority; the former entails scripts (organised complexes of information) momentarily clashing and then being resolved with the use of textual triggers; the latter entails the communication of feelings of superiority vis-à-vis a target in a given social setting. In Translation Studies, Attardo's (2001) cognitive and highly structured (if not mechanical) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) is the most frequently used model (see Asscher 2010; Hirsch 2011; Zabalbeascoa 2005). Although highly productive in terms of (sentence topic) micro-analysis, Attardo's script-based model has been criticised on the grounds that it disregards narrative intentionality by focusing on simplified, linear story-world distinctions, such as 'set up', 'disruption' and 'restoration' (Vandaele 2012:98, 102). The latter are in essence joke structures projected onto long narratives (script theories were initially devised to explain how jokes work). As will be argued here, longer narratives with humour serving as a coping mechanism can be seen as configurations of discursive acts, which unfold in the economy of polyphonic texts where asymmetrical relations are managed.

Concepts central to the understanding of humour, such as incongruity and superiority, cannot be easily uncoupled, because incongruities can be conventionally attributed to an agent (who is then seen as inferior), because an ironic citation of deviations from the 'norm' can generate feelings of superiority, or because an incongruity can be solved by a superior agent (Vandaele 2012: 61-62). According to social identity theories of humour, it is in this way that humour may demarcate division lines between in-group and out-group members. Relying on recent experiences/personal context, humorists use interpersonal or intergroup comparisons to disparage members of an out-group (source of incongruity), or each other for the purposes of bonding (Archakis and Tsakona 2005:59-60; Ferguson and Ford 2008:299, 301). Identity-formation processes can be seen even more clearly in cases of extreme power asymmetry, where humour is simultaneously psychological and social in that it helps hold anxiety at bay and cement social bonds. POWs and activist groups under oppression, for instance, have been reported to adopt ludicrous behaviour in order to bolster solidarity as well as to make captors/oppressors converse with them on their own ludicrous terms (Henman 2001: 92;

Sorensen 2008:175). In conflictual/oppositional contexts, humorist interventionists gain a sense of control over their impossible surroundings and cope with trauma by turning their reality ‘upside down’; strategic ambivalence between the serious and the ludicrous can ensnare oppressive ‘targets’ in a game of intergroup comparison.

A discussion of the coping function of humour in adverse circumstances is bound to be linked to **satire**, or “caustic accentuation of social vice... [that] contributes to an intolerance of vice” (Draitser 1994:37); in other words, satire is highly ideological. As a discursive practice, it is a triadic event involving a *satirist* (sender), a *satiree* (addressee) and a *satirised* (target) (Simpson 2003:86). The satirist disapproves of the discursive position of the satirised and makes this intention manifest to an addressee. The crux of such satirical ‘footings’ is a complex mechanism of **irony** consisting of an *intersemiotic spoof* and a *discursive twist*; the former concerns an echoic ‘animation’ of a usually absurd point of view or discursive practice of a speaker (locutor) who is not necessarily the origin of that point of view (or enunciator); the latter involves script opposition inscribed in textual features (Simpson 2003:94).² For instance, Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* uses the generic conventions and language of the political tract as an intersemiotic spoof; for its discursive twist, it relies on very specific culinary terms and highly polite speech acts to convey socially incongruous ideas about the consumption of children (Simpson 2003:145-147). It is the interlocking clash between (controversial) ideas and styles that qualify satire as an ‘insincere’ communication act, one that bears resemblances to irony and parody.

A model of humour for works with a social corrective purpose cannot ignore the layered intentions that are crucial for the perception and appreciation of such humour. As Vandaele aptly notes, narrative humour is “the discursive creation of a specific intentional perspective (associated with a **narrative participant**) that can prove incongruous (to the surprise of a

² Simpson seems to combine a traditional definition of irony relying on the use of ironic cues and the violation of Gricean maxims to communicate non-literal meaning with script-based theories of humour (Attardo and Raskin 1991:308). Yet he goes further than Attardo as he projects such incongruities onto a narrative level. For example, he distinguishes between locutors and enunciators and assumes that incongruous ideas may be dissipated in continuous narrative text rather than in the specific nodes that Attardo’s highly structured approach suggests.

character and/or audience), that can prove normatively and epistemically inferior (so that the audience enjoys invariable or regained superiority), and that can exploit and/or devise a comic ‘key’ or ‘tone’ of communication” (2012:89). Attitudes, emotions and information in novels are mediated in such a way that a dominant agent of communication can ‘denormalise’ relevant expectations, values and actions. For example, readers can impute the breaking down of narration to the author’s stance, thus joining the author’s mocking act or sense of superiority vis-à-vis the narrator (2010:739). Narrators, on the other hand, can surprise readers by misleading them and then forcing them to reframe an upheld perspective, thus temporarily turning them into “inferior targets” (2010:751); narrators can also present characters or the storyworld in a way that that may create comic distance/narrative empathy, by echoically presenting incongruous actions and thoughts (2010:743). On a macro-level, all these destabilising effects may serve standard mechanisms of humorous narratives, such as comic suspense (narrative interest with relatively reduced empathy), comic surprise (expectations which are flouted) and comic characterisation (incongruously operating characters) (2010:748, 749, 763). Finally, they are framed with a help of a comic tone that invites participants to trace incongruity and superiority and to decrease empathy to a level that is necessary to overcome the potential seriousness or pain of the storyworld (2010:778).³

If Vandaele’s framework is extended to include paratextual materials, then the overt references to genre specifics can be triggers of comic tone. Kapllani’s text, for instance, is framed as follows: the ST blurb states that it is a “reflective novel”⁴ that reminds us we are all migrants, or “transients” in life; it narrates the first seven days of a group of Albanians in Greece in the early 1990s by combining “tragedy” with “black humour and cathartic self-irony” (my translation).⁵ The TT avails itself of multiple fragments of reviews that appeared in the British press and which are used as endorsements on the blurb or in an introductory page in order to frame the piece in a similar way: “*A Short Border Handbook* combines the wittily mischievous eye for absurdity of *How to be an Alien* with the philosophical insight of

³ Vandaele argues that a comic tone is an instantiation of what Goffman would call ‘keying’, namely, the transformation or mitigation of an original frame into something different (in this case, serious into comic) (Vandaele 2010:778). As I have noted elsewhere (Asimakoulas 2009:235), Goffman (1974:79) also suggests that target texts in translation can be seen as keyed frames of originals.

⁴ «Το στοχαστικό αυτό μυθιστόρημα..» (ST blurb).

⁵ «... το δράμα και η τραγωδία συνυπάρχουν με το μαύρο χιούμορ και τη λυτρωτική αυτοειρωνεία» (ST blurb).

Milan Kundera” (TT blurb, original punctuation); “This funny, ironic and intelligent description of immigrant life gives voice to a social group that did not have one, and mediates on the broader tragicomedy of exile” (TT introductory page). Both the ST and TT predispose readers to feel superior over incongruous characters, even if the narrative topic of the book concerns the throes of migrancy and the ethical urgency of conveying a voice that is normally silenced. The comic tone in Kapllani’s work can be associated with a coping function of humour where an inter/intragroup comparison is necessary. As will be argued in the next section, the feelings of superiority and incongruity this comparison generates are based on the absurdity of stigma, which is the foundation of the novel’s characterisation: the staging of the persona of the ‘loser’.

