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Abstract: The European Union and the Italian state have currently implemented a state infrastructure enabling to govern the migration flows towards Europe. This infrastructure has involved the formation of an ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections that raise the efficiency of migrants' reception, integration or expulsion. Expertise on intercultural communication has been celebrated as a key resource of this infrastructure. In this article, I discuss the status of expertise on intercultural communication within an infrastructure managing migration in Italy. I focus on the circumstances by which expertise on intercultural communication has emerged as a crucial technology of this infrastructure and on ways this knowledge contributes to the regulation of migrants' access to the life projects migration stands for.

Cover Letter:

This my revised version of the paper “The Governmentality of Migration:

Intercultural Communication and the Politics of (Dis)placement in Southern Europe” for the

Special Issue “Discourses of Diversity”.

Cover Letter:

I have integrated ALL comments made by the two reviewers.

## HIGHLIGHTS.

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## The Governmentality of Migration:

Intercultural Communication and the Politics of (Dis)placement in Southern Europe

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**ABSTRACT.** The European Union and the Italian state have currently implemented a state infrastructure enabling to govern the migration flows towards Europe. This infrastructure has involved the formation of an ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections that raise the efficiency of migrants' reception, integration or expulsion. Expertise on intercultural communication has been celebrated as a key resource of this infrastructure. In this article, I discuss the status of expertise on intercultural communication within an infrastructure managing migration in Italy. I focus on the circumstances by which expertise on intercultural communication has emerged as a crucial technology of this infrastructure and on ways this knowledge contributes to the regulation of migrants' access to the life projects migration stands for.

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## Introduction<sup>i</sup>

On October 3, 2013, a boat packed with more than 600 migrants, who had left Libya for the Italian coast, sank off Lampedusa. A fire on board had ignited a wave of panic that brought the ship down. The Italian coast guards saved 155 passengers. 360 individuals were confirmed dead; others were missing. The news of this tragedy went around the world in photos, video clips, and articles (re)orienting a large degree of public attention towards this small island situated 70 miles off the African continent – an island that has historically been constructed by both the migrants and the European governments as a gateway to Europe.

While the concern for the large numbers of victims initially dominated the press reports, a few days after the disaster, part of the international community started to raise questions about the insufficient European asylum policies that, in the view of many NGOs (Amnesty International, 2011; CIR, 2014; IOM, 2014), was responsible for more than twenty thousand deaths in these same waters since the late 1990ies. In addition, sections of the European population began to view the politics of push back (Andersson, 2016; Zaiotti, 2011) – which until this time had characterized the European Union’s response to the volatile influx of African and Asian migrants – as an ineffective political strategy that should be replaced by a well-managed, professional policy of reception (Weber, 2013) (although a substantial part of the population continued to advocate the repressive practice of mass rejection).

As a reaction to the increasing popular dissatisfaction with its refugee policy, in the past two years, the European Union and the Italian state have implemented an infrastructure (Chu, 2010; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014) able to successfully govern (Foucault, 1991) the migration flows to Europe. In addition to a whole set of well-known and widely contested repressive state measures – such as electric fences, border controls, military and police interventions (Côté-Boucher, Infantino and Salter, 2014) – to continue preventing the migrant population from entering European territory, this infrastructure has involved the formation of

an ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections as well as calculations, technologies, and tactics designed to enable a meticulous measurement, selection, and classification of migrants and to raise the efficiency and quality of receiving, integrating, or expelling these individuals (Feldman, 2012; Larkin, 2013). This infrastructure also draws on a series of methods (in Michel Foucault's terms: disciplines [1978]), i.e. tokens of expertise that specific actors and institutions invest in to regiment and exercise control over – or to discipline – both the arriving migrants and the actors, institutions, and societies receiving them.

In Italy, this infrastructure consists of the ensemble of activities and services provided by a constellation of both newly funded as well as long-standing organizational actors such as state offices, charitable organizations, NGOs, foundations, social cooperatives, and other corporate actors. Both the Italian state and the European Union pay these organizations to provide migrants with health care services and psychological assistance, to act as translators and cultural mediators, to teach Italian and provide academic or professional education, to assist refugees in applying for asylum, to facilitate access to housing, social networks, and jobs, to manage family reunification, or to organize and carry out the migrants' repatriation.

For scholars interested in the processes mediating migration, a critical discussion of this infrastructure, and more particularly a documentation of the tokens of expertise that shape this infrastructure and organize its everyday routines, is particularly interesting because it sheds light on the logics and mechanisms that condition and structure migration, and that regulate the fulfillment of the life projects that migration represents.

Expertise on intercultural communication – and more particularly tokens of knowledge on multilingual speech, translation practices, intercultural mediation, and language and communication in general – has been identified by political authorities and the community of humanitarian organizations (European Union, 2014; OECD, 2014; UNHCR, 2015) as a key

component of the infrastructure. Along with academic expertise claiming that intercultural communication can prevent misunderstandings, bridge cultural conflicts, and foster the globalization of economic exchanges (Porila and Thijs, forthcoming; Byram et al., 2001; LeBaron, 2003; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009), knowledge on language and communication, and on intercultural communication in particular, has been used within this infrastructure to put in place best practices, guidelines, standards, and processes that should lead to the democratization of the selection and legal classification of these migrants, ease the states' interactions with these linguistically diverse groups, and simplify the integration of migrants into the labor market.

In line with this special issue's major concern with understanding the nature and effects of authoritative knowledge on language and diversity, this article aims to unpack the multiple ways intercultural communication supports this infrastructure. I particularly look into how, why, and with which consequences for whom knowledge on intercultural communication contributes to the everyday regulation and structuration of migration by the different actors within this infrastructure and, in doing so, draw attention to the multiple (and sometimes contradictory) projects and tactics that this semiotic resource serves.

