

**The Pink Card: Documenting Legal Limbo**

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Writing Sample

Dissertation Chapter (*DRAFT*)

## Introduction: The Lives of Documents

My very first day at the NGO, I watched again and again as clients arrived for appointments, sat in front of lawyers' desks, and procured what looked like pieces of pink construction paper, which the lawyer would photocopy, attaching the copy directly to the client's registration form. This is a ritual that I have since observed and participated in countless times during my work in Athens. This is the *rose-carta*, the "pink card," the six-month, renewable identity document issued to asylum seekers in Greece. The denotation of "pink card" (used by advocacy lawyers, police, and asylum seekers alike) is simple yet so appropriate, invoking the material, colored presence of the document. Its pinkness announces its presence, but after its color, one might notice its fragility, its handled, tactile presence, and makeshift quality. Some cards are wrinkled and torn at the edges; others have been laminated at home, covered with tape, or inserted in sleeves of plastic. It is clearly a form of identity card, because it carries a photograph, most often affixed with a staple. Cards bear the written marks of different (usually rushed) hands: blue, black, and red inks, even sometimes pencil, alternately legible and indecipherable. The only elements revealing the card as a bureaucratic artifact are numbers (also handwritten), and the stamp, the *sfragida*, an omnipresent mark of Greek bureaucracy.

The pink card is a document around which disparate things, categories, and persons congeal. As an "artifact" (Riles) of asylum law and the bureaucratic practices surrounding the asylum procedure, the pink card is one of the ways in which this legal process is made visible, becoming tied to individual bodies and lives. But as a document that multiple actors handle, use, and interpret, it is also a nexus for various categories, practices, and knowledges entertained by differently positioned participants in the asylum

process. State agents, lawyers, and most crucially, asylum seekers themselves, all have something invested in the pink card. The lives of this document are intimately bound up in how asylum law itself is lived and practiced.

As an identity card, the pink card can be approached as an explicitly “subject producing” document, which concretely and directly produces persons as asylum seekers. Studies across the social sciences have shown that documentary practices are a powerful tool of “governmentality” (Foucault) through which states control subjects (Cohn 1987; Dirks 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Mamdani; Thomas 1991), making them “legible” to state power (Scott 1998). In documenting asylum seekers’ names, births, countries of origin, and dates and routes of movement into Greece, this identity card does indeed produce a certain kind of legal subject whose life and movements are “legally cognizable” (Coutin and Yngvesson 2006: 181): *the asylum seeker*. However, as this document itself circulates, both through bureaucratic machinery and the hands of asylum seekers, these legible, legal subjects are “both made and unmade” (181). Instead of a tool or instrument of governmental power, the pink card emerges rather as a kind of thread, what Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star term “filiation” (2003: 315), through which persons become attached to the category of asylum seeker and its accompanying (but widely varying) set of bureaucratic practices. This model is “textural” (315) giving expression to the valences of this connection, its looseness and tightness, scope and permanence. The pink card is one important way in which persons become tied to the category of “asylum seeker,” but it is just one thread, among multiple categories and attachments, with complex, varying lives.

In his ethnographic work on NSF review panels, Don Brenneis has shown that by following the “careers” of documents, tracing the bureaucratic practices and processes through which they travel, we can access some of the complex, changing meanings that they take on (Brenneis 2007: 56). In this chapter I seek to track the pink card not just through the bureaucratic machinery of asylum and advocacy practices, but how it emerges in the disparate movements and talk of asylum seekers themselves. Attending to how asylum seekers themselves interpret the pink card reveals crucial but often hidden ways in which asylum law operates in practice, and vernacular forms of legal knowledge in which this document is embedded. The pink card emerges as a constitutive element in how asylum seekers acquire status, and how they navigate the, often shifting, continuum between legality and illegality (Calavita 2005; Coutin 2003). But through the practices and talk that surround the pink card, the asylum process also takes on new meanings. Sometimes the asylum process appears to have very little to do with “asylum” at all, emerging variously as a protracted and agonizing condition of limbo, a pathway toward temporary economic migration, and a kind of imprisonment. In some cases, the pink card becomes detached from the very legal processes through which it was produced, taking on a life of its own. Infused with meaning, the pink card emerges as an object of power, with protective properties, but heavy with desire and fear.

