Article

SEXUALITIES

Truths, fakes and the deserving queer migrant

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Abstract

This article explores the role of truth within queer migration. By analysing a host of cultural production – including the verbatim theatre performance *Rights of Passage* by Claire Summerskill, the short film *Crypsis* by Christopher McGill, the ethnofictional film *Samira* by Nicola Mai, and the film *The Amazing Truth About Queen Raquela* by Olaf de Fleur Johannesson – I will challenge the necessity of attempting to discover the truth of queer migrants as sexual and gendered subjects, particularly as related to asylum claims. Yet if questions are raised about the importance of truth, this also demands analysing the role of faking sexuality and gender, and 'fake' queer migrants more broadly, referring to those who allegedly fabricate their sexuality and gender to claim asylum. Instead of suggesting faking implies the possibility of undeservingness, I use faking as a theoretical tool to understand the demands of truth, and how faking may become means to subvert the grounds of who is considered a deserving queer migrant seeking asylum. By disrupting the binary between truths and fakes, the very notion of there being truths of queer migrants (and the subject more broadly) will be questioned.

Keywords

queer, migrant, sexuality, gender, truth

Introduction

This article explores the role of truth within cultural production surrounding queer migration. More specifically, I use cultural production to challenge how the alleged truth of sexual and gendered subjectivity is demanded of queer migrants in, or seeking to move to, contemporary Europe, particularly as related to asylum claims but not only. Instead of suggesting queer migrants are encouraged to tell the truth within such domains, I argue

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queer migrants are encouraged to approximate the truth. The approximation of truth is desired even if recognising that accessing (what might be considered) the truth is an impossibility. Yet if the truth is merely being approximated, this asks us to grapple with the ethics of just how much truth may be approximated. For example, is there an ethical difference between faking the way one *does* their sexuality and gender to claim asylum, and one faking their sexuality and gender altogether? Ultimately, this article will question the desire for truth, instead arguing that faking is a subversive means to undermine notions of deservingness within queer migration.

Although some cultural production may seek to free its participants from having to prove anything to the spectator (Raboin, 2016), another use of cultural production involves shifting the attention to how queer migrants must prove a certain truth to become intelligible. As Thibaut Raboin (2016: 137) suggests, '[d]istancing itself from the notion of truthfulness, or at least revoking the way truth is conceptualised and used, [this] also dismisses a form of power based on the manufacture of truth by the testimonial economy'. I will build on such arguments to question the very notion of the truth. This is not inherently about freeing the subject from the burden of proving their truth but grappling with the impossibility of truth. If a Foucauldian lens suggests power operates by distinguishing truth from what is masked (Foucault, 2011), exposing the desire for truth becomes means of displacing the truth entirely, recognising this puts on display what is deemed truth may simply be demands that subjects approximate the truth. This is especially important to consider as Foucault (2011) suggests questions of truth are premised upon about who has the power to claim authority over the truth. In the context of asylum, questions of legitimacy are particularly relevant because immigration regimes have specific demands for truth. Immigration regimes might therefore be understood as having the power to determine the truth, or at least which truth is articulated, because of their very demand for a particular truth of queer migration.

After theoretically elaborating upon the existence of multiple *truths* in the next section, I will explore how the truth of sexuality and gender is demanded by immigration regimes by analysing the verbatim theatre performance *Rights of Passage* by Claire Summerskill (2016) and the short film *Crypsis* by Christopher McGill (2020). Whereas *Rights of Passage* brings to light the demands of truth placed onto queer migrants in the United Kingdom, *Crypsis* focuses on the way queer migrants go to such lengths to approximate the truth. Both interventions raise questions about the necessity of adhering to the truth being demanded by immigration regimes without them necessarily demanding the embodiment of such truth. I will follow by examining *Samira,* an ethnofictional film by Nicola Mai (2014) that explores the multiple truths that exist within the subject. Although recognising there are multiple truths, this film also explores how truths are highly contextual. I will finish by analysing the film *The Amazing Truth About Queen Raquela* by Olaf de Fleur Johannesson (2008a). Stylised as a documentary, the film blurs reality and fiction by exploring the desire of the protagonist seeking to migrate from the Philippines to Europe. Incorporating both reality and fiction raises questions about not only what the truth is but whether the search for the truth is even possible. The article will conclude with a discussion on the link between truth and deservingness.

I approach cultural production as artistic and documentative works that are always situated within the broader conditions of how they are produced, circulated, and consumed (Bourdieu, 1993). The cultural production I explore, then, questions the importance of truth, knowing it is a murky concept that may otherwise mask how the subject is interpellated. The cultural production being explored therefore does important work debunking the notion of there being an inherent truth that can be expressed to adequately reflect the diversity of queer migration. Instead of only analysing what is being represented within such cultural production, I am more focused on the questions raised by these interventions into the social field. If cultural production remains a source of igniting new understandings of how to approach sexuality and gender, I suggest paying critical attention to the way approximations of truth advance understandings of how the subject is constantly being reproduced. In sum, this means I am theorising alongside the interventions of cultural production to help think about truth within queer migration.