3. “I’m a loser”... and similar bitter realisations

Linking satire to a more specific frame of reference, Colletta (2003) discusses the use of **dark humour** in the work of interwar British novelists (such as Virginia Woolf, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell). This is a type of humour that turns negative feelings (fear, powerlessness) or grim historical circumstances into moments of Freudian narcissism/pleasure without giving in to a mood of despair (Colletta 2003:6, 26); characters, who often resort to repetitive actions as part of the aforementioned coping technique, try to create their own space in a hierarchical, unjust society (see Clarissa in *Mrs Dalloway*) yet ultimately remain socially isolated, ineffectual or prone to the very injustices they oppose (2003:42, 48, 49); both characters and narrators become the target of humour, as comic distance from the grim, dystopian vision they face allows readers to laugh with and at them (2003:27, 46). The linchpin of dark humour is an act of keeping antitheses in suspension so as to deny order or hope in a comic way.

A similar perspective can be seen in a different literary tradition where self-reference has been the mainstay of humour research, namely, **Jewish humour**. Novels featuring Jewish humour are deeply paradoxical in that they project victory-in-defeat without yielding to self-pity (Chard-Hutchinson 1991:179). Like in darkly humorous novels, ambivalent Jewish

humour relies on characterisation that contributes to tension instead of decreasing it (1991:181). This is the realm of the fool-as-protagonist, or *Schlemiezel*, defined as follows:

[...] a loser, a failure, a man out of control, a city dweller living most often on the East coast and, matters of proper geography aside, an “immigrant” who feels he lives among “natives” [... the Schlemiezel] is doomed to live the life he lives – helpless, without alternatives, no better off than he is at the moment. Such a point of view is virtually un-American. It suggests a spirit more often associated with the European immigrant than with the native, a sense of an America close at hand and yet nevertheless [*sic*] out of reach. (Boyer 1991:167)

Interestingly, the word ‘immigrant’ gradually loses the quotation marks in this citation. Jewish humour is a type of humour that addresses the adversities of non-integration, thus creating a ludic ‘negative’ of the image of success and masculinity so prevalent in American society. In the face of adversity, Schlemiezel characters can either rebel by creating their own norms (and living true to them) or adapt to the dominant norms, which requires that they find a respected societal niche for themselves (Boyer 1991:174). What eventually happens is that they oscillate between these two extremes, being marred by the limitations of both (*ibid.*). They embody a *homo incapacitus*, someone who either fails to understand or is overwhelmed by information or circumstances to the point of ineptness (Boyer 1991:168, 175).

The above-mentioned perspectives are highly relevant for a construal of migrant bitter wit, which I will suggest here. The humour of migrants entails a quasi-satirical footing which keeps antitheses with respect to interpersonal and inter-group comparison in suspension. Three closely related questions are important in understanding bitter wit: *From which discourse do the echoed views originate? Why do they sustain feelings of incongruity/superiority?* and *How are these feelings framed in the original and reframed in the translation?*

Starting with the first question, in order to trace migrant bitter wit sequences in a novel, it is necessary to detect the echoic set-up of views on what ‘normal’ identity is. This may be an image of capitalist success and cultural uniformity that essentialist models of identity promote. Majorities endorse such views, which they regiment for the purposes of abjection when encountering ‘Others’.

The second question focuses on how a satirist-satirised-satiree triad can be established, a footing which, on a macro level, may serve the *homo incapacitus* type of characterization mentioned above, usually in a context of comic repetition, surprise or suspense. The constant failure to assimilate of those who live in between cultures sustains an incongruity between NORMAL and ABNORMAL, ACTUAL/EFFORT and POSSIBLE/GOAL, WORTHY and UNWORTHY. Migrants are stigmatised because they strenuously try to adopt native standards but always remain outsiders. Their desire to lead a normal life is thwarted by hardships or lack of opportunities. The end result is that they fail to be in control of themselves. By drawing attention to this lack of control, migrant humour blurs the boundaries between the satirist, the satiree and the satirised. The ineptness of the ‘targets’ of this type of humour has no other causes than the hypocrisy, hierarchical structures and destructive disposition of majorities, who are the gatekeepers of accepted norms. This rehearsed inferiority serves both as a safety valve and a means of turning social injustice upside down. It allows migrant ‘tellers’ of stories to cope with (cultural) trauma, express in-group solidarity and inject the majoritarian reality of readers with absurdity.

The overall rhetorical purpose mentioned above may be important in terms of demarcating the boundaries of **bitter wit sequences**, that is, constellations of textual or visual features where a dominant narrative agent animates oppositional views relevant to the migrant experience. Such sequences may be characterised by a critical inter/intragroup comparison, thematic and spatio-temporal unity and a clustering of typical features that may frame satire, such as figures of speech (hyperbole/understatement, irony, parallelism), word play and marked use of syntax or punctuation.⁶ On a pictorial level, they may consist of various figures of speech (pictorial metaphor, pictorial simile) and semantic aspects of composition (such as angle, vectoriality and so on).⁷ In other words, migrant wit sequences can involve stretches of text where the topic of migration is discursively managed.

⁶ For a typology of what metaphoric and non-metaphoric techniques of satire, see Draitser (1994:48-156).

⁷ See Forceville (1996) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) respectively.

Devising a heuristic model of identifying bitter wit sequences is bound to be characterised by a certain degree of fuzziness. Hatim and Mason (1990:174, 176, 178), for example, point out that textual units may be as long as they need to be in order to serve a rhetorical purpose, which in their model is served by the following three units: a) elements, or small lexicogrammatical units which signal different values, depending on the text type (e.g. words/phrases signalling events in narrative texts and points in an argument in argumentative texts); b) sequences, which consist of more than one element and fulfil a higher-order rhetorical function and have a distinct illocutionary force (e.g. thesis cited to be opposed in argumentative texts); and c) text, a coherent and cohesive unit that consists of more than one sequence and is deemed to be a response to a particular problem, question or goal. The bitter wit sequence suggested here is motivated by the aesthetic economy of the novel itself and by the fact that Kapllani's work focuses on social paradoxes, which makes the search for patterns of opposition and polyphony a priority. Thus, deviating from Hatim and Mason's model, I take any thesis-opposition dyad as one sequence and chapters as textual units, with the broader illocutionary force being opposition to migration stigma.

The book consists of thirty short chapters, plus a prologue and an epilogue. Each of the chapters is divided into italicized and non-italicized sections, the former being more personal/confessional, as they recount the journey of a main, self-narrating character and his companions, and the latter being more communal and argumentative as they project the narrator's view on the universal problems of migrancy. The migration journey recounted in the italicised sections covers the period before the borders with Greece opened, which gives Kapllani ample license to critique Albania's totalitarian past, the main push factor for his characters. The challenges of the journey and the first contact with Greece present further opportunities for migrant wit footings. The comic tone in these sections can be instantiated in contiguous text where a uniform reading is possible if the overall rhetorical focus as well as thematic and spatio-temporal alignment are the unifying principles (see example below). In non-italicised sections, sequence boundaries may be more easily discerned, because Kapllani adopts an essay-like, argumentative style, which allows different topics to emerge, topics often demarcated by paragraph boundaries; in these sequences, the narrator conveys very specific evaluative statements that satirise institutions, persons and events. This persuasive

style harks back to Kapllani's journalism career and has been singled out in Greek reviews as a defining feature of his repertoire (Chatzivasileiou 2006; Mpoukalas 2006).