### Documenting Legal Limbo

Shortly after I arrived at the NGO, I asked Stavros, one of the lawyers, to walk me through the various steps of the asylum process, and this brief map serves also to outline the machinery through which the pink card is produced. This process moves from the

border areas to the center, converging in Athens, the center of the asylum machinery in Greece. Stavros explains that it starts at the police station or detention center, which is most often near the border. Here, even if someone attempts to make an asylum claim, this claim can be accepted but not examined, because the only police trained to hear asylum claims are at the Police Department for Aliens, in Athens. At the detention center, the police take fingerprints, and upon release (which may be after as long as three months), the individual is given a “white paper,” a notarized photocopy registering their presence in Greece, along with a deportation order asking them to leave after one month. In order to officially open a file associated with an asylum claim, they must go to the police station for aliens in Athens with a house contract and give a short interview explaining why they left their home country. Only at this point, they are given a pink card, which is valid for 6 months and can be renewed as long as their case is in the system. Routinely, all initial applications are rejected after a few months, and asylum seekers must file an appeal, moving the claim into a “second instance” decision procedure. After an unspecified period of time, ranging from six months to a number of years, the asylum seeker is called for a hearing before the asylum committee in the Ministry of the Interior. The committee makes recommendations regarding the case, but the only person who can actually grant asylum is the Minister, and as Stavros explained, the minister rarely follows these recommendations. Finally, one receives an ultimate decision, which can only be appealed to the *Simvoulion tis Epikratias*, the Council of State.

Stavros outlines here the official chains of applications, renewals, rejections, appeals, and paperwork through which advocacy lawyers assist clients in retaining this document. However, the pink card frequently seems to travel according to a mystifying

and unpredictable logic. When I first started tracking the “career” of the pink card, I had incredible difficulty identifying its trajectories: I encountered strong contradictions in the accounts of both lawyers and asylum seekers, and a powerful disconnect between the official ways in which it was *supposed* to function and how it operates in practice. Most often, this disjuncture emerged through differences in how lawyers talk about the document (giving voice to official procedures) versus asylum seekers’ own accounts -- but not always. Advocates frequently acknowledge the un-codifiable but real challenges of acquiring and retaining a pink card, and asylum seekers also invoke policies that may or may not be carried out in practice. These divergent knowledges commingle particularly in asylum seekers’ testimonies, as they recount and repeat information that they have acquired from lawyers, peers, police, interpreters, smugglers, and others in the web of ongoing relationships and encounters through which the asylum process takes shape.

The origins of the pink card – how someone actually acquires it -- appear particularly mysterious and conflicting. This is certainly exacerbated by the fact that, unable to gain access to asylum hearings at the police, I largely have had to reconstruct this process through the testimonies of informants. While there are certainly limitations to this approach (not observing directly the bureaucratic practices through which the pink card is produced), it makes other things visible. By focusing on what asylum seekers and lawyers themselves say about the procedure, I emphasize agents’ discursive engagements with and interpretations of this document and the machinery through it is travels. In this way, we can begin to access the broader patterns of knowledge through which the pink card -- and the asylum procedure -- are refracted.

The conflicting testimonies of lawyers and asylum seekers, as well as the disconnect between official policies and actual practices surrounding the pink card, combine to make the asylum system itself appear in some ways overly accessible, and at other times, incredibly difficult to enter. National asylum procedures and the bureaucratic practices that uphold them approach asylum claims in terms of a certain voluntarism and active diligence on the part of applicants. While international law frames the events that drive persons to flee, cross borders, and become refugees as forms of compulsion, one must, however, *ask for* asylum, implying a request based on need. The EU advocacy community most often discusses the capacity of persons to make this request in terms of “*access*” to protection, and in many ways, Greece’s asylum system is more accessible than many. One can make this application at any police station or detention center, at the border or within Greek territory, whether one has entered legally or illegally. Further, police are required to hear all asylum claims, regardless of the apparent credibility of the case.

In practice, however, the process rarely unfolds like this. One can indeed apply for asylum at any police station, becoming officially as an asylum seeker. However, in order to actually acquire temporary protection, one must have a pink card, and (other than a few unclear exceptions) only one police station in Greece actually issues pink cards: Allodapon, on Petrou Ralli in Athens, the extraordinarily overcrowded police station for foreigners. Many come to the NGO saying that they have spent days trying to get in, and often ultimately require a lawyer to gain entry. Asylum seekers gather outside as early as 3:30 in the morning, and some even try to sleep in line, though this is, most often, not allowed by the police. Generally, only fifty or sixty persons are allowed to enter each

day, and even when one is successful in getting in the door, one may be turned away if an interpreter is unavailable or if paperwork has been insufficiently prepared in Greek or English. Thus, despite the official openness of the Greek asylum procedure, the practices around the issuance of the pink card make “access” to the asylum system incredibly problematic in Greece.

