

## 9 Language and Humanitarian Governmentality in a Refugee Camp on Lesbos Island

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### Introduction

Separated from Turkey by a ten-kilometre channel, Lesbos Island has received 45% of the refugees who arrived in Europe in 2015. An agreement called the EU-Turkey deal signed in March 2016 has led to the containment of refugees in hot spots, camps and shelters. Through this deal, the so called Balkan route has been closed and refugees including children and young people have been immobilized in refugee camps. Drawing on a nine-month ethnography on Lesbos island, this chapter investigates the processes of language teaching and children's rejection of learning the Greek language within a refugee camp called Eastside camp, hosting 'vulnerable families', operating with the logics of humanitarianism namely the deployment conflicting moral sentiments such as compassion to govern the refugees. To do this, I question the ambivalent techniques such as 'compassion', feelings for the suffering and misfortunes of others in 'conducting' the refugees and Foucault's (2007) notion of 'counter-conduct' that emerges from the specific conducts of humanitarian governmentality. I deal with this issue, by asking what role language teaching and learning play in humanitarian governmentality and the ways in which entanglements are manifested in this type of governmentality. In order to analyse the specificities of this kind of governmentality, I move away from the power/resistance dichotomy, that is dealt with in much of the sociolinguistic literature and instead focus on how subjects 'struggle' diagonally -namely ways in which individuals move away from direct confrontations to create new forms of conducting themselves, which become evident in the struggle of language teaching and learning. By focusing on the entanglements occurring in language education, I demonstrate the contradictions of this type of governmentality (Tazzioli, 2020) that is underpinned by immobility, political economy, biopolitics and security and which, in return, denies refugees' legally enshrined right to education. The data involve my ethnographic fieldwork comprising fieldnotes, interviews, a report written by the Ministry of Education in Greece, documents from nongovernmental organisations' websites and visual material involving photos of texts and images found in the research settings.

War and instability in the Middle East, especially in Syria has brought 821,008<sup>1</sup> refugees to Greece since 2015. About a quarter of this figure comprises children, with or without guardians. An agreement signed between the EU and Turkey in March 2016 has restricted the arrivals of refugees in Europe and entailed stricter border control, leading to the containment of thousands of refugees, including children and young adults, on the Greek island Lesbos in an infamous hot spot called Moria. Referring to Moria as the 'the prison' or 'the hell' the refugees have continued to experience horrendous living conditions encountering threats of violence, sexual violence, self-harm and suicide attempts among refugee children, fires, lack of water and toilets. While some refugee children have been self-harming and attempted suicide, six refugees in Moria died at the time of this research. Moria functions as a hot spot (Pascucci & Patchett, 2018) technology (more like a

detention centre) where biometric information is taken. This includes reception, identification, registration, and fingerprinting of asylum seekers and migrants arriving in the EU by sea (EPRC, 2018). Those who qualify as ‘vulnerable families’ are then sent to Eastside camp where this ethnography took place. Arriving in Greece via sea implies geographical restrictions. Refugees cannot leave the island unless authorities decide to send them to mainland Greece. I will use the term ‘refugee’ to denote those who seek international protection and assistance (Geneva Convention, 1951<sup>2</sup>) waiting to be registered, identified (see Dublin III Regulation<sup>3</sup>) and have /have not applied for asylum. In fact, only 5% of refugees out of 800.000 applied for asylum since 2015 (Carlson, Jakli & Linor, 2018: 671) in Greece many refugees stay informally forcing refugees to continue their journeys to western Europe via smugglers rather than legal routes. Refugees cannot leave the island unless the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the Greek government decides to relocate them. Staying under these conditions means experiencing tremendous amount of waiting (Khosravi, 2017), confusion, lack of information uncertainty and immobilization, while asylum seekers are being diligently sieved, categorized as children, adults, family, vulnerable and sick and partially ‘tamed’ (Pascucci *et al.*, 2018) by supranational organisations such as European Asylum Support Office (EASO) an agency of the European Union, other nongovernmental organisations, volunteers and solidarians.