As a preamble to the ST-TT analysis in section 4, and in order to illustrate how the migrant bitter wit segmentation may work, the following excerpts that focus on police mistreatment will be presented. The examples featured below come from the italicised sections of chapters 23 and 24, which are part of a longer detention event starting with the narrator-protagonist being captured when police respond to reports of theft in a local market by rounding up all Albanians to a warehouse-turned-immigrant reception centre.

Two bitter wit sequences can be postulated for chapter 23. In the first, the narrator appreciatively enters a bookshop and strikes up a conversation (in French) with a French-speaking Greek, only to be dragged out by a policeman. Then Kapllani describes what happens outside the bookshop where one of the narrator's companions is also captured and violently subdued (therefore signalling spatial change). For the sake of brevity, only the comically relevant elements of the sequences will be cited in full below:⁸

Sequence 1 – *To my good luck[idiom:fortunately], there was a customer in the bookshop [...] I was truly spell-bound by the discussion with my interlocutor, I had started to feel that I am somewhere between the Library of Alexandria and the Sistine Chapel, when suddenly I felt on the back of my neck[+informal] a hand pulling me hard by the collar and a harsh voice asking me in broken Albanian: “Emri babai” ... Everything happened in a few seconds. I saw the terrified look of my interlocutor [...]*

Sequence 2 – *Sex kid[see introduction of characters in section 4] was wincing, as his hand hurt very much because of the policeman's blows there in the Western bookshop... (Kapllani 2006:130, 131)⁹*

⁸ All literal translations of the ST are my own. Inset brackets contain metalinguistic comments and numbers for cross-reference, where appropriate. All ST/Greek excerpts will be provided in footnotes.

⁹ Για καλή μου τύχη, στο βιβλιοπωλείο βρισκόταν κάποιος πελάτης [...] Είχα πραγματικά μαγευτεί από την κουβέντα με το συνομιλητή μου. Είχα αρχίσει να νοιώθω ότι βρίσκομαι κάπου ανάμεσα στη Βιβλιοθήκη της Αλεξάνδρειας και την Καπέλα Σιστίνα, όταν ξαφνικά ένοιωσα στο σβέρκο μου ένα χέρι να με τραβάει δυνατά από το γιακά και μια άγρια φωνή να με ρωτά σε σπαστά αλβανικά: «Emri μπαμπάι»... Όλα έγιναν σε λίγα δευτερόλεπτα. Είδα το τρομοκρατιμένο ύφος του συνομιλητή μου[...] Το παιδί του σεξ μόρφαζε, γιατί πονούσε πάρα πολύ το χέρι του από τα χτυπήματα του αστυνομικού εκεί στο δυτικό βιβλιοπωλείο...

In both sequences there is an incongruity between IDEAL and REAL. In the first, the narrating migrant protagonist satisfies his intellectual curiosity, a curiosity that had been suppressed for so long by Enver Hoxha's regime in Albania that the sheer contact with a modest Western bookshop is tantamount to partaking of the magic and wonders of the ancient world and high art. Reality is markedly different: violence ensues and it is framed with the use of an informal word for 'neck', a metonymy ('hand') that reduces the policeman to an aggressive gesture and an evaluative adjective ('harsh') describing the quality of the policeman's voice; the imperfect and situationally incongruous code-switching '*emri babai*' ('father's name') is the only phrase the policeman can mechanically reproduce¹⁰ and it is the abrupt use of Albanian that breaks the illusion of high culture (French was used before that point). The suspension dots after '*emri babai*' may indicate the narrator's perception of time in this twist of fortune. By contrast, the suspension dots in the second sequence, which constitute the concluding sentence of this chapter, signal the narrator's pause for thought, after this shocking experience; the decision to include the deictic 'there' further reinforces the incongruity between violence and book reading in an establishment of the 'free world'. In both sequences the experience and language that is associated with intellectual pursuits is denormalised by state censorship (at home) and security paranoia (in the host country).

Chapter 24 contains only one sequence that straddles several sentences:

Sequence 1 – *In all this confusion sex kid brought us the news item of the day. [...] like a cherry on a cake[idiom:to top it all] a mute had been included to our warehouse too. [...] I do not know where the devil[:emphatic] a pen and a blank sheet could be found in that hell, and [only] in this way someone from the crowd who knew Greek was able to communicate with the Greek whom the policemen had taken to be an Albanian. [...] they, from [looking at] his face[+slang] had categorized him without-discussion[+informal] as an Albanian. [...] He was able to sleep, after a fashion[+formal], because in essence the human[+polite 3rd person reference] must have not been able to*

¹⁰ This is a repeat from chapter 10, where the immigrants were registered at the reception centre. The phrase was explained there, hence the lack of a gloss here.

close an eye[idiom:did not get any sleep +informal] out of anxiety... (ST:136, 137)¹¹

The narrator lambastes the police in what seems to be an ironic reversal of police checks. A mute Greek farmer holding no identity card is bereft of the only characteristics that allow the state to acknowledge citizenship, namely, civic culture (documentation) and language. The assumption is that any marginal identity may be flagged up in a screening process that relies on a simple, verifiable, yet absurdly generalizing model of identity. The ensuing incongruity between ACTUAL and POSSIBLE sustains comic suspense (the mute Greek is only released in chapter 25 after the policemen take him “by the arms like an arrested person” (Kapllani 2006:141) and march him out). The absurd inclusion of a mute Greek to the crowd of the arrested is framed with wordplay (the extension of the Greek idiom “to be a cherry on cake” and of a fossilised emphatic expression “where the devil”-“hell”) and evaluative (in)formal lexical items (highlighted above). The wordplay comically amplifies the chaos caused by an ill-thought out operation to round up immigrants. Register also serves as an ironic cue, conveying hostility towards the discriminatory practices of the police and sympathy towards the Greek mute, who bears the consequences of such practices.

By following the dominant rhetorical focus around clusters of satirical features, 69 bitter wit sequences were identified throughout the novel.¹² The oppositions within these units concern the negative views of state institutions, the media and the general population with respect to migration, or the incongruous relation of migrants to wealth, sex, language, customs and the material culture of a host country. In translation, (para)textual elements that inform bitter wit sequences such as these can be re-framed, thus affecting the voice of the narrating agent, which, according to Slater (2011:98), can be construed in terms of “the spatial, temporal, and

¹¹ Μέσα σε αυτό το χαμό το παιδί του σεξ μάς έφερε την είδηση της ημέρας[...] σαν κερασάκι στην τούρτα είχε προστεθεί στην αποθήκη μας και ένας μουγκός. [...] Δεν ξέρω από πού στο διάολο βρέθηκε μέσα σε εκείνη την κόλαση ένα σιλό και ένα άσπρο χαρτί, και έτσι κάποιος από το πλήθος που ήξερε ελληνικά μπόρεσε να συνεννοηθεί με τον Έλληνα που οι αστυνομικοί τον πέρασαν για Αλβανό.[...] και εκείνοι από τη φάτσα τον έταζαν ασυζητητί για Αλβανό.[...] Κοιμήθηκε, τρόπος του λεγειν, γιατί στην ουσία ο άνθρωπος δεν πρέπει να έκλεισε μάτι από την αγωνία του...