The analysis presented in this article draws on an ongoing, multi-sited ethnographic research project<sup>ii</sup> (Marcus, 1995) conducted within the framework of two emblematic organizations of the migration infrastructure in Italy. The first organization is a social cooperative called Legame<sup>iii</sup> that is located in one of the main urban centers in Central Italy and that provides services to both migrants (in form of language instruction, cultural mediation, access to housing, vocational training, and legal counseling) and to the city's social workers who work for migrants (in the form of professional trainings for the young social workers of the city). The second organization is a local section of Poverty, one of the major Catholic charitable organizations in Italy, located in an urban center in northern Italy.



Poverty is mandated by the local authorities to manage the reception of migrants (in reception centers) and to facilitate their integration in local society through language training and professional coaching.

By documenting the everyday work routines as well as rationalities and practices of three key actors – I will call them Laura, Jürgen, and Thomas – who occupy strategic positions in the two organizations, I present an analysis of the everyday governance of migration. Following a theoretical discussion of the interconnections between migration infrastructures, the governmentality of displacement, and intercultural communication, based on empirical findings, I document the training activities that Legame provided to a group of young social workers. In doing so, I problematize how these workers are trained to internalize and enact a set of moralized forms of conducts to facilitate their daily interaction with the linguistically diverse migrants. In the second section, I focus on the relocation of a group of refugees who were transferred by Poverty from northern Italy to a reception institution located in a major urban center in southern Italy, reflecting on the forms of knowledge on language and communication that are mobilized by the individuals organizing and conducting this relocation. Subsequently, I document the production of a script by a taskforce of experts appointed by Poverty to help volunteers communicate to the members of the local Catholic community the organization's official viewpoint on the migration crisis.

In line with recent critical scholarship on language and culture that problematizes the ways intercultural communication intersects with larger dynamics of social difference and inequality (Gal, 2015; Gumperz, 1992; Severi and Hanks, 2015; Jacquemet, 2014; Piller, 2011; Sarangi, 1995), the ethnographic account presented in this article demonstrates that, if expertise on language and communication, and intercultural communication in particular, is imagined by those actors governing migration as a powerful resource to empower migrants and contribute to the successful management of their reception, this discipline also is invested

in as a coercive technology that creates “docile” social workers, “obedient” migrants, and “rational” members of the general public – a practice that ultimately contributes to the shaping of compliant individuals who do not resist the forms of precarity and subaltern status that migration comes with in present-day Italy.

### Migrant Infrastructures and the Governmentality of Displacement

While not always making explicit reference to the concept of infrastructure (an exception is Juffermans and Lorente’s panel “Language and the Black Box of Migration” at the conference “The Sociolinguistic of Globalization” in Hong Kong, 2015), scholarship on language and society has produced extensive findings on the institutions, processes, and practices organizing migration (Allan and McElhinny, 2016; Duchêne, Moyer and Roberts, 2013). Scholars have dedicated particular attention to the role of bureaucratic institutions (Codó, 2008, 2013; Codó and Garrido, 2010) and language testing regimes (Milani, 2008; Piller, 2001; Shohamy, 2009; van Avermaet, 2009; Yeung, under review), as well as the educational field in managing migration and migrants’ linguistic and cultural diversity (Del Percio and Duchêne, 2015; Martin-Rojo, 2010, 2013). Researchers have problematized the role of telecommunication technologies and non-governmental organizations as well as state offices and actors in turning migrants into productive citizens (Flubacher, 2014; Flubacher, Coray and Duchêne, forthcoming; Pujolar, 2007, 2013; Sabaté i Dalmau, 2014) and workers (Allan, 2013, 2016; Da Silva and Heller, 2009; Del Percio and Van Hoof, forthcoming; Duchêne, in press; Lorente, 2010; Piller and Takahashi, 2011). Studies have investigated the linguistic practices and technical devices facilitating or complicating access to asylum (Blommaert, 2009; Maryns, 2016) and health care (Collins and Slembrouk, 2014). Finally, research has been conducted on the way economic regimes contribute to the regulation of

migration and hierarchization of migrants on the labor market (Deumert and Mabandla, 2013; Vigouroux, 2013, 2015).

In addition to this body of work, investigating the way migrant infrastructures contribute to the government of migration (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014), means to document how the state has learned to infiltrate and use the multiplicity of institutions, practices, and tactics that we have learned to call civil society (Gramsci, 2010) in order to regulate and secure displacement and mobility not through force but through consent (Foucault, 2000). In line with Foucault, Nikolas Rose has termed this type of state governmentality an “action at distance” because it controls and acts upon the conduct of individuals not directly, but through the mediation of diverse bodies of expertise that – while standing for different and sometimes competing agendas and rationalities – are also consistent with state interests such as civic order, health, or enterprise (Rose, 1999; see as well Dlaske, Barakos, Motobayashi and McLaughlin, 2016; Urla, 2012, 2014).

This mode of indirect and subtle societal governmentality uses knowledge about society and its functioning as its principle technology of regulation (Martin-Rojo, 2015, 2016). Knowledge produces subjects (e.g. through the objectification of the laboring subject in economics, or the differentiation between types of subjectivities using medical knowledge) while also managing, disciplining, and naturalizing subjects’ relations with other subjects as well as the relations between subjects and objects, between subjects and events, and, finally, between subjects and their selves. This knowledge also convinces individuals of the necessity and inevitability of certain forms of control and disciplinary measures, even if such practices maintain them in subaltern and marginal situations (see Foucault, 1980, 1982; see also Gould, 1981).