The creation of the pink card, which produces a visible, stamped verification of one’s induction into the asylum process, grants the bearer a temporary status through which s/he can stay in Greece *nomima*, legally, while the case is in the system. Discussing the legalization strategies of Salvadoran migrants in the US, Susan Coutin writes that often it seems that “*status inheres in papers, not persons*” (Coutin 2003: 55). And indeed, practices around asylum status revolve explicitly around the pink card itself, which confers a temporary permission to stay, elements of protection and support, as well as certain obligations.

For asylum seekers and illegal migrants, being “legal” in Greece means primarily that if stopped by the police, they have a good document to show them. As such, the pink card serves as a safeguard against arrest, and because the international principle of non-refoulement preserves asylum seekers and refugees from expulsion into areas where they may again encounter persecution (most notably, of course, the country of origin), the bearer is also protected against deportation. However, while the pink card allows one to stay in Greece, one must also *remain* in Greece. EU policy, in the form of the Dublin Regulation (a 2003 rethinking of the 1994 Dublin Convention), demands that persons file for asylum in the first European country of arrival and remain there until the claim is processed. If an asylum seeker is apprehended elsewhere in Europe, he or she is in fact

deported *back* to Greece. Thus, the permission to stay also consigns important forms of constraint and immobility.

In addition to these basic protections against arrest and deportation, the pink card grants some limited forms of social support. Two floors beneath the NGO's Legal Unit, in a small office adjacent to the crowded waiting room, new clients arrive for the brief but crucial process of registration. Longtime NGO employees, Melike and Atash, (both recognized refugees) take down crucial client data with the help of a small but shifting team of interpreters. Before clients leave, they are given a registration number and an appointment with a lawyer, and Melike educates them about their pink card. She follows a tight but complete script, which she most often delivers in perfect Greek or her native Turkish, but if no translator is available, she can do this in English, Farsi, Arabic, and some Bangla. She explains: "*With this you can get a work permit. If you get sick you can go to the hospital. And at the hospital, there is a pharmacy where you can get medicine for free, without paying.*"

These benefits – access to healthcare and a work permit -- constitute the extent of support that asylum seekers receive in Greece. However, during the weeks I spent assisting Melike in registration, and through interviews with clients, I found that clients demonstrate enormously varied knowledge of these forms of support. Many expressed surprise and puzzlement when Melike explained that they could go to the doctor with their pink card, and the majority (young, apparently healthy, men) did not even acknowledge it. When filling out their data, most stated that they did not have a work permit – and yet they were working. The process of applying for a work permit involves further bureaucratic hurdles, but it allows one to work legally, with insurance, and most

often, with steadier, better wages. However, as Ahmed, the NGO's Bangla interpreter, explained: "most people don't care about that. They just want to make money quickly." As such, most say that they work as temporary day laborers or trade in the unofficial but booming economies of street vending which, of course, do not require *adeia ergassia*. They work illegally, for lower wages, but find work more quickly.

In other cases, however, these benefits seem to serve as a central motivating factor in obtaining and retaining a pink card – and for entering the asylum process. Given the near-impossibility of receiving hospital treatment without papers, healthcare access, not surprisingly, becomes extremely significant for those who do encounter problems with their health. Banchamlak, an Ethiopian client who had retained a pink card for only 6 months, was working as a house cleaner and nanny without a work permit. In her interview, she explained that she got a pink card because she had injured her leg, and her Greek employer helped her with her application, giving her a stable address and filling out necessary forms, in order for her to be treated. During my stint at the NGO, one of the lawyers and an interpreter in fact collaborated in the protracted but ultimately successful process of filing an asylum application for another injured Ethiopian woman who was only able to receive treatment once she acquired a pink card. Perhaps due to the wide availability of temporary employment on the black market, work papers do not seem to figure so crucially as healthcare, but for some clients it is a concern; often citing advice from friends, many come to the NGO specifically requesting assistance acquiring work permits or finding legal work.

But the most critical importance of the pink card for the bearer becomes most apparent when he or she encounters the possibility of losing it. While asylum seekers'

status is officially legal, it is extraordinarily unstable, consisting primarily of ongoing limbo, with the ever-present danger of reentering a state of illegality with the accompanying dangers of arrest and deportation. Asylum seekers can renew their card every six months as long as they have an active asylum claim, and this can go on for years – often three or four years, sometimes longer. (I met one Sudanese man who had retained a pink card for 9 years.) But renewals are charged with the same access difficulties as applications, and are often sources of even greater anxiety, since at the point of renewal, the subject occupies a position of legality -- which can be lost so easily.