The Ministry of Education in Greece was to find a formula to the question of refugee education and integration, especially for those who fall into the category of youngsters requiring compulsory education (aged below 16) into public schools after the implementation of the EU-Turkey. Greece agreed to create special education structures in the reception centres, and develop bridging programs between the two (Simopoulos & Alexandridis, 2019: 27). When addressing the issue of refugee education in Greece, the report highlighted the importance of language learning. The Ministry was considering the mobility, fluidity and the ‘refugees’ ignorance of the Greek language’ (MERA, 2017: 36), and shortsighted the importance of language learning. However, the MERA report added that the Greek language was of little use for the refugee population as they did not plan to stay in Greece and while their lives were on hold or in transit, English and German lessons provided by the NGOs attracted the refugees more than the Greek language classes (MERA, 2017). Finally the report highlighted that the ‘the more relaxed pedagogical methods of the Greek school’ did not meet the expectations of the refugees because they had ‘experience of educational systems that are governed by traditional and authoritarian pedagogical logic’ (MERA, 2017: 58). From the tone of the report two assumptions become clear: that the refugees need ‘special’ education, because it is assumed they have been out of schools and in need of preparatory classes (Simopoulos & Alexandridis, 2019), and that the educational backgrounds of refugees are authoritarian while the Greek education system is relaxed. These assumptions appear to establish a compassionate, but also a patronizing outlook on the refugee population and the knowledge they bring, while their reluctance, and refusal to learn the Greek language is associated not only with their mobility but more importantly, their ‘ignorance’.

Following Urla and Helepololei’s (2014) work on resistance, Del Percio and Wong (2019:208) suggest that ‘an analysis of the discourses, relations of power and terrain of subjectivities in which subordinated actors are enmeshed’ is needed. I will contribute to these discussions by focusing on Foucault’s (2007) notion of ‘conduct’, namely rationalisations and prescriptions of rules and rituals that are well studied in the sociolinguistic terrain, but focusing more on his notion of ‘counter-conduct’ namely the ‘struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others’ involving ‘border elements’ where the individuals are neither in nor outside of the pastoral care (Foucault, 2007: 268, 282). This means I deal with how humanitarian actors conduct refugees via

specific procedures and techniques including language education and also give an account of how individuals question, confront, change and struggle to escape certain ways of being conducted (Rossdale & Stierl, 2016: 160). I argue that the struggles of the asylum seekers are not vertical or horizontal in the ways in which power/ resistance dichotomy operates, but are rather diagonally or tangentially shaped. The latter enable individuals to find ‘lines of flight’, a ‘nomadic creativity’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), finding other ways of escaping the normalisations in the cracks of the asylum process, by focusing on the issue of language learning and teaching in the camp. To do this I discuss both conducts and counter conducts of humanitarian actors and refugees in the context of a refugee camp where the blurriness of care and securitization - namely where ambivalent entanglements - are knotted in language learning and teaching. I argue that language teaching and learning in this context becomes part of managing and governing the refugees, which in return gives birth to ‘counter conduct’ as the humanitarian actors endeavour to ‘normalize’ the containment of refugees within the ambivalent task and discourse of ‘integration’, as taken up by the Greek Ministry of Education in Greece and other national and supranational actors such as the European Commission. The purpose of this article is therefore to investigate ways in which language learning and teaching become part of governing the individuals but also how this produces counter-conducts. To do this, I give an ethnographic account of how actors’ conducts lead to tensions in learning the English language but not the Greek language in the recent refugee crises in Greece.