¹² Some chapters, such as chapters 11 and 16, featured none, and the epilogue was intentionally excluded because the TT entails an entirely rewritten version.

cognitive location in which the narrator is anchored in the world of the narrative, and from which she tells her story”. Kapllani’s novel is based on the narrator’s change of physical location that has a direct impact on his cognitive positioning vis-à-vis identity. Since satire by definition relies on accentuation, the TT may foreground or background the caricatured identity on which the comic tone relies.

4. Moving targets: Translation of humour in (para)text

The most readily accessible interfaces of migrant humour for readers are the paratextual materials. The reader first encounters the cover of the ST (Figure 1), which has a black and white photograph featuring a stencilled graffiti drawn on an old, plastered, grey wall canvas depicting a young girl releasing a heart-shaped, red balloon into the wind. At first glance, this sequence has no discernible bitter wit footing, yet a bottom-up observation may reveal a diffuse tension between pictorial elements. The visual language used is a figure of speech, perhaps a metaphor of the future of social groups/society, hope and aspirations. The incongruity may reside in the opposition between the vibrant red colour of the balloon and the side-angle gaze of the stern-looking girl, which invites observation rather than participation.¹³ In the foreground, pavement stones and the encroaching roadside dust serve as indexes of a derelict urban space, (or of heavy construction); footmarks leading to and away from the graffiti girl may signal creativity, travel, or even pilgrimage in that urban setting, thus serving as sequence enhancers, or elements that elaborate a single sequence (Hatim and Mason 1990:176). Then the title, in sombre black fonts, reads: *Small Border Diary*. The broader discourse the designer of the cover page is trying to elicit here is perhaps the tenacity of walls and borders (even in urban spaces) or the desertification of ancestral homelands due to migration, both of which go against visions of ‘normalcy’. On the other hand, the red balloon is a (nostalgic) reminder of cultural vitality.

¹³ See also Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:120, 144).

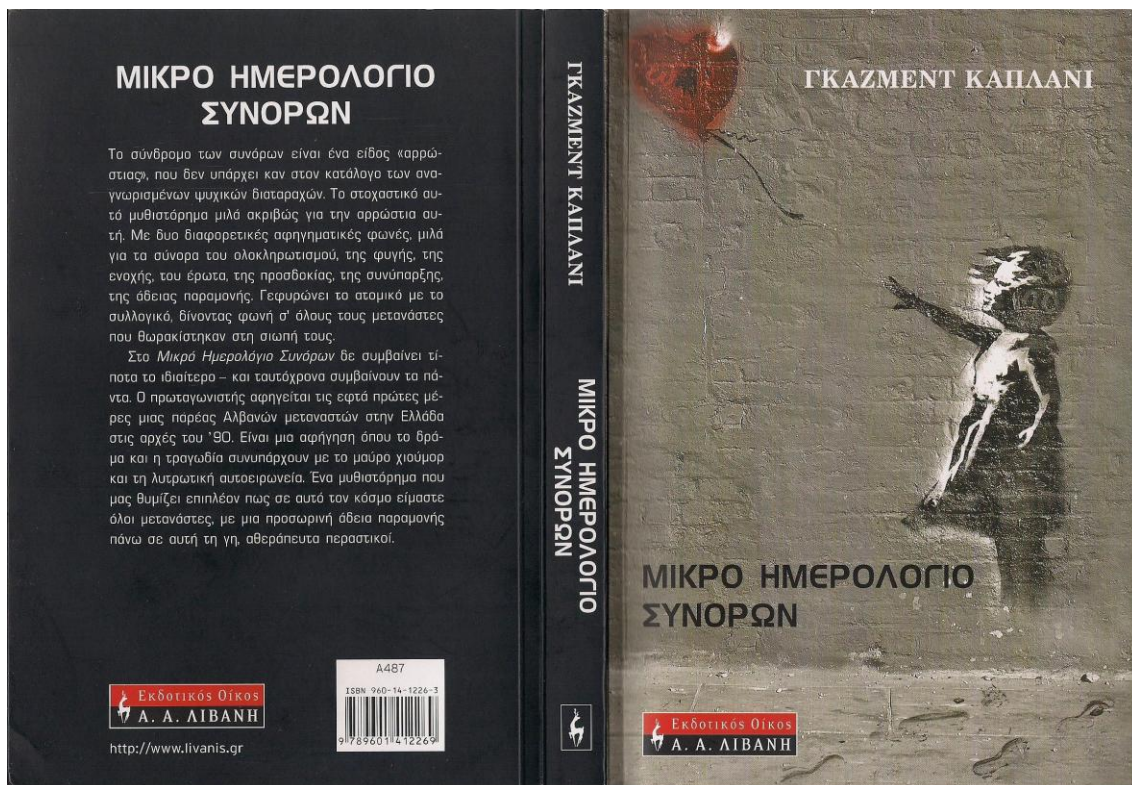


Figure 1: Greek Paratexts¹⁴

The English version takes the same basic concept of exclusion from normalcy but presents it less ambiguously, with elements borrowed from surreptitious acts of spying or of a police chase (Figure 2). The incongruities in the visuals (CONTROL versus EVASION) are supported by a sustained exaggeration effect. Both the front cover and the blurb consist of the same visual sequence: an outsized, whitewashed yet slightly cracked wall blocking the view of what lies beyond, under a blue sky. This is again a visual metaphor of migration, but one that is complemented by caricaturing. The young man tries (too hard) to remain inconspicuous. He wears loose fit jeans, a black T-shirt with matching black cap and sun glasses and has climbed to a vantage point that allows him to look beyond it (with a left-to-right direction of gaze). A similar caricature effect is animated by graphological matter. The title is spread over four lines and iconically resembles a scaffold on which the young man stands. The fonts are in different, vibrant colours; they have rough print outlines; the definite article featured at the top does not touch the x-line and it is tilted to the right in relation to the y axis. Thus, a visual

¹⁴ Reproduced with the kind permission of Livanis Publishing.

parallelism to the young man's gaze is created, possibly inviting viewers to participate in this gaze. The cartoon-like nature of the fonts also becomes a metaphor of exuberance and rebellion.¹⁵ The wall continues to the blurb which also features the outline of a man with an Alsatian guard dog on a leash in the lower left-hand side corner. The dark figure is a visual metaphor of anonymity and can be simultaneously serious (the tyranny of control) and facetious (an inept border patroller), as it clashes with the bright tones of the cover page and the migrant spy respectively.