Asylum seekers' accounts of the renewal process in Athens point frequently to the fear of becoming illegal again, in a kind of immediate criminalization, through contact with the police. Many cite rumors of police who steal and shred pink cards and arrest people randomly, and some in fact refuse to go to the police to renew, thereby letting their pink card expire. In addition to the dangers of renewals, there are other pitfalls through which one can lose a pink card or through which it becomes invalid. Perhaps most problematic is a policy requiring asylum seekers to report any change of address to the police; if they fail to do this, their case is interrupted, and their card is rendered invalid, a situation that demands an appeal -- and always the assistance of a lawyer. Due to a lack of interpreters, time, or effort of the police, and the fact that it is written on the card only in Greek and English, many asylum seekers are unaware of this crucial policy. Furthermore, due to the transient working lifestyles of many asylum seekers and other low-income migrants, which often demand temporary and changing residences, some go for renewal at the police to find that indeed their case has been interrupted, and that their

card -- and status -- has become invalid. The voided card is taken away, and they are sometimes arrested.

Many come to the NGO precisely because they encounter difficulties with their pink card, oftentimes beyond the point where a lawyer can remedy the situation. These clients often seem to speak from a shadow-realm of fear, anxiety, and often desperation, skirting the streets and other public places where they might encounter the police, like the young Afghani man who grabbed my arm outside the NGO one morning and asked me to help him, explaining in Greek that he had come all the way from Larissa – a four hour train ride: *Ti na kanw--* “What am I to do? I left Athens, because I don’t have papers anymore. The police will find me.” Indeed, much of the legal labor at the Ngo is spent with persons in just such situations. And the repeated, often frantic question is: what will I do when the police stop me on the street and I don’t have papers?

In this position of anxious limbo, the diverse ways in which asylum seekers discuss the card and their status point to important differences in how they interpret and use the asylum process. Knowledge about the document and its relationship to the law is asymmetrical and diverse. Some voice a strong sense of the card’s connection to the asylum process and of their own *self*-identification as asylum seekers or “refugees,” and among these subjects, the document and their own status take on richly divergent meanings. However, one of the extraordinarily strange things that I observed is that many asylum seekers do not convey any knowledge of the relationship between the pink card and the asylum system, and in fact, do not actually seem to know that they are asylum seekers. The sharply differing ways in which asylum seekers interpret, use, and grant

meaning to the pink card point to surprising but often unacknowledged significances of both asylum law itself and the position of limbo that they occupy.

Many who self-identify as refugees describe limbo as a source of great frustration – in particular, the waiting. A highly politicized organization of Sudanese asylum seekers have been attempting to encourage voluntary return to Sudan, claiming that it is in many ways more livable than in Greece. Although this group capitalizes on their self-identification as *refugees* (the name of their group explicitly invokes this term), many assert that they would rather be in Sudan, like one man who told me: “it’s better there [Sudan]. Here is always waiting. You can’t do anything. There I have my family, my friends.” A number told me that they would like to be deported (but Greece does not deport persons back to Sudan due to lack of funds). For others who identify strongly as refugees, the sheer length of the Greek asylum process is not just frustrating, but is also a source of shame and failure. The situation regarding Iraqis in Greece is particularly problematic in this regard, as the state has effectively frozen asylum claims for many Iraqis in the hopes that the situation in Iraq will improve. While many Iraqis can renew their pink cards repeatedly without fear of arrest, most have also never even been called to an asylum hearing either. Early on in my fieldwork, I did an interview with an Iraqi Kurd who had recently been recognized as a refugee. He told me that for the years when his case was “iced,” he had simply wanted a chance to recount his story, but his case, both technically strong and substantiated by many documents, eventually required the intervention of the UNHCR representative in Greece just to get him a hearing. Kamir, another Iraqi Kurd who works as an employment councilor at the NGO, told me that he had started out with a pink card, but this did not work, so he left the asylum process and

successfully applied for a green card. He explained to me that this did not make him happy, because he is a refugee, and should have been recognized, suggesting that for him, *asylum* signifies recognition of a life experience and a condition, which -- because he failed in the asylum process -- was not legitimated. In contrast, one Iranian woman, who also identified strongly as a “refugee,” explained that even though she had not been called to an asylum hearing, as long as she and her family had pink cards, she planned simply to “let the lion sleep.” In this sense, the expediency of the pink card outweighed her hope for recognition, as she underscored the usefulness of the limbo in which she and her family live: receiving no decision is better than a rejection, the most likely result for all asylum claims in Greece.