In keeping with findings on medical, sexual, and economic knowledge, scholars in language in society have argued that knowledge about language and communication has been

crucial for increasing security in modern societies (Bauman and Briggs, 2003). This scholarship argues that the deeply rooted belief that security, peace, and social order – like prosperity, democracy, and political participation – cannot be ensured under conditions of linguistic heterogeneity has converted language and communication (and metalinguistic knowledge in particular) into one of the crucial resources for governments of modern, liberal nations. Indeed, through the intermediation of institutions such as compulsory education, the military service, the church, cultural institutions, and last but not least the family, language and culture have been employed as a coercive technology to govern and normalize the social and political behavior of citizens and to naturalize the hierarchization of individuals along axes of differentiation marked by gender, ethnicity, race, and class (Gal and Woolard, 2001; Kroskrity, 2000; Martin-Rojo, 2015, 2016).

In this context, investigating the ways intercultural communication contributes to the government of displacement represents a questioning of the status of this semiotic resource within an infrastructure that governs migration not through a one-way expression of power violently exerted by a monopolistic state authority onto the body of society, but rather through a form of indirect, societal governmentality that is enacted by a multiplicity of coexisting actors and institutions that are situated both inside and outside the state apparatus – an apparatus that “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.” (Foucault, 1980: 39)

In order to avoid oversimplified, generalizing accounts of the ways intercultural communication intersects with such forms of docilizing governmentality, in the next section, I look at these processes from the perspective of my current work on the practices of reception and integration of migrants and refugees currently arriving in Italy, and present ethnographic data collected between the summer of 2014 and the autumn of 2015. This data includes: field

notes of observations of daily work routines, of meetings, and of trainings and public events; recorded conversations with the different actors occupying different positions and roles within the investigated organizations; interviews conducted with migrants and refugees; and institutional documents, guidelines and reports. This information leads to a better understanding of the multiple projects that rely on intercultural communication within different spaces of the migration infrastructure in Italy. The ethnographic data also enable me to document the ways different actors rationalize their investment in these semiotic resources, the metalinguistic knowledge they mobilize to explain and justify these investments in intercultural communication, and the effects of these communicative practices on how valued social resources are distributed within and by the migration infrastructures. Finally, by looking at the ways displacement is governed through the everyday routines of those actors working in the migration infrastructure, I am able to document attempts to resist and subvert the forms of power expressed by this infrastructure.

### Disciplining Workers

In this first section, based on empirical findings, I would like to introduce Laura, an experienced, 48-year-old coach working for Legame. Laura has a degree in psychology and intercultural mediation. She looks back on lengthy experience working with migrants in different Italian humanitarian organizations and has been employed as a social worker in various reception centers. She has also worked as a legal advisor and as a first-aid officer on the southern Italian coast. In 2005, she was engaged by Legame to provide training and coaching sessions for young social workers. Despite the high demand for skilled social workers, the state authorities have consistently refused to finance compulsory trainings for young social workers dealing with migrants, which is why organizations such as Legame – that have operated in the social sector for decades – have begun providing training and

coaching opportunities for young social professionals who are often obliged to work under highly precarious and insecure labor conditions brought about by the volatility in the numbers of incoming migrants.

The first time I met Laura was in the autumn of 2014, when I had the opportunity to attend one of Legame's trainings on intercultural communication and conflict management.

According to Legame's public announcement, this training was aimed at providing "participants with instruments that enable the improvement of interaction with others, instill healthy and functional relations, and increase their ability to work with and for vulnerable subjects."<sup>iv</sup> Indeed, Laura told me that, for these young professionals, "learning how to speak across cultures" is a means for workers to learn "coping with the forms of stress and frustration that their [the young professionals'] precarious work in linguistically and culturally diverse settings comes with."

This training consisted of six modules taking place on six consecutive Saturdays. It was attended by thirteen social workers, eleven women and two men, all aged between 25 and 35. None of the participants had been forced to attend these trainings by their employers; rather, they believed their attendance would raise the level of professionalism at work and help them manage everyday conflicts both with the migrants and with the other workers in their reception centers.

The first training module was dedicated to "good communication." In it, Laura explained that conflicts – both with migrants and co-workers – "are often the product of miscommunication." To illustrate her argument, she presented a slide displaying the communication model developed by Shannon & Weaver (1949) in their book "A Mathematical Model of Communication." This model, she explained, is ideal for outlining the communication practices performed by social workers and identifying factors that hinder communication and lead to conflict. Indeed, a message, she argued, is "usually encoded by a

sender and gets then decoded by a receiver.” However, she explained, “the sign often does not pass as smoothly as intended, especially in such hectic work contexts as reception centers.”

The participants seemed to agree with her and acknowledged her diagnosis by smiling and nodding. “The permanent mess at the centers,” she continued, “the different languages spoken and cultural backgrounds, the migrants’ situation of uncertainty, the fatigue after a long shift, the low salaries and short contracts, and the anxieties, frustration, or anger caused by the unstable work conditions, or by an impatient migrant or a bothersome colleague,” all these factors would represent what Shannon and Weaver call “noise,” i.e. an obstacle in the transmission of the sign, which results in miscommunication and conflict (see Connor, 2015 and Deumert, 2015 for similar conceptualizations of “noise” in Norway and South Africa). This is why, she clarified, “improving communication means learning how to reduce ‘noise’.”

She further explained that the communication trainings she had developed and tested in her career draw on knowledge from psychological behaviorism and assume that abnormal psychological behavior can be treated by what she called “recursive intentional enactment of socially acceptable forms of conduct.” She added that “while these trainings have traditionally been used in the psychological treatment of patients with anorexia, obesity, anxiety, and depression, the techniques are increasingly used in training sessions that address regular employees and their communication practices.” Training good communication skills is, in Laura’s view, a way to encourage workers to process what she calls their “abnormal behaviors” in their daily professional routine, which ultimately helps transform these individuals into better workers.