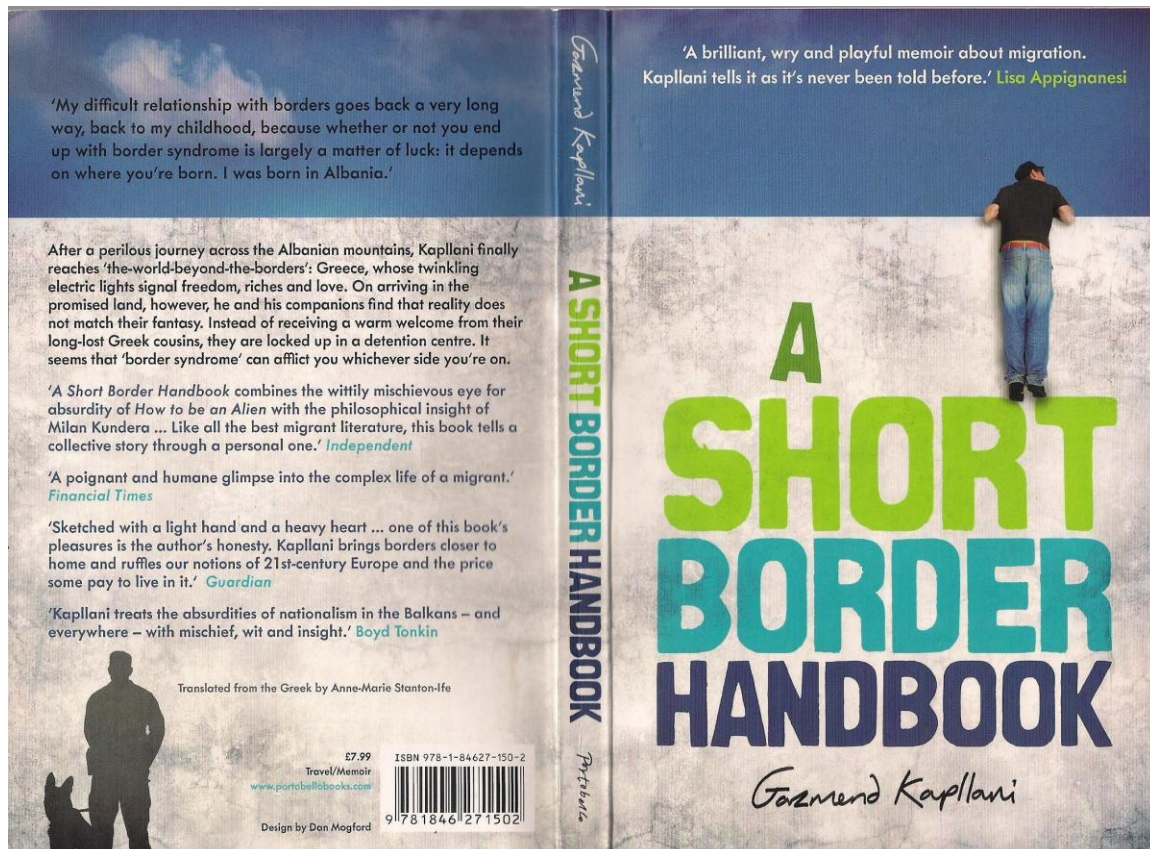


Figure 2: Target Text Paratexts¹⁶

Unlike the matter-of-fact ST blurb (see section 2), the TT not only provides a summary of the plot, but also creates the space for a second migrant bitter wit sequence:

¹⁵ According to Van Leeuwen (2006:147, 150), irregularity in fonts gives a message a distinctive signature and it may signal resistance to the norm of typical writing, as taught at school, or rebellion against any coercive institution in general.

¹⁶ Reproduced with the kind permission of Portobello Publications.

After a perilous journey [...] Kapllani finally reaches ‘the-world-beyond-the-borders’: Greece, whose twinkling lights signal freedom, riches and love. On arriving in the promised land, however, he and his companions find that reality does not match their fantasy. Instead of receiving a warm welcome from their long-lost Greek cousins, they are locked up in a detention centre. It seems that ‘border syndrome’ can afflict you whichever side you’re on. (TT blurb)

The naïve perspective of the characters is framed here with an echoic mention of bliss. The initial, idealised description is undermined by the mention of ethnic bonds with the Greeks, which are proved to be unrealistic. The author of this excerpt foregrounds the incongruity between the desires of the characters, through the hyperbolic evaluation of assumed cultural ties as familial bonds, and concrete reality, as more borders are erected in the very place that is supposed to be border-free. The last sentence highlights the epistemic deficiency of characters by lowering the modality for something that is blatantly obvious (‘it seems that’) and by concluding with a blunt statement (the contracted form “you’re on” also clashes with the more formal “afflict”).

In the main body of the text, the targets of Kapllani’s bitter wit include the self-deprecating narrator, specific characters and the readers. The following discussion looks at each of them in turn. The main focus is the strategy of distortion, which, according to Katan (2004:188), “is neither good nor bad [but] a way of directing the addressee to what the speaker or writer considers important” and which in the case of evaluative statements may involve overtranslating in order to heighten contextual effects for readers (ibid.:193).

The overt agent of bitter humour in the novel is the implied author/narrator. His stance becomes clear from the very first page of the prologue, where he admits that he suffers from the so-called border syndrome:

(1) ST: *It is about a type of disease that I can with great difficulty [+formal] explain to you what it resembles exactly. This disease does not exist in the known catalogue of recognized psychological conditions, such as agoraphobia, acrophobia or depression, for example. Nevertheless, I can give*

you an idea about the symptoms that accompany it. Not right now, a bit later. But I know that there are other people too, very many people, who suffer from border syndrome. Whoever has never desired to cross some border or has never felt rejectable[+formal] by a border will find[+continuous] it difficult to understand us... (Kapllani 2006:9-10, original font/punctuation)¹⁷

TT: Border syndrome is an illness that's difficult to describe with precision. Unlike agoraphobia or depression, it doesn't feature on the list of recognized mental disorders. But what I can do, perhaps a little later, is outline some of the main symptoms. I do know that there are other sufferers, a great many of them. Those who have never experienced the urge to cross a border, or who have never experienced rejection at a border, will have a hard time understanding us. (Kapllani 2009:2, original font/punctuation)¹⁸

In this sequence, the narrator makes a pledge to explain this inscrutable illness. Appealing to narrative curiosity, he foreshadows the events which will explain the syndrome specifics. The obvious incongruity is again the lack of normalcy experienced by the migrant, and which is linguistically modelled after an impossible diagnosis. The narrator implies that just as 'border syndrome' is not recognized as a condition, so too the status and condition of migrancy remains invisible, even though scores of people experience it. The incongruity here is amplified by the fact that the self-diagnosing migrant needs an entire book to define rejection to majoritarian readers. Linguistically, the sequence employs formal, field-specific register ('agoraphobia', 'acrophobia', 'depression') and a marked adjective ('rejectable') in the last sentence that enhances the personification of borders. In contrast, the use of informal style in the TT may be seen as a distortion technique (see the omission of 'acrophobia' and the use of expressions such as 'will have a hard time'). Since this is only the beginning of the novel and readers are aware of Kapllani's status as a migrant (if not through experience, then through the paratexts), it may be assumed that both the ST and the TT set the scene for the entire novel by foregrounding the authorial 'I' as someone who is incongruously inadequate like the