## **Humanitarian Governmentality: Morality, Political Economy and (Im)mobility**

Humanitarian work is ‘morally driven, politically ambiguous, and deeply paradoxical’ (Fassin, 2012: xii), while the term humanitarian is full of ‘semantic sedimentation’ (Fassin, 2012: 6). Its lexicon is misleading, as ‘inequality is replaced by exclusion, domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, and violence is expressed in terms of trauma’ (Fassin, 2012: 6). What is more, humanitarian governmentality camouflages the business aspect of its ethos, namely compassion. It employs techniques of care imbued in compassion through moral sentiments obscuring the political economy involving philanthropists’ investments and immobilities it implements. While morality first appears to be at odds with capitalism, it is in fact is an apparatus for the functioning of capitalist agenda, especially where voluntarism, solidarity, charity and work done out of love, disguise the fact that states have withdrawn resources from the public services (Muehlebach, 2012). The morality of humanitarianism however involves fences, barbed wire, approximately 16sqm (IKEA) containers, precarity, uncertainty, disciplining and education of the individuals.

Humanitarianism necessitates immobilisation as this is not only important for care logic but it is also necessary for the securitisation of borders and the control, especially on an island such as Lesbos sharing the sea with Turkey. Because the border in the sea between the island and Turkey is ambiguous, the Greek government has been discussing to put a ‘floating’<sup>9</sup> sea border to push back the refugees. The interventions of humanitarian actors from securitization of the borders to education create ‘an intimate relationship to the border but also to immobility’ (Pallister-Wilkins, 2019: 372). The logics of humanitarian borderwork involves ‘mobile care’ for the suffering bodies in spaces of immobility (Pallister-Wilkins, 2019). This mobility is one of the principles of humanitarianism that is ‘independence’ which allows NGOs such as MSF (Medicine San Frontier/ Doctors Without Borders) to be mobile, meaning the ability of aid workers and their resources could

be easily moved from one place to the other to provide care for those who are immobilized in places such as the camps (Agier, 2011).

## **Doing Fieldwork in a Container and Seeing Things**

I arrived on Lesbos island in October 2016 to work as a sociolinguist and field researcher as part of a large multi-sited, interdisciplinary project called project P.R.E.S.S. (Provision of Refugee Education and Support Scheme) funded by Hellenic Open University. After a few days of training on how to do research in refugee camps organized by the project coordinators in Athens, I landed on the island together with a colleague with whom I worked closely during the course of the project. As we drove from the airport, passing the port in the centre of the island, towards my hotel in a village called Thermi, in the northeast side of the island, I saw a big grey FRONTEX (The European Border and Coast Guard Agency) vessel with the EU and UK flag on it. I started taking strolls around the seafront side of the island in the coming days to familiarize myself with the island. I saw confiscated boats which had smuggled refugees from Turkey to Lesbos; I saw objects left behind such as childrens' life jackets, hats, baby clothes, shoes, and black plastic dingy pieces scattered on the shores of the island. Wondering about who may have owned these objects, I could not stop thinking about the violence that I saw during my work for a BBC documentary called 'Exodus: our journey to Europe' where refugees filmed their journeys, including their crossing of the sea. As I gradually met people on the island, many of them told me 'there were so many dead people here', 'some people died when they were only two meters away from the shore', 'the fish in the sea probably eat dead bodies, try not to eat fish', 'you should have seen the island in 2015.' Having heard these disturbing experiences of people, I felt quite lucky that I only saw the objects left behind instead of dead bodies. What is left now however is a life jacket graveyard on the island.

The project allowed me to spend a year on the island and aimed to identify and implement programmes addressing refugees' educational needs in Greece. I was to spend a year on the island conducting a team ethnography together with two colleagues. Nadina had an MA in Social Anthropology and Efstratia had an MA in Educational Approaches to Multilingualism. Although we conducted fieldwork in various places on the island such as a language and support school, and a shelter for unaccompanied minors, the field site that I will concentrate on in this paper is a refugee camp run by the local government which I call Eastside camp (All names are pseudonyms from here onwards). The camp hosted around 1000 refugees staying as families selected in Moria were qualified to stay in Eastside camp. The asylum seekers in the camp were mainly from Afghanistan, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Syria and other parts of South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