It should be noted there are two specific contexts being discussed here: the material experiences of queer migrants and cultural production. There are, therefore, different consequences with how the truth plays out in these different domains. In the former, there are individuals being subjected to the demands of immigration officials who have the ability to determine their fate. In the latter, there is the freedom to experiment and imagine otherwise. This brings us to a discussion of what Melissa Autumn White (2014: 978) terms tactics and imaginaries, or 'the urgency of acting "now" and the open question of "the future"'. Yet what White suggests is that both tactics and imaginaries remain pivotal to radical change and should be seen as entwined through the way they help dialectically inform each other (see also Butler and Spivak, 2007). Playing with the truth in cultural production, often through dramatised means, highlights the problem of demanding a particular truth within the material experiences of queer migrants. The point is of this article is therefore not exactly to assess whether queer migrants have any choice about performing this truth (although I would suggest the possibility of asylum often depends on it), but rather to interrogate this desire for truth in the first place. Although all migrants applying for asylum have to prove a particular truth aligned with the demands of the United Nations (1951) 'Refugee Convention', it is especially problematic for queer migrants because there is the difficulty of proving an aspect of subjectivity as fluid as sexuality and gender; and because there is the difficulty of linking this to their membership of a 'particular social group' – the grounds of persecution most commonly used by queer migrants in Europe to claim asylum (Spijkerboer and Jansen, 2011). An extra difficulty is that such membership should be socially perceived or 'immutable'. This is why legal scholars have categorised these demands for truth of 'identity' or subjectivity for queer migrants seeking asylum as unfair (Dustin and Ferreira, 2021). Other researchers might therefore find it interesting to explore other aspects of subjectivity which are difficult to prove as truth when applying for asylum through the category of social group (e.g. families, tribes and occupational groups).

Truths, fakes, neither?

Who is the queer migrant? Or perhaps more aptly, is there any truth about queer migrants that might be ascertained from attempts to discover their sexual and gendered subjectivity? Early scholarship on queer migration explored how queer migrants subverted the bounds of citizenship and the way borders were attempting to authenticate their sexuality and gender (Cantú, 2009; Luibhéid, 2008). Whether immigration regimes or across society, the latter which can produce a modality of bordering in its own right, there has been an attempt to authenticate not only the experiences of persecution had by queer migrants in Europe and elsewhere but their claimed sexuality and gender (Spijkerboer and Jansen, 2011; Williams, 2020). Such expectations often require queer migrants to adhere to stereotypes of white (homo)normative LGBT persons in Europe (and the global North more broadly) – ranging from producing linear trajectories of sexuality, relying on binary gender norms, or adhering to sociocultural ideas of what their traits and interests might be (Giametta, 2017; Sari, 2020). I do not mean to claim such understandings of sexuality and gender in Europe may not already be held by queer migrants. There is a rich body of scholarship exploring the fluidity between local understandings of sexuality and gender and foreign influence (Altman, 2001; Manalansan, 2003; Boellstorff, 2005). The problem is when queer migrants are expected to conform to particular norms that differ from their own understanding of sexuality and gender. One example challenging this is shown in *Tacit Subjects* by Carlos Ulises Decena (2011: 19), which explores how some Dominican gay or bisexual men living in the United States are 'neither secret nor silent' about their sexuality. Despite nuances existing, the demand for particular stereotypes is often what allows queer migrants to become intelligible within public discourses (Raboin, 2016). Hence, perhaps what remains most troubling is how the notion of truth has come to define the possibility of proving sexuality and gender. If stereotypes are used to interpellate queer migrants, it would seem there is not an attempt to seek the truth of their sexual and gendered subjectivity but whether they can approximate the expected truth.

Although queer migrants seeking asylum may face heightened pressure to conform to the stereotypes being expected, I suggest similar demands of truth are applied to queer migrants more broadly. This is because seeking asylum is only one option (albeit one of few) for queer migrants seeking mobility. At the same time, it is not only immigration regimes where such authentications take place. As Alison Jeffers (2008) argues, the performance of migrant 'stories' is also demanded across society – whether that be within nongovernmental organisations, the media or in the public more broadly. Although keeping this in mind, I do heavily focus on immigration regimes in this article to reflect where such discussions of truth are mostly taking place. Where necessary, I discuss the similarities and differences between experiences within and outside of immigration regimes. Ultimately, it seems we need go further to instead explore how truth comes into play within discussions of queer migration more broadly, especially the way it has been expected a subject may simply tell the truth to become intelligible. The point should be questioning the possibility of seeking the truth as opposed to holding the assumption the truth may exist. Hence, despite Moira Dustin and Nina Held (2018) rightly stressing the need for an intersectional approach to queer migrant subjectivity, wherein they argue other

factors ranging from race, class and religion must also be considered, I would suggest this can only bring us so far when analysing how notions of truth are being expected. If anything, the attempt to broaden efforts to analyse what the truth *may* be risks maintaining the idea of such truth existing if only better methods are used to acquire it. The problem of truth thus demands grappling with how queer migrants are pre-emptively constructed based on stereotypes. Indeed, the construction of the queer migrant through stereotypical behaviour of LGBT persons in Europe precedes the subjectivity of 'actual' queer migrants, which therefore demands queer migrants engage in what Sara L. McKinnon (2009) calls the performance of credibility, whereby they must perform according to the diktats of truth being expected of them. As such, it would seem the importance of truth within narratives on queer migration must be challenged.