¹⁷ Πρόκειται για ένα είδος αρρώστιας που δυσκολεύομαι σφόδρα να σας εξηγήσω με τι μοιάζει ακριβώς. Η αρρώστια αυτή δεν υπάρχει καν στον κατάλογο των αναγνωρισμένων ψυχικών διαταραχών, όπως είναι για παράδειγμα, η αγοραφοβία, η υψοφοβία ή η κατάθλιψη. Μπορώ, παρ' όλα αυτά, να σα δώσω μια ιδέα για τα συμπτώματα που τη συνοδεύουν. Όχι τώρα αμέσως, λίγο αργότερα. Πάντως ξέρω πως υπάρχουν και άλλοι άνθρωποι, πάρα πολλοί άνθρωποι, που πάσχουν από το σύνδρομο των συνόρων. Όσοι δε λαχτάρησαν ποτέ να περάσουν κάποιο σύνορο ή δεν ένοιωσαν ποτέ απορριπτέοι από κάποιο σύνορο θα δυσκολεύονται να μας καταλάβουν...

¹⁸ The TT prologue and epilogue are the only TT chapters where the (non)italicization patterns of the ST are not adhered to.

‘loser-characters’ in the novel. However, by prioritising accessibility, the TT backgrounds the mock-grandiloquent style of the self-diagnosing loser.

By far, the greatest challenge facing migrants is the imperative to assimilate. The narrator elaborates on the incongruities this may generate, as is the case in the following example taken from chapter 4:

(2) ST: Sequence 1 - THE WAY IN WHICH A MIGRANT ABANDONS his land confers upon him something of the dazzle of a hero.**[a]** But in his everyday life he is fragile, confused, sometimes[+formal]/[b] ridiculous. Like a card player who has dreamt up the grand scheme, but who does not know the most basic thing: how to play the game...**[c]**

[... **Sequence 2]** But he does not know the language and he is terrified, because those locals speak it so fast, that it’s like he listens to a sewing machine... No, there is no way to learn it, they and their language can go to hell...**[d]** but if he does not learn it, he cannot find a job, therefore, he cannot survive. [...] Then he discovers that he has started to like it, because now that he can speak he is not a mute presence. Yet his enthusiasm wanes quickly. He does not speak the language, he breaks it, he literally butchers[+formal] it. Feminine names he turns into masculine, masculine into feminine and most nouns into neuter. He was mute[/vounós/], now he is annoying[+slang, /spastikós/]...**[e]** (SBD:28-29)¹⁹

TT: There is something heroic**[i]** about the way a migrant abandons his native land. Nevertheless, in his everyday life, he is fragile, confused, and at times ridiculous, like a card player who dreams of that one amazing trick but lacks essential knowledge of the rules of the game.**[ii]**

[...] But he doesn’t know the language, and he is terrified, because these locals speak so quickly – it’s like listening to a sewing machine. No, there’s no way

¹⁹ Ο ΤΡΟΠΟΣ ΠΟΥ ΕΓΚΑΤΑΛΕΙΠΕΙ την πατρίδα του ο μετανάστης τού προσδίδει κάτι από τη λάμψη ενός ήρωα. Αλλά στην καθημερινή του ζωή είναι εύθραυστος, μπερδεμένος, ενίοτε γελοίος. Σαν τον χαρτοπαίχτη που ονειρεύτηκε το μεγάλο κόλπο, αλλά δεν ξέρει το πιο ουσιαστικό: πώς παίζεται το παιχνίδι... [...] Δεν ξέρει όμως τη γλώσσα και έχει τρομοκρατηθεί, γιατί αυτοί οι ντόπιοι τη μιλάνε τόσο γρήγορα, που είναι σαν να ακούει ραπτομηχανή... Όχι αποκλείεται να τη μάθει, ας πάνε στο διάβολο εκείνοι και η γλώσσα τους... αλλά αν δεν τη μάθει, δεν μπορεί να βρει δουλειά, άρα δεν μπορεί να επιβιώσει. [...] Έπειτα ανακαλύπτει ότι πως έχει αρχίσει να του αρέσει, γιατί τώρα που τη μιλά δεν είναι πια μια βουβή παρουσία. Ο ενθουσιασμός του όμως ξεθωριάζει γρήγορα. Αυτός δεν τη μιλά τη γλώσσα, τη σπάει, κυριολεκτικά την κατακρεουργεί. Τα θηλυκά ονόματα τα κάνει αρσενικά, τα αρσενικά θηλυκά και τα περισσότερα ουσιαστικά ουδέτερα. Ήταν βουβός, έγινε σπαστικός...

he's going to learn it. They can go hang, the lot of them, and take their language with them.[iii] But if he doesn't learn it, how is he going to find a job? How will he survive?[iv] [...] It starts to grow on him. He speaks it and is no longer just some mute presence. But his enthusiasm is short-lived. In his hands, the language is not spoken but broken. He doesn't just break it, he butchers it.[v] Feminine names become masculine, masculine feminine, and most nouns are neutered. Better mute than annoying.[vi] (SBH:18)

The narrator in this non-italicised section foregrounds the ineptness of migrants by alluding to a general discourse of success: a successful individual is an assimilated and distinguished member of society. The incongruity here can be seen in a series of actions and confused thoughts. The Greek original initiates a straw man gambit by offering a detailed description of the migrant hero, with formality serving as an ironic cue (“confers”, “dazzle”, “sometimes” in ST2[a,b]). Then a simile is used to show the migrant’s erroneous judgement in setting priorities. There is a marked incongruity between the effort that goes into the proverbial lucrative ploy and the migrant’s ignorance vis-à-vis the basic rules (“grand scheme” in Greek also hyperbolically refers to elaborate heists; ST2[c]). This incongruity is foregrounded with the use of punctuation; the fundamental assumption is placed after a colon in the end and is followed by triple dots which invite readers to a pause of pensiveness. The TT does not employ formal register for this opening statement (“There is something heroic”) in TT2[i], but relies on an incremental, merged sentence conveying the collection of anti-heroic descriptions in TT2[ii]; the use of the distal deictic “that one”, however, can be said to increase the narrator’s ironic distance from the “amazing trick” that he cites as a locutor.

In the second sequence, the narrator in the ST employs free indirect discourse to highlight a migrant’s initial and then sustained frustration when attempting to learn the language of the host country. Entering the thoughts (through the sewing machine simile), as well as the speech (“they and their language can go to hell”) of a frustrated outsider in ST2[d], the narrator shows how every attempt to assimilate fails. Even after the first obstacle of mastering the language is overcome and the migrant becomes content with his more vocal self, the bitter realisation that he mangles that language dawns on him. The cumulative use of asyndetons, the use of “literally” with a formal word for “butcher”, and the rhyming, antithetical pair “*vouvós-spastikós*” (“mute-annoying”) are the caricature devices serving the increasingly

deploring voice of the narrator in ST2[e]. The TT refracts this ironic distance by raising orality. The use of contractions, the expanded dismissive statement (“they can go hang”) and direct questions in TT2[iii,iv] indicate more clearly the source of the speech, a character who is constantly running out of options. Interestingly, in TT2[v] the translator rearranges the first asyndeton into two sentences; the first contains a rhyming antithetical pair (“not spoken but broken”, possibly a compensation for the antithesis in ST2[e]), and the second has an incremental structure of a negative verb with ‘just’ (“doesn’t just break it”), followed by a literal translation of ‘butcher’ in TT2[v]. The final sentence is elliptical (TT2[vi]), a stylistic choice which matches the orality of the preceding free indirect discourse, that is, the speech of the universal migrant persona this chapter refers to.