For some, in addition to limbo and its attendant frustrations and dangers, the pink card also figures as a powerful indicator of immobility and “being stuck.” Because many have family and acquaintances in the West and the North, and have been told en route by smugglers and peers about the difficult life facing asylum seekers in Greece, many who arrive in Greece plan to apply for asylum elsewhere in Europe. However, a large number are detained, and in order to survive temporarily in Greece without being arrested again, they end up applying for asylum anyway. And because an asylum claim in one EU country prohibits one from leaving, the pink card in many ways confines persons to Greece. The fingerprints, taken whenever one is detained and when pink card is issued, are the incriminating data through which asylum seekers traveling illegally further into Europe are identified and sent back. And so I have heard the issuing of the pink card described almost as a kind of theft, through which one is trapped and made immobile: “they stole my fingerprints,” “they have my fingerprints.” One Somali man, who had

recently been returned from England, explained, “With this card, I am supposed to be free. But I am in prison.” Another asylum seeker, an Afghan who had also just been returned from England, gave me a typed statement of his grievances with the asylum procedure in Greece. Elucidating his frustrations regarding the lack of social support and assistance in Greece, he points the paradox of why, if the Greek state does not seem to want him here, does he have to remain. He ends with his frustration with the pink card:

If we judge from the way of humanity it is not my right to have just a pink carde. I can not live with your PINK CARDE because I think the PINK CADRE is a paper I mean it is for forcely living not anything else .....

There are, however, numerous asylum seekers who do not seem to understand the relationship between the pink card, the asylum process, and their own status as asylum seekers. One job that I undertook at the NGO involved conducting brief interviews for registration, in which I asked clients where they are from and why they left their countries. Among the clients signed up for registration, the vast majority were from Bangladesh, and I would most often interview between 15 to 20 Bangladeshi asylum seekers a day, sometimes less, often more. And generally, everyday, all but one or two would say very explicitly that they came for kaz and taka, work and money. Some would even state “orthonotic shamarsha,” “economic problems.” And this statement of “economic problems” would most often be accompanied by matter-of-fact accounts of desperate poverty: old mother and father, sick, many brothers and sisters, no food, no work, no money. Regarding the pink card, these clients would frequently describe it simply as a “stay permit” or “residence permit. To my question of why and how they

acquired the pink card in the first place, some explained that they got the pink card because friends told them they needed it in order to stay – it is their residence permit. Others told me that they were provided the pink card upon release from prison or detention. When approached in this way, as a residence permit, the pink card emerges for these asylum seekers as an object of necessary desire. And the limbo enabled by the card, though rife with anxieties and immobilities, certainly has its uses: it enables them to stay and continue life and work in Greece – until the card becomes invalid or is taken away.

This widespread but unofficial significance of the pink card as a “residence permit” for such self-described “economic migrants” may point to other ways in which the state itself uses the pink card – and the asylum process as well. Over coffee one afternoon, I tell Stavros that I am bewildered and somewhat troubled by the fact that the largest client base at the NGO is composed of many who describe their migration clearly in “economic” terms. In response, he takes out his Greek national identity card. “What is this?” Your I.D. “Yes, but what else is it?” He then unfolds its blue laminate and points to various categories: *name, father’s name, date and place of birth, religion*. “It is also the state’s record of me. The pink card is not any different.” He explains that because there is no real immigration law in Greece, there is no way for the state to know who is in its territory, so the police have begun to use the pink card to document and regulate migrants. They don’t have to ask for asylum, he says, because as far as the state is concerned, “they are not really asylum seekers.” They are migrants who must be controlled. And this is done with the pink card.

Whether or not the state issues these documents through an organized (mis)-use of the asylum system, as Stavros suggests, the diversity of asylum seekers’ understandings

of the pink card suggests that these documentary and bureaucratic practices of the asylum process work both to enable and regulate many different forms of migration -- and this includes “economic” migration, a subject that is repeatedly elided in both asylum law and advocacy discourse. Certainly, for some, the card serves as a clear index of their position as asylum seekers and their own desire for refugee status with its legal (and often, moral) legitimacy. But through the pink card, others become tied to this legal process and the status of “asylum seeker” who display no fluency in the language of rights or refugee protection, and who narrate their own migration in terms of poverty, work, and hopes for prosperity. In Stavros’ comment that “they are not really asylum seekers,” we see a limit to the ways in which the law and its documentary practices are able to “produce” these subjects as asylum seekers. Rather, agents’ own interpretations of these documents reflect and produce new, unofficial but crucial, lives of asylum law itself.