The camp management called the camp a 'village' and the asylum seekers 'guests' in order to give them sense of 'dignity'. In fact, the word *camp* is not used in the Greek language and often the term 'hospitality structure' is invoked under the concept of *philoxenia*, 'broadly meaning hospitality to foreigners and strangers more generally' (Cheliotis, 2013: 725). Hospitality however always entails hostility, an invisible pact signed between the 'host and hostage' (Fassin, 2012: 136). The camp was surrounded with barbed wire. It was located on the periphery of the island, a heterotopia (Foucault, 1997a), an 'other' place separating the refugees from the city centre (and not far from a brothel). Although refugees were allowed to go to the centre of the island, many of them felt intimidated to be visible because some cafes and restaurants would not allow refugees to sit in their premises as I was told by many asylum seekers. At the entrance of the camp, there was a map showing all the organisations operating in it and the locations of the containers with numbers on them. The camp was divided into two sections: educational and residential areas. The educational

area had several containers designated for educational activities run by the NGOs which provide a supply chain operated on the basis of a technology of needs (Hanson, 2007) where language lessons were part of 'normalisation', 'socialisation' and 'psychosocial support.' The residential area was separated from the educational area, and had containers in which refugees lived together with their families.

The architecture of the camp was panoptical. Nobody could see what the others were doing in their containers and only the managers knew what everyone did. The containers did not have kitchens or bathrooms and shared bathrooms were provided. Although this place was called a 'village' by the management to give a more 'dignified' sense to the space, it did not resemble a village in the sense that the place had a military-like architecture such as barbed wire, divisions of space as residential and educational, security at the door, NGOs walking around with IDs and vests with their logos on them, and so on. In the containers, there were bunk beds, UNHCRs grey blankets and plastic sheets on the floors with UNHCRs logo. Families in the camp received precooked food in a medico-military style at certain hours of the day. This military style also involved other semiotic elements such as the management's choice of clothing. Both female and male managers wore green military combat trousers, military belt buckles, commando sweaters with shoulder patches, aviator sunglasses and military boots occasionally combined with more casual garments such as flamboyant scarves and strong make up.

The barb wired 'village' had an entrance with multilingual security guards and visitors had a notebook for signing in and out or show their ID cards. Alcohol and fires for cooking were prohibited. All conduct was 'expertised' including education, health, security and the researchers. When my colleagues and I negotiated our entrance to the camp, the management told us that we were the 'experts' and that we had to prepare an education programme in order to enter the camp. After further discussions with the management (although our access had already been granted by the project coordinators, we had to renegotiate it) we were asked to teach Geography lessons to children because the management found that the refugees were 'disoriented' and that they did not know their whereabouts. We were asked to prepare an educational activity and email it to the managers who were to decide whether we were able to conduct our fieldwork in the camp or not. Although none of us were Geography experts we were able to comply because Efstratia had experience teaching Geography to children. Our conversation with the management was rather unpleasant because we were reminded of the 'serenity in the village' as if we were potential 'trouble makers' who had some potential of disrupting the rules of the camp.

Ms Papazoglou from the management team took my attention with her military (cargo) combat trousers and her green military belt with a military buckle. She wore postal/military boots and walked with great confidence when she showed the camp to me and my colleagues. Her chest was uptight and her torso straight, just like a soldier. She was very firm and vigilant, informing the male manager about any decision to be taken. While we were walking with her she said that in the west the first thing children do in the morning was to go to school and that the children in Eastside camp needed to get used to this through their educational activities. She mentioned that the 'guests' had to learn that men and women were equals and that in the west they did not hit their children.

## **Compassioning and Normalizing the (Non) Education of Children**

As I discussed earlier, humanitarian logic works with compassion to obscure categories in that it makes distinctions between legitimate/ illegitimate, normal/ pathological such as vaccination status and education/ non education. Although children's schooling and language education are seen as

not only moral and legal obligations as children below the age of 16 are obliged to go to school, but also their trajectories such as experiences of war are acknowledged with compassion. While the actors tried to normalize the refugees containment, their undermining of children's educational backgrounds was justified as:

Refugee children are in a transition phase from a war situation to normality and, therefore, what they want from education is different. [...] They may have more knowledge compared to other children of their age in western societies, they know how to survive, how to overcome obstacles and how to get adjusted but they do not have the knowledge which is positively assessed in schools (MERA, 2017: 65).