As can be seen in the first two examples, a migrant loser is invisible when experiencing hardship and visible when it comes to cultural proficiency. The distortion translation techniques featured in these two examples are also indicative of two recurring patterns in the novel: the raising of orality and the backgrounding of register clashes. More specifically, eleven out of the fifteen sequences where free indirect discourse is used exhibit an increase of the level of orality. Considering Vandaele’s argument that “[t]he slightest hint of intentionality – a narrator’s voice verbalizing a fact – foregrounds mockery of the character” (2010:770), the echoing of speech in the TT here brings the narrator’s voice even more to the foreground and creates further opportunities for empathy/distance in a novel where self-deprecation is key.

On the other hand, register clashes, a typical device in humorous Greek novels (Antonopolou 2002:214), were not replicated on a one-to-one basis in the TT. While ten sequences featured similar register patterns, register incongruities were eliminated in twelve – with six featuring a formal-to-neutral and six a formal-to-informal pattern. The rationale behind these solutions cannot be fully justified, but fewer register clashes mean a more coherent, accessible voice. The formal-to-informal patterns certainly tally with the raised orality tendency mentioned above as well as with the raised orality in ten additional sequences with second person narration or reported speech with quoted insets (where syntax, punctuation and lexical items/discourse markers are manipulated). Perhaps an additional constraint in the transfer of

register clashes is the morphological richness stemming from the diglossic past of Greek, which allows register to be used very productively in contextually and co-textually incongruous configurations. Such source culture-specific elements may run counter to resources available in English.

As in many types of humour, migrant bitter wit sequences are defined by the priority that the perspective of the dominant narrative agent, the narrator, takes over the perspective of other characters. In chapter 18, for instance, the main characters (the narrator, Xhemal, Mareglén (also known as ‘sex kid’) and two drivers from Tirana) make a short journey from their immigrant reception centre to the nearby town of Igoumenitsa, hoping to find work. After witnessing the wealth of the locals and engaging in an absurd comparative history exercise, they stop outside a cafeteria where beautiful women can be seen:

(3) ST: *While we kept walking, sex kid stopped in front of the window screen of a café [...] “I have never seen such beautiful girls”, he said in all his innocence. “Where could you see beautiful girls, in your village? You have only seen cows in your life”, taunted Xhemal in a manner of a person who has just arrived on the latest flight from New York.[a] [...] One of the drivers [...] said that prosperity spoils men in the end, it makes them soft, like women, and he gave an original explanation, according to which only Albanian men, no matter how well they lived, would never become like women, because first they are very hungry for women and second, and most important, they have masculinity in their DNA.[b] (Kapllani 2006:103-104)²⁰*

TT: *[...] While we were walking, Sex Boy stopped outside a busy café [...] ‘I’ve never seen such beautiful girls in all my life,’ he said innocently. ‘Where did you expect to see beautiful girls – in your village? You’d be lucky to see a cow where you come from!’ joked Xhemal with the urbanity of someone who has just stepped off the last flight from JFK.[i] [...] One of the drivers [...] responded by] explaining that economic well being destroys men in the end, making them soft like women, and gave an original interpretation, according*

²⁰ [...] Ενώ συνεχίζαμε να περπατάμε, το παιδί του σεξ σταμάτησε μπροστά στην τζαμαρία μιας καφετέρειας [...] «Δεν έχω δει ποτέ τόσο ωραίες κοπέλες», είπε με όλη την αθωότητά του. «Πού να έβλεπες εσύ ωραίες κοπέλες, στο χωριό σου; Εσύ μόνο αγελάδες έχεις δει στη ζωή σου», τον κοροΐδισε ο Τζεμάλ με ύφος ανθρώπου που μόλις είχε φτάσει με την τελευταία πτήση από τη Νέα Υόρκη. [...] Ένας από τους οδηγούς [...] είπε πως η ευημερία τελικά χαλάει τους άντρες, τους κάνει μαλθακούς, σαν γυναίκες, και έδωσε μια πρωτότυπη εξήγηση, σύμφωνα με την οποία μόνο οι Αλβανοί άντρες, όσο καλά κι αν ζούσαν δε θα γίνονταν ποτέ σαν γυναίκες, γιατί πρώτον είναι πολύ πεινασμένοι για γυναίκες και δεύτερον, και το κυριότερο, τον ανδρισμό τον έχουν στο DNA τους.

to which only Albanian men, however well they may live, could never become effeminate, because first of all they are all so sex-starved, and secondly, and more significantly, their DNA is far too macho for that to be a possibility.[ii] (Kapllani 2009:86-87)

In this sequence, there is an incongruity between normal and abnormal levels of masculinity. Equivalent conversations may be held among in-groups of Greek men in cafés, where (friendly) jibes of Alfa-male intra/inter-group comparison is the norm. The discussion between the characters is, however, situationally incongruous. It takes place outside a coffee shop, in a post-communist context where masculinity may be readily linked to material possessions. Migrants are therefore automatically relegated to the bottom of the envisaged male hierarchy. The incongruous statements of the characters are framed in reported speech, by a superior narrator. First, a character dubbed ‘sex kid’ – a label matching his consistent comic characterisation as a young migrant obsessing about sex – becomes the target of Xhemal’s rejoinder on his rustic provenance and lack of sexual experience. The narrator is quick to undermine Xhemal’s sense of superiority by comparing him to a New Yorker (ST3[a]). The TT signals this jibe even more clearly by employing the hyponymic “urbanity” (instead of “style”) and “stepped off” (instead of “arrived”) as well as the metonymic “JFK” (instead of “New York”) in TT3[i]. The overt, more specific description renders the New York arrival scenario even more unrealistic, thus accentuating the incongruity between thoughts and speech.

Another travelling companion comments on the deleterious effects of prosperity by rehearsing a cliché, an argument of masculine exceptionalism that may be used for bonding purposes, and for his critique of wealth-loving westerners. The ST alludes to the speech patterns of this character by using a repetition (“like women”, possibly for lack of more specific vocabulary), cohesive markers (‘first’, ‘second’) and the hyperbolic cliché concerning the genetic tenacity of Albanian masculinity in particular (“they have masculinity in their DNA”; ST3[b]). The TT avoids repetition, but uses the same cohesive markers and an expanded exaggerating personification in the end (“DNA is far too macho”) with a syllogism frame (“for that to be a possibility”) in TT3[ii]. In this way, the narrator’s distance from a pseudo-scientific explanation becomes more pronounced.