Unsurprisingly, the attempt to authenticate sexuality and gender is built upon faulty logics. Queer theory and related disciplines have long grappled with the instability of sexual and gendered identities: it has been recognised the subject is constantly becoming due to the multitude of social forces being confronted. This means the attempt to identify the sexuality and gender of migrants, whether seeking asylum or not, is more about attempting to fit subjects into certain norms, as opposed to grappling with the complexity of sexual and gendered subjectivity, including how it may change throughout experiences of migration (Cantú, 2009). If queer migrants must perform a certain subjectivity to be interpellated, this demands a discussion of just how much truth must be performed to remain within the bounds of the queer migrant 'figure'. This is not the fault of queer migrants, clearly, but the demands placed onto them to perform a certain truth. If the approximation of the truth is being sought, this subsequently opens up the discussion of subjects lying (or bending the truth) about their experiences, including their sexuality and gender, to allow for the possibility of migration. Such possibility has contributed to disbelief within immigration regimes about the alleged sexuality and gender of queer migrants (Millbank, 2009), which has only led to more invasive questioning when attempting to acquire this approximation of truth. It is this very fear of subjects lying, despite immigration regimes encouraging this possibility, that displays the paradoxical element of truth at the crux of this article.

Although governments and the media may publicise the possibility of migrants lying about their sexuality and gender (Schaps, 2020), the point of this article is not attempting to ascertain whether subjects are lying, but grappling with the demands of truth. Nonetheless, to say a few words, it would seem plausible the rhetoric of 'fake' queer migrants may be used to justify excluding high numbers of claimants from asylum, or for governments to position migrants as deceptive more broadly. Exploring such factors may shift the focus from whether migrants are actually faking their sexuality and gender to how this rhetoric is being used, but I would suggest this problematically demonises those who may actually be faking their sexuality and gender to claim asylum, which I do hold onto the possibility of occurring. In fact, there has already been discussion on the prevalence of fake queer migrants in multiple contexts. David Murray (2014) conducted an ethnographic study into the experiences of queer migrants applying for asylum Canada, where it was found there was increasing fear over the potential of individuals faking their sexuality and gender to claim asylum, an assumption held by not only the government but

fellow migrants and those seeking to support them. Yet Murray (2014) argues this tension between true and fake asylum cases is nothing new but instead reflects the system of refugee status determination which seeks to determine the truth of the claimant, whether that be their sexuality and gender or experiences of persecution more broadly. Similarly, Mert Koçak (2020) has also explored how queer migrants in Turkey attempt to translate their sexuality and gender by pitting themselves against the alleged high prevalence of fake cases, not only attempting to prove their truth within refugee status determination but daily life. According to Koçak (2020, this has resulted in a hierarchy of deservingness surrounding types of persecution. As will be explored later, defending the legitimacy of only (certain) queer migrants to manoeuvre immigration regimes creates yet another hierarchy of deservingness.

The alleged presence of fake queer migrants begs the question of how this destabilises the figure of the queer migrant. Following Cal Biruk (2020: 479), who explored the notion of 'fake' gays in queer African nongovernmental organisations, I also seek to explore how 'faking might act as a mode of (queer) theory and world making that destabilises metrics and technologies we use to arbitrate authenticity'. Indeed, faking may destabilise the problematic grounds in which queer migrants are interpellated within both immigration regimes and across society. This does not mean destroying the opportunities for those 'real' queer migrants seeking mobility, even if one may suggest advocating for 'faking' sexuality and gender may do this, but instead challenging the very notion of seeking to interpellate queer migrants based on stereotypes of LGBT persons in Europe. If faking is possible, this exposes the problem of relying on approximations of truth. Ultimately, the fake queer migrant is not inherently a myth but instead reflects anxiety around truth, whereby such fears stem from the attempt to protect the authenticity of the 'real' queer migrant adhering to approximations of truth. The fake queer migrant may very well constitute an attempt to subvert the way in which queer migrants are interpellated. Although the notion of fake is built upon mistrust, such mistrust is necessary to subvert the bounds in which queer migrants are supposed to exist. This means it becomes vital to 'expose the instability of moralized dichotomies nested beneath real/fake', as suggested by Biruk (2020: 479). Ultimately, faking sexuality and gender exposes the desire for the alleged truth of sexuality and gender, even if such truth can never be entirely met. By faking, there is a destabilisation of the bounds that attempt to foreclose the complexity of the subject of queer migration. To explore such possibility, I will analyse how the cultural production being used in this article tentatively posits queer migrants as 'fakes', not to suggest they *are* fakes, but to suggest something may be learnt from fake as a theoretical device about the production of truth.