Although the 'normality' implied here is not 'normal' namely living in containers surrounded by barbed wire is not 'normal'- the quote implies that refugees' psychosocial circumstances of know (ing) ( the knowledge about how to survive) is less valued than the kind of knowledge that is assessed in the Greek education system. What is clear is however that there is a politics of difference (Flubacher & Yeung, 2016) as illustrated by the exclusion of refugee children from public schools because of their non-western backgrounds combined with a compassionate understanding of their experiences of war. In line with this, the same argument goes for language education, UNESCO reports that 'language and literacy barriers are deemed to be one of the main obstacles preventing refugees from accessing and attending school, especially outside camp settings'<sup>10</sup>. Discourses of integration (Flubacher & Yeung, 2016) such as UNESCO's and ministry of education's, namely 'lack of knowledge ' to be assessed in Greek schools and language as a barrier is odd because the very concept of integration delays and hinders refugee childrens' attendance to public schools. Nevertheless discourses of integration are still employed (MERA, 2017) despite the fact that many children on the island should have been in school by law, protected by the Greek Constitution and by Article 13 L 4540/2018 that says 'asylum-seeking children have access to the education system under similar conditions as Greek nationals'<sup>11</sup>. Children on Lesbos island could not access to schools due to negative public opinion around refugees' vaccination status (Trubeta, 2018), that 'turned children into dangerous bodies legitimizing their exclusion from their obligation to go to school' (correspondence with Alfonso Del Percio). The discourse of disease legitimizes conceptualisations of (the lack of) vaccination as an 'existential threat' (Milani, 2020) estranging, manipulating and nesting this issue in asylum seekers' 'ignorance' (of the Greek language). Although it is highlighted in the report that 'the right to education is a fundamental human right which is respected, protected and promoted by the Greek state (p. 5), refugees are blamed for not learning the Greek language.

In what follows, I build on these discourses circulating on the island and focus on the relationship between language and humanitarian governmentality perspective developed by (see Martin Rojo & Del Percio, 2019) that theorises language and culture 'as a coercive technology to govern' (Del Percio, 2016: 89) in a humanitarian context. I show how asylum seekers', counter conducts especially those of children, and how they learn languages in their own ways in order to increase their opportunities for possible geographical mobility, employment or simply as a result of not finding the teaching in the camp up to their level of education. I try to demonstrate these through snapshots from the everyday lives of refugees and other humanitarian actors and some of their activities in the camp.

## Conducting Refugees' Conducts

UNHCR and also local NGOs struggled to teach Greek to refugees. Entanglements occurred between the demands of the refugees and humanitarian actors in relation to language learning. Although many refugees final destination of resettlement was not in an officially English speaking country, they still wanted to learn English. In a meeting with Lito who was a Senior Protection Assistant from UNHCR Lesbos, and working closely with the ministry of education on the island she mentioned that most refugees were 'reluctant to learn Greek as they planned to go to other EU countries, especially Germany'. Lito also noted that the UNHCR had run educational sessions at Eastside Camp and had tried to 'raise awareness' of provision in camps by 'convince [ing]' the refugees to learn Greek since they live in Greece for now'. Interestingly, Lito uses language of compassion, such as 'raising awareness' to coerce the refugees by 'convincing' them to learn the Greek language, as there were no prospects for them leaving the country any time soon.