In her training activities, Laura dedicates particular attention to the decoding of the communicated message, since she believes it is “at this phase of the communicative practice that most of the misunderstandings and tensions would find their cause.” Indeed, because “speaking is a succession of communicative practices, each of which is influenced by the

previous one and influences the subsequent one,” learning how to speak is mainly about learning how to actively listen, i.e. about developing the capacity to “successfully decode previous speech events and then to give appropriate answers.” In consequence, to successfully engage in a conversation, she claims, “we need to work on our own physical openness to receive and decode a message in a way that does justice to the sender’s intentions.” In her view, this implies paying particular attention to the following three elements:

“First, the receiver needs to maximize his or her capacity to focus on what is said.” Second, “the receiver needs to control his or her own nonverbal communication.” Third, “the receiver needs to be able to manage and keep control over his or her communication practices.” For each of these elements, Laura gave short instructions helping these individuals to work on their own communicative competence.

For the first element, she suggested that the workers should make sure they “listen to their interlocutors until the end of their sentence without interrupting”; she asked to focus on what “the interlocutor expresses and not think about their own personal problems and insecurities”; she also suggested “not to focus on the weaknesses of the interlocutor’s discourse.” For the second element, she emphasized that “active listeners should avoid excessive body movements or shifty looks.” Good listeners should also “regulate the distance of their body from the one of their interlocutors” and make sure that their body is “tilted forward and oriented towards the person that is speaking.” Finally, she said “listeners should limit the number of words in their interventions, use minimal responses, ask questions, and manage silence in order to give the interlocutor time to explain their thoughts.”

A first look at the expertise on language and communication entextualized and circulated by Laura helps us to understand that active listening is not a neutral behavior. The conduct that Laura conceives as ideal is highly moralized: it constructs hierarchies between different forms of speech as well as establishes and naturalizes imagined links between bad



communication and unproductivity, bad communication and conflict, or bad communication and uneasiness at work. Further, Laura's recommended communicative behavior is a conduct that stigmatizes every form of uncontrolled emotional behavior and that therefore effectively dehumanizes the worker. Along the lines of Michel Foucault's work on the microphysics of power, Laura's instructions are tokens of expertise resulting in an exercise of subtle coercion over the worker's body, of its movement, gestures, attitudes, and more generally of the relational activity represented by social work. (In this sense, the use of the Shannon & Weaver's communication model is insofar applicable to Laura's point as it assumes that communication can be engineered, i.e. systematically planned and improved through a set of technical adjustments that eradicate redundancy and noise, both factors that, according to the mathematician authors, complicate the transmission of the message.) Despite the parallels, however, the modes of communicative training practiced by Laura differ from the policy of coercion represented by Fordist governmentality. While the political anatomy described in Foucault's early analysis (1978) was a mechanism of a coercion exerted by a disciplinary institution onto the individual's body through a partitioning of time, space, and movement, the communicative instructions provided by Laura stand for what Foucault would call a governmentality of the self (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996, 1999), a form of domestication in which the self exerts power over its own body and is made responsible for its performance, endurance, and health.

During the training activities, Laura asked the participants to create groups of three and to simulate conflict situations so we could practice active listening by enacting the techniques she had presented and by constantly monitoring how participants speak, listen, and act with their bodies. Laura asked me to join Antonella, Giovanna, and Rodolfo, who decided to simulate a conflict situation in which two ethnically different groups of refugees fight about who could use the only toilet they had at their disposal, an argument that necessitated an

intervention on the part of the social worker. The social workers explained that while this imagined conflict might sound trivial for people like me not working in such reception centers, it was certainly not and that tensions related to who gains access to the facilities of a reception center often lead to violent encounters, all of which costs the social workers – as mediators – a great deal of energy and patience, and brings about frustration as well.

What struck me while observing the simulation of controversies enacted by the participants was their high motivation to learn and automatize Laura's instructions. Indeed, they constantly corrected each other, pointed to their body language and speech style, adjusted their body posture, and suggested possibilities of improvement. Although Rodolfo and Antonella had earlier told me that the unsafe hygienic conditions of the building in which they were required to work and the absence of adequate facilities for the reception of the migrants caused tensions and uneasiness both among the migrants and within the team of social workers, none of them seemed to challenge the idea that working on oneself could help attenuate the tensions partly engendered by the poor infrastructure. To the contrary, I gained the impression that they had internalized the theory that any conflict and uneasiness is a result of their communicative practices and that mastery of the techniques they were learning during this training would help them to cope better at work. What also became clear when talking to these young professionals was their conviction that acquiring the desired forms of professional conduct would help them achieve a certain degree of professionalism that in turn would allow them, in the near future, to stabilize their professional standing and overcome precarious situations at work.

Now, the first conclusion we can draw from these ethnographic insights is that, while the communication trainings are meant to empower these young professionals and to help them acquire a specific expertise that, in the future, may (or may not) support their professional integration and mobility, these trainings also contribute to making social workers

responsible for the well-being of their bodies and for the quality of work this body is able to produce. Indeed, by assuming that the workers' well-being – in addition to their capacity to gain access to stable work conditions – are dependent on their willingness to constantly work on and monitor their bodies and communicative conduct, these trainings and the forms of linguistic and communicative expertise they entextualize force these workers to locate the reasons for their uneasiness at work and their position of professional precarity within their own bodies and minds – and not in the working conditions they are exposed to. In these terms, it is possible to understand the training in intercultural communication not only as a means to improve the productivity, flexibility, and endurance of the bodies and minds of the social workers, but also as part of a strategy of appeasement and pacification of the worker. Although the trainings foster aspirations to professional change, they prevent the social workers from resisting and challenging the long shifts, the high demands on their flexibility, and the short work contracts that characterize the everyday work of these young professionals.