Demanding truth in *Rights of Passage* and *Crypsis*

Rights of Passage is a verbatim theatre performance by Claire Summerskill (2016). Using professional actors and recreated scenes based on extracts from interviews conducted with queer migrants, government employees, lawyers and NGO staff, the performance is a typical story about the experiences of queer migrants seeking asylum. Whereas the first half focuses on queer migrants' experiences in their home countries, mostly the traumas,

the second half details their interactions with the British immigration regime, where they also face a number of problems linked to proving their sexuality and gender. Although it may be banal to suggest *Rights of Passage* expresses how immigration regimes problematically seek the truth of the subject, I am more concerned with how the performance expresses the absurdity of demanding the *approximation* of truth. The key distinction, I suggest, is that desires for truth quite legitimately want to know the truth of the subject, whereas desires for the approximation of truth merely want to make it seem as if the subject appears close enough to the stereotypes being expected of them.

The prime example in *Rights of Passage* occurs when one of the protagonists fails to prove their sexuality because they were unable to recount the opening hours of the London gay nightclub *G-A-Y Late.* According to Summerskill (2018), such blatant denial of sexuality based on knowledge of nightlife provoked laughter from the audience, which suggested their awareness of its absurdity. Instead of establishing how the alleged truth of their sexuality prompted the necessity of mobility, there is an attempt to focus on stereotypes. The question may as well have been, are you the type of LGBT person who goes *to G-A-Y Late*? Indeed, the question is assumed to mean whether the subject knows the opening hours of *G.A.Y. Late because* of their sexuality, and subsequently enjoys going; not because they could research the opening hours. Yet by framing this question as requiring an answer based on factual knowledge, not subjective opinion, it leaves open the possibility of rejection, not based on the truth of their sexuality but their inability to approximate the truth. If the subject had conducted research on *G-A-Y Late*, they could arguably fake their sexuality on the basis of the question being posed. If the question posed is whether the individual knows the opening hours of *G.A.Y. Late*, there is no faking involved, but instead knowledge of stereotypes. A single question is unlikely to form the sole basis of a judgement, but the point is to express how such approximations of truth are expected, as opposed to establishing the alleged truth of the subject. In this way, *Rights of Passage* playfully shows the absurdity of needing to approximate stereotypes of LGBT persons in Europe. The necessity of approximating truths dictated from immigration regimes raises questions about just how far the truth may be stretched, or faked, to claim asylum.

The desire for queer migrants to approximate the truth by immigration regimes leads to a discussion on how queer migrants may seek to do so. Prior knowledge may help, such as knowing the opening hours of *G-A-Y Late*, but that is not the only means. As such, I turn to *Crypsis,* a short film based in Glasgow by Christopher McGill (2020). Based on the accounts of queer migrants from different African countries (it is not stated which) seeking asylum in Scotland, *Crypsis* also explores the difficulty of proving the alleged truth of sexuality. Upon the protagonist not being able to prove their sexuality to an immigration official, they are told to collect more evidence. The protagonist ends up attending an unknown queer nightclub in their bid to find the necessary proof. They awkwardly dance around the club until beginning to engage with some of the other clubgoers, ranging from potential hook ups to drag queens. At once, the protagonist begins taking photos of themselves with people they encounter. The necessity of convincing the immigration official of their sexuality stems not from the desire for truth but

instead the possibility of approximating stereotypes, like attending queer nightclubs. In this instance, photographic evidence becomes the means of proving sexuality.

It is not the point whether the protagonist may enjoy attending queer nightclubs, and photographing their experience, but the demand they do so to appease the desire of the immigration official. By gathering proof of how they mimic stereotypes, it becomes possible for the subject to convince the immigration official not of their sexuality but their ability to approximate the truth of their sexuality. This does not mean queer migrants seeking evidence of their sexuality are ethically dubious, but does bring to light the way truth is navigated according to specific terms. Although there may be a particular truth of sexuality and gender held by queer migrants, instead they must adhere to the stereotypes being expected of them, even if this means faking evidence. It might be easy to accept the position faced by queer migrants as having to prove their 'truth' through alternate means, but I suggest this means accepting the potential role of faking in proving such truth. Indeed, taking photos with potential hook ups or drag queens as proof one has attended queer nightclubs may be somewhat of a trivial example of approximating the truth of sexuality, but such example brings to light the problematic nature of this reliance. Even if approximations of truth appear as the more feasible means of interpellating the subject, recognising the impossibility of ascertaining the alleged truth of sexuality, this only sets queer migrants up to fail in their asylum claim because they are attempting to prove an aspect of subjectivity that has no concrete evidence.

If immigration regimes rely on queer migrants approximating the truth of sexuality and gender, it might be said that immigration regimes therefore play a role determining its subjects—indicating their role in discursively producing those being encountered. Although immigration regimes rely on stereotypes, they do not only deny the alleged truths of queer migrants but seek to reproduce migrants as bounded subjects that can only ever approximate the truth being expected of them. Even with efforts to improve on adjudicating claims based on sexuality and gender to counter such problems, ranging from cultural sensitivity to banning certain tactics of acquiring the 'truth', the very problem of queer migrants having to approximate the truth would still remain. Only critiquing the problematic stereotypes used by immigration regimes also risks imposing the idea that truth may be found if only asylum cases were handled differently, which is why I have explored the approximations of truth as the central problem.