Often, refugees are offered English lessons by the national and international NGOs<sup>12</sup>, UNICEF or partners of UNHCR. The provisions of lessons depend on whether an NGO is an international or local one. Many local NGOs that operate in the camps prioritize Greek lessons as their funds depend on provision of particular language teaching. For the refugees, English has a valued status (Moyer, 2018) as it increases their chances of communicating with humanitarian actors, staff, fellow refugees and locals. English is also seen as a global language (Park and Wee 2012) that refugees can use anywhere they go. Therefore, the role of English is associated with increased mobility and Greek language is associated with immobility. Decisions that refugees make in terms of their language choices are often in conflict with what humanitarian actors provide in relation to refugees' overall wellbeing and speculative future integration in the wider society. For example, most refugees who had a desire to go to Germany had positive attitudes towards English but they also wanted to learn German. The Greek language was associated with staying in Greece, whereas German was associated with hope or, in other words, a speculative investment (Tabiola & Lorente, 2017) for the future. In a recent correspondence with a UNICEF staff, I asked why requests about German classes were declined. 'It is part of child protection' he stated. So asylum seekers' demands of learning German is rationalized as child protection, in order to prevent false expectations and disappointment. But asylum-seeking children are not convinced and they find their own creative ways of escaping Greek language learning.

Now what are the specific practices of nongovernmental organisations in terms of language education? What do they exactly do when they teach English in the containers of the camps? Due to excessive securitisation our request to observe NGOs language lessons was declined. What I saw was the following images hanging on the plastic walls of the container where this research took place.

### [Image 1]

English was not only valued by the asylum seekers: its domination was visible in the architecture of the camp. The small kiosks at the entrance had predominantly English signage but had Farsi, Arabic and Greek translations as well. In the container, the juxtaposition of two images on the same wall

(see above) shows how language teaching and general conduct expected from the refugees co-exist at the same time. Note how the first image demonstrates the role of the teacher as an active agent who does the teaching and the student as the receiver of this teaching. This shows how the pedagogical machine (Foucault, 1986: 173) operates in the container. However, the ultimate goal does not seem to be only teaching sets of rules about English grammar but to teach sets of rules in terms of individuals' conducts during the lessons. The expected conduct enforces punctuality, bringing the required tools, listening and asking questions orderly, as demonstrated in the second image. The juxtaposition of these two images on the same wall shows how language teaching and general conduct expected from the refugees coexist at the same time.

To extrapolate these rules to general conduct in the camp, I give an example from one of the meetings I attended in the camp. These meetings took place in the amphitheatre of the camp every two weeks where the manager gave a talk and discussed the issues in the camp. The manager greeted us with 'hello family' and continued 'maybe you are specialist expert but you must remember you're in a family. So family rules'. This 'pastoral metaphor' (Foucault, 2007) which applied to the relationships in the camp resonated in the manager's theatrical speeches where everyone gathered for regular meetings. The manager continued: 'Eastside camp is different from all the other camps (referring to Moria usually). We respect all NGOs but we have a different mentality. It is we, not me. It is we, not me. Welcome home. Follow the official way. Follow the law if you want to take the children to museum and etc. Make my day I want to make my day. Continue. Shoes, hat, gloves etc. (pointing at a child who had no shoes on).' Now as Foucault (2007: 131) argues, the art of governing involves 'a household, souls, children, a province, a convent, a religious order, and a family' so the concept of family is important in understanding the dynamics of the camp.

So if governing the family is in fact policing the asylum seekers and everyone involved with them, struggles emerge: initially calling these struggles 'revolts of conduct', Foucault (2007) finally identifies this type of refusals / resistances 'counter-conducts'.

## **'Counter-conduct' and Entanglements**

As I want to move away from the power/resistance dichotomy to explain to open up the camouflaged practices of humanitarianism, I now focus on the notion of counter-conduct that Foucault developed during in his lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* given at the Collège de France in 1977–1978, Michiel Foucault asks: 'How can we designate the type of revolts, or rather the sort of specific web of resistance to forms of power that do not exercise sovereignty and do not exploit, but 'conduct' '(Foucault, 2007: 200). When he searches for a term that describes 'struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others' he comes up with the term 'counter-conduct' which involves 'border elements' (Foucault, 2007: 215) where the individuals are neither in nor outside of the Christian pastorate on which he builds his concept of governmentality on. The difference of counter-conduct makes in comparison to resistance, revolt and insubordination is that it 'turns one's attention to the difficult and complex layers of mutual implication, contradiction and ambiguity that emerge (even) in radical spaces' (Rossdale & Stierl, 2016: 163). Some examples are 'refusing to be a soldier [...] refusal of civic education, of society's values, a refusal of a certain obligatory

relationship to the nation [...] (Foucault, 2007: 265). In the body of this paper, counter conducts involved refusal to learn the Greek language.