Asylum seekers’ knowledge of the pink card, and of their own status, has an important impact on asylum law as it is lived and practiced, and the unstable period of limbo that asylum seekers occupy. But what happens when this period of limbo ends, and the pink card finally loses its power? There are a number of possible trajectories for asylum seekers in Greece, occupying varying positions on the continuum between legality and illegality. In addition to those whose cases are interrupted for various reasons, others exit the asylum process voluntarily, managing to collect enough work-related paperwork in Greece to apply for a green card. Some do, however, survive in the process until they receive final decisions on their cases. An extraordinarily few receive recognition as political refugees, but the vast majority are rejected. Because the Greek asylum system is so sluggish, most asylum seekers I met still had active asylum claims,

occupying that unstable but ongoing position of limbo. However, in the springtime, very suddenly, enormous numbers of Bangladeshi clients began coming to the NGO carrying final rejections and deportation orders. According to the lawyers, this was an aberration. But with the apparent clarity of these cases, and the state's certainty that all Bangladeshis are economic migrants, the asylum process for these clients was being accelerated. When a lawyer, and frequently I myself, delivered the difficult news to these clients that nothing more could be done with their cases, I observed multiple responses, signaling – variously -- despair, grief, resignation, and incomprehension. Some asked repeatedly why nothing could be done. Couldn't something be done? Others didn't say much. Some wept. But across these responses I encountered the repeated fear of arrest and deportation, and the practical question: “what will happen when the police stop me on the street? What will I show them?” For those cast again into a state of illegality, the thing that emerged as most salient was a vulnerability to arrest and deportation, and the absence of the pink card, the object that has hitherto served as a form of protection.

In very rare situations, cases that have been rejected can be appealed to the *Simvoulio tis Epikratias*, the Council of State, a process that can take years, but as long as the appeal is in the system, the asylum seeker can remain legally in Greece. I myself was closely involved in appealing one such case, also of a Bangladeshi national, who claimed to have been persecuted as a Hindu by the Muslim majority government. We filed his appeal, obtaining proof that it would be heard. Nonetheless, when I gave him this good news, his most pressing concern was: “what will I show the police? Are you going to give me a piece of paper?” His pink card had been taken away, and the procedure for reclaiming a pink card is a different legal pathway than that for appeals, and it is very

slow. As a temporary solution, a lawyer provided him with a notarized copy of his entire appeal, which, as a model client, he carried with him at all times. However, two weeks later we got a call that he had been arrested, and when I went to visit him in detention, the very polite police officer said that she was very sorry, but could do nothing until he got his pink card back. We have seen throughout that the pink card operates as a document through which asylum seekers are able to maintain some kind of practical, (semi-) legal, if unstable existence. But here we see the pink card become unmoored from the very legal processes that produce it, to the point where the position of the bearer is tied to the paper itself, not the courts. *Status inheres in papers.*

### **Conclusion: Objects of Power**

The pink card is an artifact of bureaucratic and legal processes, and a thread through which persons are tied to legal categories. But it also has a simple, brute materiality, which we can see at work its hugely consequential presence or absence. At the beginning of his *My Cocaine Museum*, Michael Taussig asserts that such material practicalities have “their own poetry, vivid and shocking” (25). This last account underlines this “poetry.” Through the material practicalities that surround it, the pink card because infused with protective properties, as well as the power of the state, which it masks and deflects. The conflicting, often mystifying, logics that seem to govern this document, and the disjunctures between official and unofficial practices, add to its mysteriousness and its power: while the pink card is an object necessary for protection, neither asylum seekers nor lawyers ever know exactly how to navigate the bureaucratic machinery through which it must travel. As such, this can be seen as part of the “magic”

of the state -- and the law (Taussig; see also, Gordillo). However, this document also acquires its power through the divergent meanings that asylum seekers grant it, colored with fears and anxieties of limbo and immobility, desires for status and legitimation, and dreams of prosperity. As we have seen, these many significances emerge not just through the often quotidian bureaucratic practices through which the card takes shape and moves, but just as crucially, through the talk, narratives, and active interpretative work of asylum seekers.

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