To conclude this section, what does the impossibility of truth have to say about fakes? As Leticia Sabsay (2018: 65) remarks, the notion of the subject involves both an attempt to suspend the continual process of meaning making into a fixed signifier *and* recognising this fixed signifier cannot possibly suspend the continual process of meaning making. If the subject is constantly engaging in meaning making, it means no signifier will ever fully determine the subject. Adopting such an understanding allows us to grapple with how an asylum claim demands an approximation of truth, even when recognising the subject will always be engaging in meaning making. The alleged truth of an asylum claim, whereby proving sexuality and gender becomes necessary, thus involves queer migrants suspending the logics of meaning making to prove their subjectivity through a signifier, such as knowing the opening hours of *G-A-Y Late* or photographs with potential hook ups or drag queens. To posit this within a simple binary, such reliance on signifiers means the

immigration regime both denies truths (being 'queer' but not adhering to the stereotypes of LGBT persons in Europe) *and* welcomes faking (not being queer but adhering to the stereotypes). Even if queer migrants already adhere to the stereotypes expected of them, this still forecloses the possibility of more nuanced understandings of their subjectivity. Ultimately, this may only encourage the subject (queer or not) to fake their sexuality and gender, including the way in which they express themselves, as means of presenting a signifier to represent their subjectivity, recognising immigration regimes ignore the process of meaning making by seeking an approximation of the truth – especially poignant considering the effect migration may have on subjectivity.

Expressing multiple truths in *Samira*

Yet it would be amiss to say truth is only demanded by immigration regimes, as I pointed out earlier. Nor are there only demands for a singular truth to be presented. Instead, context informs the desire for multiple *truths*. To explore such truths as they relate to intelligibility, as well as the dynamic interplay between agency and coercion, I turn to *Samira,* an ethnofictional film by Nicola Mai (2014) about the experiences of Karim (or Samira), a queer migrant from Algeria living in France. Jumping between their experiences as Karim and their experiences as Samira, I explore how the truths of the subject are entirely contextual. The film was originally an art installation involving two screens depicting the two truths of Karim/Samira, an attempt to display the dualisms existing within the subject. Such approach mimics many scenes of the film. Through displaying the contradictory yet seemingly fluid narratives of Karim/Samira, *Samira* not only recognises the impossibility of a singular truth existing within the subject, but the multiplicity of truths – or perhaps more aptly, the multiple demands for the approximations of truths that inform attempts to reproduce intelligible queer migrant subjectivity more broadly.

Similar to the verbatim theatre performance discussed above, *Samira* involves an actor playing the role of Karim/Samira. The film recreates the life of the research subject of an ethnographic study conducted by Mai. Despite being stylised like a documentary (multiple interviews, etc.), *Samira* is fictional. As Mai (2018) points out, this does not deny the truths of the subject matter, recognising how their ethnographic study informs the content of *Samira.* Karim/Samira exist, but the specific aspects of their life shown in *Samira* are reproduced as means of showing the multiple truths of their life that may not be entirely accessible through traditional documentary practise. Although documentary is often portrayed as depicting the truth of social worlds, choices are made as to what to depict within the frame, which showcases how documentaries indeed end up straddling the line between fact and fiction (Shapiro, 2002). Ultimately, reproductions of reality are dependent on choices being made about what truths to reproduce. In *Samira,* different narratives of truths were compiled from subjects with similar experiences to the 'real' Karim/Samira*,* especially when Mai (2018) did not have access to certain aspects of their life (such as their interviews with immigration officials, visits to the doctor and so on). Hence, despite being fictional, *Samira* is arguably no less 'true' than a documentary, and no less authentic than the way 'real' subjects are depicted using selected fragments of their

lives. The truths of Karim/Samira are therefore reproduced in order for such truths to be made (somewhat) intelligible.

Samira is about the migratory experiences of Karim/Samira, including their necessity of proving multiple truths, both public and private. After beginning to take hormones in Algeria, which prompted the visible growth of their breasts, they decided to leave for Europe. They initially moved to Italy where they began selling sex *as* Samira alongside other Algerian transgender women, but eventually decided to move to France instead because they believed there was a greater chance of applying for refugee status through the figure of the 'Algerian transsexual'. Such interplay between agency and coercion becomes apparent through this attempt, recognising on the one hand the agency of becoming aware of what truths need to be presented to claim asylum, but on the other hand the coercion involved in not only having to seek asylum according to the diktats of immigration regimes (such as alleged vulnerability) but the necessity of proving such truths as being related to the expression of their gender. They sought to claim asylum on the grounds of their gender through presenting the 'truth' in accordance with the truth expected of transgender migrants, a teleological narrative that relies upon the re-production of Western understandings of gender that suggest transgender people were born in the wrong body (Camminga, 2019). Karim/Samira is shown telling immigration officials in France they will face persecution from society (as Samira) if returned to Algeria. Despite the coercion involved in demanding subjects reproduce truths sur-rounding stereotypes of LGBT persons in Europe, it would be wrong to suggest adhering to such truths only involves the subject succumbing to the demands expected of them. As made evident, such enactment of stereotypes involves the subject taking control of the situation. It is these particular truths that are necessary for Karim/Samira to claim asylum.