The conducts of humanitarian actors such as protecting the wellbeing of refugees comes in the form of biometric calculations, control, discipline and various other methods of regimentation and contradictions. For example an activity called ‘boxes of wonder’ developed by Save the Children<sup>13</sup> and that was presented as a good practice in a document targets information about children’s country of origin, their journeys, meaning usually their journey via smugglers, how they manage stress and trauma and by telling all these things in English, children learn the language. Now these entanglements of humanitarians conducting the conducts of refugees comes with counter conducts in sometimes diligent and sometimes more reactive ways. In other words the destructive pact camouflaged with compassion and love for the unfortunate, signed between the refugees and the humanitarian actors, gradually creates (abusive) entanglements and compassion evolve into manifestations of counter-conduct.

On the way to this particular camp and also to the infamous Moria camp, an ex-military base used as a camp and detention centre, there was a wall of graffiti which said ‘Fuck your rules’. Although it is not clear whether refugees, volunteers or solidarians put this graffiti on the road that goes from the centre of the island to the two refugee camps, it has a relationship to all the other rules that everyone in the humanitarian government has to follow. Refugees as well as people working with them were subjected to sets of rules from their sexual activities to distribution and the consumption of food. For example aid workers were encouraged to wear clothes that were not sexually revealing. In this respect, image 1 is counter conduct *par excellence* of all examples I will discuss here.

## [Image 2]

To give a second example, the following episode happened when my colleagues and I attended a Christmas celebration for children in the camp. We were asked by Dimitra, who worked in the camp, to help with the activities and we agreed to watch the kids while they participated in the activities on the playground. Kawa and another friend of his came and we met Dilan, a young girl from Hewler, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. She was 16 years old and attended some of the lessons in the camp. She was with her little brother and was taking care of him. Many young girls were responsabilized for this type of care- looking after younger siblings, helping their mothers’ with cooking and cleaning. Dilan told me their mother (the other two girls’ mother) did not allow them to go to the lessons. Efstratia my colleague and I went to their tent. However, on our way to the tent we remembered that we were supposed to be helping on the playground so Efstratia left and I went to Dilan’s tent to meet her family. I met Dilan’s father Serxwebun, her mother Soran, her eight year old brother Agir and the two year brother Roj that Dilan was looking after. Soran, the mother was cooking when I arrived to their tent and she offered some food from the big pot of rice that she was cooking on the fire. Dilan took care of the household, cleaned, took care of her siblings and then around 4 pm she attended the lessons. Unlike other two girls, Dilan went to the lessons and helped the family with the asylum papers with the English she learnt. Dilan learned some Kurmanji/Badinani from her friends. Later, Dilan’s father and eight year old Agir joined the conversation. Agir was happy to speak to me in English. He said ‘If you just go to school you don’t learn a

language. I went to school for seven years and didn't learn English. But here I speak with people in English. I learn outside. I like English because I can talk to people from everywhere'. Many young people were interested in English and they learned on the playground or playing football or other sports. It was very interesting that an eight year old had awareness of how he learned English better outside of the classroom, while his sister learned in the container. Agir implied he learnt better than his sister, by trying to show me how good his English was.