### Pacifying Migrants

Jürgen is the second actor I would like to introduce. He manages the Poverty reception centers in the northern Italian city in which I did fieldwork and was my main interlocutor. It was he I turned to when, in the autumn of 2014, I learned of the state's intention to transfer 39 asylum seekers from Nigeria, Mauritania, Gambia, Ghana, and Bangladesh from Jürgen's reception center in northern Italy to reception centers located in the deteriorating peripheries of an urban center in southern Italy.

This relocation was mandated by the Italian Ministry of the Interior and conducted by Poverty. It was justified as part of a governmental strategy to exploit the reception capacities of institutions situated in so-called “structurally weak” regions of the country, i.e. in areas of Italy where the presence of migrants could potentially facilitate the revitalization of the local

economy. Indeed, because the European Union and the Italian state pay organizations such as Poverty to provide migrants with housing, catering and health care services, language instruction, vocational education, as well as legal counseling and professional orientation, the transfer of migrants to economically weak regions was conceived as a way to stimulate local commercial exchange and create jobs for the unemployed Italian population. The government authorities also explained that the resettlement was a way to support the city's tourism sector that, according to the local tourist industry, had been negatively impacted by the increase of refugees begging in the city center.

When I heard of this transfer, I asked Jürgen what relocating the migrants involved for Poverty as an organization. While showing me the list of migrants who had to leave, he explained that he considered this operation to be high risk because the selected migrants might not accept the relocation to a region of Italy they generally conceptualized as Europe's equivalent to Africa. Indeed, the migrants viewed their relocation to areas considered economically weak, administratively dysfunctional, and socially segregated as detrimental to their future access to the labor market and to their chances of receiving a fair and efficient asylum process.

In such a delicate situation, he explained, what is at stake for Poverty is the need "to display a certain degree of professionalism and organizational skills as well as moral integrity". Indeed, it must be understood that the recent professionalization and liberalization of Italy's reception practices have brought consequences for charitable organizations like Poverty, which have historically held a monopoly power in the domain of social services and which now had to operate under new, deregulated market conditions. It is within this specific logic that Jürgen's wish to ensure "a smooth relocation" operation should be considered. Indeed, although Jürgen viewed the resettlement of 39 migrants as a loss of the financial resources dedicated to housing of these individuals, ensuring the professional conduct of this

specific relocation would – in the long term – retain Poverty’s access “to potential future funds, thus retaining the organizations ability to remain competitive in a highly fluctuating market.”

In order to create the conditions for a successful relocation, i.e. to avoid tension and forms of resistance during the relocation, Jürgen built a team of experienced, multilingual personnel. He explained that it was very important that “the migrants linguistically understood the conditions and implications of this transfer.” “To ensure a maximum of communicative transparency”, Jürgen explained, he chose people fluent in English and French, two languages he felt were understood by almost all migrants to be resettled. He also asked two former asylum seekers, now working for Poverty as night guards, to join the team. Their Urdu and Arabic skills, Jürgen said, would help should any mediation between the migrants and local authorities become necessary. All appointed multilingual staff members were already employed and received a regular salary from Poverty.

While investigating the organizational processes of this relocation, I asked Jürgen why he dedicated so much attention to questions of understanding and mutual intelligibility, and more particularly, how would mutual understanding make the relocation process more professional. He pointed to the *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook* that, in his view, was a “Bible” for all those planning relocations. He read out the following excerpt:

“Poorly designed resettlement programmers may create enormous and often unrealizable expectations within the refugee community. Combined with frustration and possible trauma from prior experiences, these expectations can be a source of anxiety and tension that may ultimately lead refugees to extreme measures, such as organized protests or violence. As part of managing overall expectations, it is important to establish and maintain a dialogue with refugee leaders and individual refugees about protection activities and durable solutions. Efforts should be made to ensure that refugees understand the scope and limitations

of all possible durable solutions. The most important aspect of any effort to manage resettlement expectations is to provide refugees with clear and consistent information on the limits and possibilities of resettlement.” (UNHCR, 2013: pp.140-141)

Jürgen looked up and explained that false expectations are a key source of migrants’ anxieties and potential resistance, both elements that potentially endanger the success of a relocation. In keeping with what he had just read, Jürgen continued, saying that “dialogue,” “consistent information,” and more generally “understanding” facilitate the management and avoidance of false expectation and, as such, help create the conditions for a successful – i.e. uncontested – transfer of migrants.

Furthermore, Jürgen oriented my attention toward a second excerpt from another handbook entitled *Recommendations and best practices for the management of mixed migration flows*, which is produced jointly by the Italian Red Cross, the International Migration Organization, Save the Children, the UNHCR, and the Italian state. Again he read out aloud:

“To inform properly means establishing a relationship of trust with the migrants, i.e. to help migrants to better understand their actual situation, with transparency and honesty, even if it means disappointing some expectations. Being informed in full and correctly is essential to be able make informed choices in circumstances that have a significant impact on their lives.” (IOM et al., 2010: p.23)

Here communication is imagined as a tool creating trust and enabling the migrants to keep control over their bodies at a key moment in their migration trajectory. Jürgen further explained that making sure people understand what was happening to them was a means to empower them and to prevent them from resisting a practice that some might consider unjust.

During the relocation process, I observed how language and communication – and more specifically the workers’ capacity to communicate across linguistic boundaries – was

invested in to ensure intercultural understanding. I documented how the migrants selected for resettlement were instructed by the social workers in English and French instead of in Italian – as had generally been the case when I was at the center. I also documented how the two former asylum seekers translated the migrants’ concerns from Urdu back into Italian and English. Finally, I observed how the Arabic-speaking guards helped the Mauritanian refugees pack their clothes into plastic bags.