Yet *Samira* does more than provide another example of queer migrants attempting to reproduce stereotypes; the film shows the possibility of navigating multiple truths placed onto migrants across different contexts. Towards the end of the film, Karim/Samira remark how they had their breasts removed. Instead of staying in France, they desired to be recognised by their dying father as male. They ended up getting married to a French-Algerian lesbian woman to help obtain a different form of residency in France that would subsequently allow them to return to Algeria to take up their role as the male head of the family. Indeed, Karim/Samira is quick to remark how they are a *real* Algerian man, the same as their father, while also presenting as transgender while engaging in sex work *as* Samira in France. The possibility of Karim being Samira too is thus another truth that informs their subjectivity: 'I sleep with men when I am Samira and with women when I am Karim', they suggest. This remark brings to light the way subjectivity is neither bound to any identity marker, nor that identity markers take over the subject. Such markers (transgender woman, real man, etc.) are used by the subject differently depending on the context. Nor is this contradictory, I suggest, but reflects the manifestation of the way in which subjectivity does not inherently flow in one direction. The contextual desires within their life depend upon different performances of sexuality and gender. Although their desires may be seen as stereotypes of what is man and woman, including the attempt to uphold such binary position, their subjectivity seems to exist on either side of the binary simultaneously. Even if context informs which side of the binary may be performed, they

inhabit not necessarily a space between man and woman but instead a dualistic subject position simultaneously.

Indeed, in their own academic work, Mai (2018: 187) says that 'each version of the self-presented by Karim … is authentic. Every subjectivity is incoherent: the real privilege is not to have to be verified, recognised, or believed in relation to the biographical borders enforced by sexual-humanitarian protection'. Their subjectivity may be incoherent, but the depiction of dualism within the film still hints at the possibility of using multiple truths in an attempt to make various aspects of subjectivity intelligible. It is only when such truths come together to inform subjectivity as a whole that such incoherence is imagined. Yet while agreeing with such remark by Mai, I seek to go further than focussing on the multiplicity of truths. As Sabsay (2018: 55) points out, '[i]n certain intellectual circles it has become a truism to assert that the subject is multiple and nomadic… one whose plural identities, in their indeterminacy and fluidity, have indeed become since then the object of myriad political struggles'. Recognising the subject may have many truths thus depends upon accepting the relational aspects of subjectivity, whereby individuals interact with other subjects (and objects) within their particularly social world to build truths through a process of meaning making. This does not deny the presentations of reality as understood by Karim/Samira, but does suggest truths are still dependant on context, whereby instead it is desiring to approximate truths that becomes apparent.

Yet the very idea of performing multiple truths still has little bearing on what might be understood as the truth of the subject. Each version presented by Karim/Samira is a different truth, but they still exist as the combination of such truths, even if their life may be seen as full of becomings. If their truths are being reproduced based on context, this appears to still grasp the subject as whole *despite* having multiple truths. The problem thus becomes linked to the impossibility of grasping truths while knowing approximations of truth will always be demanded. Sabsay (2018: 68) thus argues:

> "When the multiplicity and fluidity at the core of the subject are turned into secondary qualifying features—when we move from the notion of a subject's fluid multiplicity to that of a subject with multiple subject positions—the subject's multiple becoming is recast as exterior, and yet constitutively attached, to the well-known substantial subject that lurks in the shadows waiting to reinstate themself at every instant we allege to dismantle them".

Hence the singular 'truth' of the subject remains because truths become merely what the subject approximates but not what the subject is. Recognising not only the desires for approximating truths but the very notion of having multiple truths still depends upon the idea of the subject as existing to *do* such truths.

There is no identifiable truth that exists outside of its ongoing reproduction. Instead, truths masquerade as identity markers to allow subjects to navigate context. Hence even if Samira performs as the 'Algerian transsexual' for the sake of seeking asylum, or if Karim performs as the 'real man' to take control of the family unit, they become merely reproductions of truth based on how they have recognised the need to present approximations of truth, whether through stereotypes in Europe or the gendered dynamics of their family or wider society. Karim/Samira thus reproduce truths as much as they

showcase the multiplicity of truths that may exist within specific contexts, recognising how such truths are inherently linked to the notion of proving they have specific (and multiple) identities. As Sabsay (2018: 61) poignantly continues, '[e]ven when identity is conceived as an arbitrary product and claimed in defence of subaltern positions—amplifying the map of available categories with which one can identify—if we maintain the essentializing character of a transparent notion of identity conceived as the representation of a referent exterior to said representation, the power of its modes of regulation and exclusion will remain inevitable'. Indeed, it is neither about only opening up the door for more diverse understandings of sexuality and gender, as Karim/Samira do, nor accepting the possibility of multiple truths surrounding sexuality and gender, but accepting the tenuous position subjects find themselves in when they have to produce any truth about themselves, especially when grappling with how such truths are constructed for the sake of understanding subjectivity at a given point of time through a signifier. To repeat what Mai (2014) remarked upon earlier, it is a privilege not to have to be verified.