The foregrounding techniques in example 3 indicate an attempt on the part of the translator to convey the absurdity of the reported statements by enhancing the narrator's sarcasm. Indeed, ironic expansions occur in 27 out of the 29 sequences where ironic cues are used. The translator tends to add exclamation marks, quotation marks and other editorial techniques, evaluative adjectives and adverbs (e.g. “uncanny”, “mere”, “apparently”, “extremely”, “constantly”, “even”) and wordier renditions that spell out the illocutionary force of the source text. An example of this can be found in the following excerpts in chapter 24:

(4) ST: Sequence 1 – The caption accompanying the news item: “And[:emphatic] Albanians got expensive”[a] [...] It is this microscopic and that suddenly renders immense the rift[b] between [...] those who were once immigrants and those who are [*immigrants*] today.

[... **Sequence 2** –] A part of the local press taunted the Greeks then, because, although until that point they were the cheapest and their employers used them as strike-breakers, and they[:*they too*] suddenly decided to become expensive[c]. [...] (Kapllani 2006:138-139)²¹

TT: The caption flashing across the bottom of the screen reads: ‘Even Albanians are getting expensive!’[i] [...] It’s that microscopic, seemingly innocuous little even that does all the work[ii]. It establishes the distance between [...] yesterday’s migrants and today’s migrants.

[...] Much of the local press back then poured scorn on the Greeks, because up to this point they had been the cheapest labour around, and were sometimes used by their bosses as strikebreakers, and then suddenly, there they were, wanting to be expensive too.[iii] (Kapllani 2009:116-117)

Migrant bitter wit in these two sequences is built around a WORTHY-UNWORTHY and PAST-PRESENT incongruity respectively. More specifically, they aim to undermine a static model of culture in favour of what Clifford would characterise as a view that embraces hybridity, displacement and disputed historicity (1997:23). Unreasonable ideas and actions are traced in discriminatory media discourse, which erases the historical relativity of migrancy. The first

²¹Η λεζάντα συνοδεύει την είδηση: «Ακρίβυναν και οι Αλβανοί» [...] Είναι αυτό το μικροσκοπικό και που ξαφνικά καθιστά τεράστιο το χάσμα ανάμεσα [...] σε αυτούς που ήταν κάποτε μετανάστες και σε αυτούς που είναι σήμερα. [...] Μια μερίδα του τοπικού Τύπου γλευάζε τότε τους Έλληνες, γιατί, ενώ μέχρι εκείνη τη στιγμή εκείνοι ήταν οι πιο φτηνοί και ενίοτε οι εργοδότες τους χρησιμοποιούσαν ως απεργοσπάστες, ξαφνικά αποφάσισαν να γίνουν και εκείνοι ακριβοί.

sequence focuses on a headline. In terms of linguistic composition, the ST uses a marked editorial intervention – italicized emphatic “*and*” – twice (ST4[a]; ST4[b]); in the latter case “*and*” is used as part of an antithesis scheme (“microscopic *and*”-“immense rift”). This scheme, in combination with “suddenly” foregrounds a cognitive-cum-emotional impact, a dawning realisation on the part of the migrant recipient of the message that prevailing norms have relegated him to a category of second-class citizens all along. The TT uses italics only in the second instance of the emphatic, yet distance from the view echoed is heightened in two ways: first, an exclamation mark is used in TT4[i]; this exclamation mark can be less clearly attributed to the narrator, so intensity/surprise in the cited news caption is foregrounded. Unfavourable inter-group comparisons in discriminatory language are laid bare in TT4[ii] by employing an ironic expansion (“seemingly innocuous little... does all the work”) and a new declarative sentence (“establishes the distance”) that sounds more direct/definitive than the cleft sentence of the original.

Ironic expansion can also be seen in the second sequence (“there they were”; TT4[iii]). Through this expansion, the translator inflects the voice of the author/narrator conveying the incongruous fact that Greeks have also been the migrant targets of similar discriminatory discourse in early twentieth century America, a society that had (and has) its own norms on what the role of immigrants should be. Despite this amplification of ironic intention, it can be assumed that Greek readers are experientially or emotionally closer to both their migration past and the visibility of Albanians in the Greek media (see Tsaliki 2008) than English-speaking readers. Reminders that Greece has traditionally been an emigrating country (also elaborated in Chapter 23) debunk any dogma of exclusion. Such a rhetorical move implies the need for critical self-reflection, a state of mind that cannot simply be the prerogative of the culturally non-assimilated migrants. The distance between satiree and satirised is reduced ever so slightly more for Greek readers.

5. Conclusion

This paper has offered a tentative framework for the analysis of a phenomenon that, arguably, needs to be subjected to greater scrutiny in translation studies. Migrant humour is an identity-organisation marker that serves as a coping mechanism and as such shares features with other socially relevant types of humour. The concept of *migrant bitter wit* proposed here encompasses this perspective as it is predicated on a minoritarian positionality with a fluid satirist-satirised-satiree footing, a cognitive location that may be framed differently in translation. Serving as a link to the overall rhetorical purpose of Gazmend Kapllani's novel, bitter wit was used in order to identify units of darkly humorous discourse that put majoritarian views into satirical perspective, namely, instances where a thesis-of-exclusion is cited to be opposed subtly or directly. Such antitheses, which were also shown to operate in the multimodal environment of paratextual features, are reframed in the translation: register clashes are backgrounded and levels of orality and irony increase. The ensuing foregrounding of narrator/character speech patterns and homogeneity of discourse may reflect the translator's own prioritising of the comic tone and of the personal voice of the 'migrant loser'.²² There are even overt references to the translator's "sardonic poise" (Tonkin 2010) and "convincingly colloquial English" (Zinovieff 2009) as defining features of the book. Although the translator may not have had a translation brief with substantially different specifications, the English version was bound to address a larger, more multicultural audience in the UK, something that may explain the reframed voice identified by reviewers. A less predictable shift, perhaps, was the fact that the book was marketed as 'travel literature' in book shops,²³ whereas the ST publisher and Greek reviewers presented it as a darkly humorous novel. In combination with the physical presentation of the translation, which is saturated with caricaturing elements, the more colloquial, accessible TT predisposes English-speaking readers to instantly recognise the incongruous voice of someone who is in between locations and cultures.

A more extensive study of textual norms in relation to migrant bitter wit can involve a corpus of several TTs; the latter can be translations from Greek (where a substantial body of literature deals with migrancy, but perhaps fewer authors have exclusively focused on Greece as a migration destination or have been migrants themselves) or from other languages narrating

²² The UK press, for example, reinforces a frame of broad popular appeal and topicality for what is consistently labelled as a 'memoir' (see Jaggi 2009; Kassabova 2009).

²³ Stanton-Ife, personal communication, 05 October 2012.

other migrant experiences. The extendibility of the framework suggested here can be linked to migrant visibility in the target culture. The international presence of Kapplani's work has increased after its translation, something that may help bring to the fore a group of 'new migrants' which is particularly neglected in the UK (Vathi 2010:6). Given the 'superdiversity' (Vertovec 2007) of any modern metropolis, and the potential presence of bitter wit in more factual genres – humorous journalism, op-ed articles, blogs, or multimodal texts – the projection and translation of coping mechanisms used by other migrant communities, old and new, can also be examined.

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