Thanks to the linguistic competence of his team, Jürgen was able to inform all the migrants about the necessity to leave the city for a new reception center located in southern Italy; nevertheless, things did not go as expected. Indeed, if the multilingual skills of the employees effectively assured mutual intelligibility and transparency, this investment in intercultural communication was apparently insufficient to convince the migrants that leaving the city was a safe thing to do. This is why, despite the involvement of multilingual personnel, the 39 migrants refused to leave and demanded further guarantees.

Indeed, the group of young migrants asked the local authorities to confirm in a written document – in English, French, and Italian – to guarantee that the reception centers in southern Italy would provide the same standards and services (in terms of legal support, language instruction, hygienic conditions, and available beds) as offered at Poverty. This document was also requested as a guarantee to ensure that their asylum-seeking process would not be interrupted by their transfer to another Italian region. Since asylum procedures in Italy are processed at the regional level, the migrants feared their transfer to the reception centers in southern Italy would entail restarting the entire application process, thus delaying an answer for years. As one of the migrants’ leaders explained to me during the negotiations, this written guarantee was a way to ensure that the Italian authorities were effectively certifying what they had promised and to guarantee that all 39 migrants would linguistically understand what was in store for them. In other words, in line with Jürgen’s investment in

intercultural communication, the migrants considered this multilingual guarantee a means to create the conditions for a minimum of certainty, empowerment, and control in a future that seemed more uncertain than ever.

For the local state authorities, such a written guarantee was in line with their wish to maximize the transparency of their communication and to make sure that linguistic misunderstandings would not prevent migrants from being aware of what to expect in the Southern Italy reception centers. This is why, after a few hours during which the local police searched desperately for an officer able to produce the text in English and French, they distributed these documents to the refugees who finally agreed to leave the city.

My follow-up on these people's trajectories revealed that these multilingual state guarantees were not as powerful and authoritative as expected. Although translating the document into a language understood by the migrants ostensibly guaranteed that everybody understood what was happening, once arriving at the centers in southern Italy, the local authorities stated that part of the migrants' asylum application had to be resubmitted. Furthermore, while the requested document guaranteed that the new reception centers in South Italy would correspond to Poverty's institutions in terms of quality of the infrastructure and professionalism of the services provided, the transferred migrants claimed the new infrastructures did not meet the promised standards. The new arrivals criticized the center's overpopulation (with more than 10 individuals occupying one sleeping room), the insufficient sanitary facilities (with one toilet per room of ten persons), the complete lack of legal counseling, language instruction, and vocational training, and more generally, the suitability of these facilities to host human beings. This is why, only a few days after their arrivals, 14 of the 39 migrants chose to leave the center and to seek shelter in one of the many (illegally) occupied houses in the city center.



Overall, this ethnographic data suggests that Jürgen invested in intercultural communication as a powerful technology to prevent the transferred migrants from resisting their relocation and engaging in forms of protest and rebellion that would consequently endanger the efficiency of this transfer. More particularly, by constructing intercultural communication as an icon of intercultural understanding, this communicative resource was mobilized to grant migrants an illusion of control and agency over their own resettled bodies, i.e. as a strategy of persuasion, reassurance, and pacification creating the conditions for the termination of a protest enacted by the migrants. In that sense, intercultural communication can be seen a part of a more general investment in the subjects' capacities to choose for themselves and to be responsible for their own self-realization and actions (Rose 1999). Moreover, the analysis of the management of this resettlement practice demonstrates that – probably due to their constant exposure to these discourses on the emancipatory nature of intercultural communication the migrants themselves began to internalize the expert notion that linguistic understanding implies empowerment and agency; as a result, they adopted and legitimated precisely the tools and forms of expertise that ultimately contribute to the banalization of structural, non-discursive conditions that cause and perpetuate their situation of precarity and marginality.

### Educating the Public

In this last section, I introduce a third actor, Markus, who is Jürgen's principle assistant at Poverty. Markus, who holds a PhD in linguistics (with a focus on second language learning) from an Austrian university, has worked at Poverty since 2011. He has been active in the reception centers as a language instructor, has worked as a press officer for the refugee section of Poverty, and has been assisting the organization in its relations to other sections of Poverty located in Europe.

When I began to show interest in his activities at the Poverty press office, Markus, informed me that Poverty was experiencing a period of transformation. This was due, he claimed, to the unprecedented arrival of migrants from the northern African coasts and from the Middle East. He explained that the dramatic increase in numbers of arrivals in the past years led to a massive expansion of his own section in terms of employed personnel, services provided, and amount of financial resources available. These changes also had consequences for the mission and positioning of the entire organization. Indeed, while the provision of service to migrants had, for many years, been a minor task in this Catholic organization, today serving migrants was part of Poverty's core business. Markus explained that these transformations were good for him because they lent him more visibility and responsibility within his organization; nevertheless, the organizational transformations, and more particularly Poverty's new focus on migrants with a Muslim background, came with a risk.

He said the main challenge confronting his organization at that moment in time was convincing the local Catholic population that caring for the incoming Muslim migrants is a good thing. He further explained that Poverty's management feared that the tensions caused by the arrival of migrants in the city could affect the status and prestige of the organization in this particular city. Indeed, the opening of different reception centers managed by Poverty had been contested within the local Catholic community and by the rightwing parties Lega Nord and Casapound that, for several months, had been organizing demonstrations in front of Poverty's reception centers and demanding that the migrants leave the city.

Markus believed these contestations implied two risks. First, the potential loss of prestige of the organization in the minds of the local population could lead to a decline of revenues coming from the donations of the local Catholic community. While Poverty is partly financed by the Catholic Church and the Italian state, the major part of the organization's revenues is generated through donations from the local population. Markus explained that

these donations do not just consist of financial contributions. These donations also take the form of real estate and other expensive infrastructure that is offered to Poverty and on which the organization relies for its day-to-day operations. For example, several buildings hosting the reception centers of Poverty have been donated by the local population. Losing the support of the local population would mean losing access to these buildings and facilities.