The impossibility of truth in The Amazing Truth about Queen Raquela

From the imposition of truth to the possibility of multiple truths existing, the truth of the subject has so far been problematised. This subsequently raises questions over the importance of truth within immigration regimes, recognising not only approximations of truth may be necessary but how different contexts inform truths. To continue exploring such importance, but ultimately questioning this desire for truth, I turn to the feature-length film *The Amazing Truth About Queen Raquela*, directed by Olaf de Fleur Johannesson (2008a). This film is not about the truths of sexuality and gender, nor the claiming of asylum. Instead, the film throws into disarray the very possibility of knowing any truth. To summarise the plot, the film tells the story of Raquela, a transgender woman living in Cebu, the Philippines, who aspires for a new life in Paris or elsewhere in Europe. It begins with Raquela engaging in different forms of sex work to earn a living, ranging from escorting to online sex shows as a porn star. They end up befriending one of the men who helped them get into the business, Michael, although their relationship becomes strained overtime. Despite this, it seems Michael does care for Raquela. Armed with their aspiration of going to Europe, Raquela also befriends another Filipino transgender woman in Iceland, Valeria, who promises to help bring them to the country on a temporary visa to work in a fish factory. With the financial support of Michael, Raquela moves to Iceland to begin the job. It is only after the visa expires that Raquela goes to Paris with Michael on a holiday, where their relationship comes to an end. Ultimately, the film is marketed as a fairy tale dream for Raquela, a fancy life in Paris, albeit a dream gone wrong owing to the difficulties faced by those seeking to migrate.

As quirky as the plot may be, the most interesting aspect of *The Amazing Truth* is its blurring of reality and fiction, and not knowing what the truths, if any, are. Stylised as a documentary but somewhat fictional, Raquela is not only the main character of the film but an 'actual' individual whose own life was blended into the film itself. The director

Johannesson originally went to the Philippines to make a documentary about 'ladyboys', but upon meeting Raquela, they decided to make a film about a protagonist seeking to leave the Philippines for a new life in Europe. Indeed, both Raquela and their friends were encouraged to share their own thoughts about their lives throughout the film. As Johannesson (2008b) notes, 'Raquela would act partly as herself, adding narrative elements as her dream began to take shape under our influence'. Raquela exists, but the truth of the narration surrounding their experiences is open for interpretation. This blurring of the truth becomes especially pivotal in one of the early scenes of the film, where the camera is directly on Raquela as they sit upon a couch ready to be interviewed. Laughing, Raquela remarks this is *their* life story, and how they promise to tell the truth. However, by promising to tell such truth, it seems to set up the possibility that alternate truths may exist too, or how there is doubt about the validity of their claims lest they remark they are being truthful. The attempt to affirm the truth only reinforces the possibility of something untruthful. So, what is the amazing truth about Queen Raquela?

Although the construction of truth is openly admitted to by the production team, the logics differ from *Samira*, whereby Mai (2018) had extensively remarked how the truths of Karim were formed to reflect the ethnographic study that had been conducted. In *The Amazing Truth,* there is no such detail. The truth is ultimately blurred to the point that determining what is truth is somewhat impossible because there is only brief indication that reality and fiction are merging, and much of this can only be confirmed through reading about the film. Like any fictional film, that does not deny the way Raquela conjures affects about the plight of those sharing similar experiences, but the blurring of reality and fiction raises questions about how to interpret the film. The life, or perhaps more accurately, *a* life, involving Raquela, is told in a fictional way that not only masks who they are, but expresses some of the most intimate aspects of a (or their) life. In this way, the film is entirely opaque about truth while still providing an intimate narrative that *may* be truth. As Jamila Musser (2018: 10) points out, opacity 'offers a bulwark against the mandate of transparency foisted on minoritarian performers who are imagined to be without subjectivity or interiority'. Raquela is entirely opaque as their story is not verified as true or false, but instead created using a mix of reality and fiction. Whereas documentary usually takes for granted the truth of the subject matter, *The Amazing Truth* still engages with truth by openly delving into the possibility of this truth being constructed. This is especially the case considering the truth offered by Raquela is constructed under the guidance of the production team. Although largely fictional, there is some truth in there, but the viewer is left not knowing what is fictional and what is truth.