The second risk Markus saw is related to the consequences of the social tensions and struggles on the staff and volunteers working on behalf of the migrants. Markus stressed the vulnerability and defenselessness of the many volunteers Poverty employs in its daily activities. Indeed, in the past years, Poverty had increasingly relied on young volunteers or “trainees,” as the organizations calls them, in order to combat the cost explosion that came with new Poverty reception centers. According to Markus, the problem was that these young volunteers had started to complain about their working conditions and especially the emotional pressures exercised by their friends and families who, according to Markus, seemed to have a hard time accepting the volunteers’ commitment to work with refugees and migrants. Markus said that these tensions caused many volunteers to ask to be removed and to work in other domains of Poverty. Others completely stopped volunteering for Poverty.

During my fieldwork, I observed that, in order to manage the effects of these organizational transformations, Poverty invested in communicative activities, i.e. interventions in public debates, local media, and visits to schools, all of which aims at influencing how people think and talk about migrants. Because Poverty’s management maintained that the local population was merely poorly informed about “the real nature of the migrants, their histories and trajectories as well as their dreams and ambitions,” it was Poverty’s task to “educate and elevate” its community and to “prepare the local citizenship for a future multicultural society characterized by intercultural dialogue and common understanding.”

It is within this context that, in the spring of 2015, Poverty's management mandated a taskforce of so-called "experts" on intercultural dialogue, led by Markus, to produce a communication script supporting volunteers in their everyday encounters with the local population. The four appointed experts were chosen by Poverty's management on account of their academic training in language and communication – two of them held a PhD in language studies, two others had degrees in marketing or communication – and due to their extensive work experience in institutions dealing with migrants and social marginality. Indeed, the specific expertise embodied by these four individuals was selected with a view to contributing to the organization's management and manipulation of public opinion on migrants and their difference.

In the framework of several meetings – some of which I was able to attend between February 2015 and March 2015 – this taskforce produced a set of communicative instructions that, in its final version, was entitled "Mixed feelings when dealing with migrants." The text consisted of 19 answers to 19 complaints and questions about migrants that, according to Markus, had been circulating in the local population and that needed to be offset by clear information about migrants, their rights, and their living conditions. The complaints included worries about the migrants' supposed criminal attitudes, their aggressive behavior, their incapacity to take care of their children, their reported laziness, their unwillingness to learn Italian, their refusal to integrate into Italian society, their problematic relationship with hygiene, and their purported reluctance to accept Italian laws and habits.

This, for example, is the scripted answer to complaint 15:

"When I go to work, I often see idle refugees sitting around [on the street], [these are] all healthy, young men. Why don't they start helping themselves to improve their situation?"

"There are different reasons why these people are inactive. The absolute majority of them would like to work and care for themselves. Keep in mind that the Italian, but also the

South Tyrolean politics, are responsible for the conditions in which refugees live here. Many refugees are forced to sit around because, by law, they are only allowed to work at the earliest after six months [following the submission of their asylum application] and [even] after that they have great difficulty in finding a job on the regular labor market. They are most eager to earn their money, but they suffer from lack of an occupation. To prepare the refugees for their lives in their new home, we also need to invest in language training and professional education from the outset. Remember that most refugees want to be active, but they are subject to a ban on working and there are hardly any integration offers. They have no chance to access education, and they consequently remain unattractive on the labor market. If you need help with gardening, your move and other routine jobs, turn to the Poverty refugee office. In the framework of the “freehand” social project, the office connects asylum seekers with South Tyrolean households [needing help]. Poverty gives the helpers [i.e. the asylum seekers] some financial compensation. As a result, they are insured at work and pay taxes.”

As becomes clear in the answer to question 15, the instructions were structured as follows: First, the document reproduced a question that was considered by the team to be a standard complaint with which the volunteers were confronted by their families and, during their work activities, by the Italian populace. In a second step, the document proposes answers, i.e. pieces and bits of discourse that the volunteers should enact and adapt according to the communicative situations encountered in their daily work routines.

I had the opportunity to follow both the production process of this script and the discussion of the script with the volunteers who were expected to embody and enact the correct answers. Both the production process and the communication of the script created tensions.

To be sure, during the production of this text, there was general agreement that such a script was necessary to protect the volunteers from tensions that migration causes and to

educate or elevate the local Catholic population; nevertheless, the different members of this team disagreed on what agenda this script should put forward. While some wanted a script that could give “practical instructions and clear advice,” other members of the commission insisted on the “political and religious stances of solidarity, charity, and altruism” that the script was to communicate and inculcate in the minds of the local Catholic community. Furthermore, tensions arose concerning the status and function of the instructions. While part of the group viewed the script as a representation of general guidelines that act as discursive resources on which the volunteers could rely in difficult communicative situations, for others, the document represented speech instructions that had to be memorized by the volunteers and systematically performed in their encounters with the Italian population. Despite these tensions, Markus’s position of power within this taskforce – as the principle assistant of Poverty’s refugee director his voice was particularly important – permitted him to impose his position in favor of a strict internalization of the document by the volunteers. This was in order to guarantee “that these young volunteers would communicate the values and doctrine represented by Poverty.”

This attempt to stylize (Cameron, 1995; Duchêne, 2009; Lorente, 2010) the volunteers’ talk created additional tensions in volunteer circles. In order to communicate and explain the function of the document to the volunteers, Markus organized a meeting with these individuals. While Markus and his team expected that the volunteers would enjoy this experience and have fun, the document gave rise to dissent and forms of resistance. Some of the participants claimed that they disagreed with the formulated answers and that they shared the worries expressed by the local population; as such, they were not prepared to enact the script. Others feared that by representing and displaying the doctrine and mission of the organization in such an explicit way, they would become targets of the aggressions and frustrations of the local population; for them, the script was not a tool facilitating their work,

but something that made it more difficult. Still others complained that reproducing this script would be perceived by the addressed audiences as contrived and artificial, a condition that would not simplify the volunteers' work.

While these forms of resistance were surprising to Markus and his team, the management of Poverty now considers the script as obligatory discursive instructions that are to be followed by every volunteer of the organization when confronted with criticism of the organization's involvement with the reception of migrants; as such, it is a principle resource for regulating the volunteers' communicative conduct. Every new volunteer has to memorize the document and must demonstrate their ability to convincingly perform the forms of knowledge about migrants entextualized in the document.

During my observation of the volunteers' daily routines, I observed that some of them overtly questioned Poverty's attempts to regulate and standardize their speech practices and they tried to adapt their production of knowledge according to their own ideological stance towards the incoming migrants. Others, however, strictly followed the explanations prescribed by the instructions, since, as some of them explained, the document enabled them to enact "expert knowledge" on the topic of Muslim migration that was currently controversial in the city. As such, some of the volunteers I interviewed said reproducing an authoritative voice was "reassuring" because it enabled them to occupy a position of authority within their own Catholic community and to convince their interlocutors about the false nature of negative perceptions of migrants.

The effects of these scripted communicative techniques on the local public opinion about migrants is naturally difficult to ascertain. What is clear is that, despite the struggles and tensions that the presence of migrants continues to cause within the local Catholic community, Poverty continues, at least for the moment, to profit from buildings and facilities donated by the local community.

## Conclusion

Through the presentation of these three settings, it was my intention to document the different practices and activities that expertise on intercultural communication contributes to shape, legitimize, and serve. In doing so, I argued that, although intercultural communication is said to facilitate the everyday functioning of the state infrastructure that regulates the influx of migrants, intercultural communication also acts as a powerful resource that is mobilized to express control over or discipline not only the workers, who are the executors of this infrastructure of migration, and the migrants, whose trajectories and life projects are determined by the receiving institutions, but also the general population, which is asked to accept or tolerate the forms of precarity that are frequently associated with these migrants.

More particularly, by showing that an individual's anxieties, frustrations, and fears are constructed as expressions of irrational, emotional, and unresonable bodies and minds, my ethnographic account enables me to demonstrate that expertise on intercultural communication is invested in as a powerful technology that contributes to the domestication of forms of affect (Besnier, 1990; McElhinny, 2010) that, if not controlled, are imagined to lead to societal disorder, unrest, resistance, and harm. In these terms, the investment in expertise on intercultural communication is not just a way to exert power over an individual's conduct and communicative practices by means of the internalization of scripted tokens of normed conduct or through the subordination of an individual's body to the logics and interests of an infrastructure implemented to govern migration. Rather, the governmental investment in intercultural communication is a form of coercive power that permits, through the mediation of actors such as NGO's, cooperatives, and humanitarian organizations, the pacification and appeasement of entire societies and the securement of national territories.



However, the exercise of power through convincing the self to constantly surveil its own conduct as well as the conduct of his or her fellow women and men does not replace a more repressive state apparatus drawing on bodily violence, incarceration, and expulsion. It rather coexists with this apparatus and contributes to its embellishment and to a certain extent to the obfuscation or invisibilization of its repressive forces. Indeed, by interpellating civil society as its principle actor of repression and control, this mode of governmentality alleviates the (Western) state of any responsibility for the forms of violence and subalternity that the regulation of migration comes with and thus contributes to the reproduction and legitimation of those conditions that maintain migrants (and some of the individuals working on their behalf) in subaltern and marginal positions.

All this should not surprise a critical scholarship interested in the conditions and effects of authoritative knowledge on language and society. Indeed, as Bauman and Briggs have shown in their groundbreaking book “Voices of Modernity” (2003), expertise on language and communication has always served the interests of the cultural formation we have learned to call modernity, and it legitimizes the relations of domination and inequality this formation produces and sustains (see for example Duchêne and Heller 2007; Gal and Woolard 2001; Milani 2007; Johnson 2005 on how linguistic expertise has served the interests of inequality). Seen as such, the investment in intercultural communication documented here could be understood as part of a larger, historical attempt by modern states to govern bodies not solely through the exercise of force and violence but through forms of social control and persuasion.

Still, despite these historical continuities, the current politics of displacement in Italy may also be characteristic of the current modes and principles of societal governmentality. The investment in intercultural communication documented here may be seen as anchored in a larger project of what Million calls “neoliberal multicultural biopolitics” (2013; also see

McElhinny in this issue for a similar claim), that invests in politics of recognition and valorization of difference and contributes to the affective domestication and tranquilization of the subalterns. While the commitment to intercultural communication and to discourses valorizing diversity more generally creates the illusion of equality and inclusion, it also tends to erase and bypass questions of power and structural domination, and lacks a commitment to material equality and social justice. Scholars have therefore argued that in times of restructuration of the welfare state, such valorizing discourses of diversity can be considered as coming without a cost, since they ensure social order but seldom involve action and material redistribution (Ahmed 2012). Finally, intercultural communication as a particular token of discourse on diversity gets to stand for antiracism, pluralism, equity and social justice as well as personal empowerment, individual integration and access to choice and self-responsibilization. This means that in times of financial instability and political uncertainty, endorsing these discourses allows for many organizations as well as governmental actors to get positioned as particularly progressive, modern and humanitarian and to avoid being made responsible for individuals' marginality and social exclusion.

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<sup>iv</sup> All quotes are translations from Italian.