The Amazing Truth displays the impossibility of finding the truth within the subject, recognising how the truth is not only constructed but has the possibility of being blurred by the demands of reality *and* the imagination of fiction. If finding the reality of truth is impossible, perhaps the focus should not be on searching for an inner sense of unfiltered reality but how one temporally positions themselves within not only the multiple expectations but the multiple truths that may exist for them (Sabsay, 2018). Instead of suggesting the truth may be found (even if this truth seeks to counter a stereotype), another approach involves not analysing queer migrants as having a bounded subjectivity. It is not about suggesting queer migrants may express their truth if only given the right platform,

but analysing how expecting the truth of subjects is an impossibility. The 'truth' is not the truth but instead the way the subject makes sense of the necessity of proving their subjectivity along certain frames. If this truth is constructed, if truth has become dependent on understanding how discourses enact such truths, I suggest we must be open to the possibility of not relying on the truth but instead how it is sought at the detriment of more complex understandings of subjectivity. Otherwise, searching for the truth leaves the subject needing to prove the unprovable. This is why, it is not inherently about the truth but instead how this truth is approximated by individuals, not only those working through the dynamics of immigration regimes but any subject attempting to make sense of their own understanding of the truth. Moving forward, the necessary step is thus attempting to critique such demands of truth as opposed to what the actual truth may be, which ends up raising questions how far the 'truth' may be stretched.

Conclusion: The deserving queer migrant

However much queer migration studies had already given attention to the demands of immigration regimes, this article sought to highlight how it is only ever possible to approximate the truths being demanded. This ultimately prompted discussions on the uncertainty of subjectivity. The impossibility of ascertaining the truth surrounding the sexuality and gender of queer migrants has prompted some legal scholarship to more explicitly focus on the specific threat of persecution being faced by queer migrants as opposed to attempting to figure out who they are (Dustin and Ferreira, 2021). Although such argument holds merit, this would still fall into the trap of demanding particular truths. To conclude, therefore, I want to take things further by suggesting the truth problematically ends up becoming an exclusionary mechanism of asylum for those subjects who fail to adhere to certain truths being expected of them. If Foucault (2011) argues holding authority over the truth is about power, it would seem the truth can be a mechanism of not only including those who adhere to its demands but an exclusionary mechanism for those who fail to do so. This brings us back to the discussion of fake queer migrants. As Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer (2007) argue, immigration regimes produce 'epistemologies of ignorance' in ways that demand particular types of silences. This is why immigration regimes, despite being based on Western legal and juridical systems of seeking to establish the truth, play a fundamental role in encouraging the possibility of faking *and* rejecting those who may be faking. The very possibility of there being truths becomes exclusionary itself. As Deniz Akin (2017) argues, although queer migrants may use tactics to prove certain truths of sexuality and gender based on their knowledge of the required stereotypes, such adherence reinforces the legitimacy of such stereotypes in the first place. Although this may be necessary for queer migrants to seek asylum, it simultaneously reinforces a hierarchy of protection that allows particular individuals to be seen as legitimate, or truthful. To reiterate, the fault is the system that demands such truths, not the individuals who understand the system. Hence, demanding the truth of sexuality and gender risks making those who feel compelled to fabricate the truth of their sexuality and gender appear as undeserving of asylum at the expense of only including those who

allegedly tell this truth. This is especially the case because immigration regimes only offer a limited number of possible truths to be expressed.

If queer migrants must approximate the truth of their sexuality and gender to claim asylum, which may involve lying, might it ethically permissible to fake sexuality and gender too? Bluntly, is it wrong to 'fake' being queer if your life depends on it? The point is not disputing such needs of protection held by queer migrants but exploring how asylum becomes exclusionary, which risks denying the legitimacy of plight for those who have no other option but to fabricate a subjectivity. Those who fake their sexuality and gender may indeed be seeking to migrate based on terms not included within the realm of asylum, but still face conditions of unlivability that necessitate migrating. If it is possible to recognise that queer migrants seeking asylum must perform a certain truth in order to claim asylum based upon the limited reasons as to why their plight is necessary, this would leave open the possibility of approaching sexuality and gender as another domain of truth that may be utilised by those seeking to migrate who do not fit into the marginal channels of migration offered by asylum (e.g. economic or environmental migrants). Such possibility questions the importance of truth when only certain forms of acceptable truth are dictated by immigration regimes. If immigration regimes demand truths in ways that legitimise violence, against those included *and* excluded from asylum, the only solution may be getting rid of them (see Luibhéid, 2019).

Yet until such future is possible, this means grappling with the necessity of queer migrants needing to adhere to particular truths. In response, this article has contributed to queer migration studies by exploring the importance of faking to subvert the exclusionary mechanisms of asylum. Subsequently, I highlighted how the possibility of faking shows the pressure placed on queer migrants to express their narratives within certain schemas of truth, recognising the dichotomy between truths and fakes is used to create a hierarchy surrounding who deserves asylum. Hence, it could be said fake queer migrants are the scapegoats of the inability of immigration regimes to ascertain the 'truths' of queer migrants. The reliance on approximations of truth becomes means of excluding those deemed undeserving. Relying on the alleged truth of queer migrants thus only seeks to create a hierarchy of deservingness that delegitimises the plight of those considered 'fake', whether that is faking how one *does* sexuality and gender or faking sexuality and gender altogether. Hence, there must be an ongoing exploration of the way in which only particular truths are expected within immigration regimes to allow for critiques of how this becomes exclusionary. Asylum is important, but it must be problematised for whom it excludes.

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