Similar to this, at the gates of the camp, I met Kawa (aged 16), from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He lived with thirteen/ fourteen members of his family and had not been to school since they left Iraq. He did not attend the lessons as he found learning English in conversation was more practical for him as he needed to work. By hanging out at the entrance to the camp gates, where the camp security and various NGOs were having lunch or coffee, Kawa learned English, a bit of Greek, and Farsi and improved his Arabic. This enable him to begin to interpret for Red Cross and other NGOs translating from Arabic to English. In many of my encounters in the camp and in general on the island, many refugees told me that they wanted to learn English and work as interpreters. Most of them were either young people or educated and were multilingual. Undoubtedly, most refugees on the move want to learn English partly to invest (Tabiola & Lorente, 2017) in their futures and find jobs but also because English is important in terms of survival, while navigating in uncertainty. Although the learning and teaching of languages in this specific context can be understood from the humanitarian logic of compassion for the suffering of the unfortunate, the economy and ambivalence it creates is noteworthy. While as indicated in the Ministry's report, the refugees need to be 'integrated' step by step, the refugees had their own reasons as to why they did not want to attend the Greek lessons.

A ten year old refugee boy, Menan, who came to our Geography sessions regularly, said 'This teacher don't know. She doesn't know *tablo* in French (whiteboard). Look no good teacher. They play (referring to children). Maths easy. English easy. This people don't know. Look this class no good. Just play'. A lot of the NGOs' teaching activities involved psychosocial components such as playing. Sometimes in what was called 'safe spaces' designated to children's activities, I had the opportunity to get a glimpse of how children were gathered together singing or playing games prior or during the lessons. This learning through playing did not work for Menan who spoke French, Arabic and English. He expected the lessons to be more advanced as he found the classes too easy and not up to his level, challenging the assumption that refugees are assumed to have no education or a lack of literacy skills.

While this observation may have relevance to some, because of their education may have been interrupted by war and conflict, there are also refugees who are very well educated and do not receive education that meets their expectations. The mother of two Afghan girls who came to our Geography sessions was a dentist back in Kabul where her husband was assassinated (she reported). She complained all that children learnt in the camp was A, B, C, while tears dropped from her eyes. Afsoon complained there was no colour in their container, everything was either white or grey. Paradoxically the general humanitarian discourse as indicated in a UNESCO report highlighted 'lack of the language skills required in host settings' and 'high degree of geographical mobility [...] expos(ure) to a multitude of languages in and outside of education settings' are obstacles for asylum seekers' schooling.

What these stories show is how asylum seekers confined in the camp find different ways and spaces for learning the English language. The latter is not only seen as a speculative investment (Tabiola & Lorente, 2017) for the future mobility, but is also part of refugees' counter-conduct in their escape from container teaching and the Greek language that they associate with immobility.

## **Conclusion**

By exploring Foucault's notions of conduct and counter-conduct in a humanitarian context, I showed how refugee children and their families are being conducted by various actors in a refugee camp on Lesbos Island. By focusing on these two conceptualisations, I have demonstrated the techniques of humanitarian governmentality, that is the role of compassion in the conducting of individuals by focusing on practices of language learning and teaching. I showed the entanglements emerging in the conduct of conducting the asylum seekers by concentrating on their counter-conducts, which do not manifest as total revolts, disobedience or resistance but as questioning, justifications and problematizations. As total escape from a camp is not possible, I have tried to show how individuals partially escape from 'being conducted'. By doing this however they do not powerlessly surrender to the subjectification of the 'sovereign', so to say. but rather create the affects of entanglements in the kind of ambivalent context. In this sense, if governmentality is governing souls, households and family- counter-conduct is destabilizing, delocalizing, deterritorialising this type of mentality by creating an affect of entanglement which manifests as questioning, refusal or diagonal escapes from the specificities of humanitarian conducts. One of the effects of this entanglements is how language learning and teaching gives birth to counter narratives, counter realities and otherwise becomings (Rossdale & Stierl, 2016). Since moving away from governmentalization is impossible for anyone involved in a camp situation, counter-conduct should be understood thus: 'the will not to be governed is always the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price (Foucault, 1997b: 72).

I would like to conclude with a conversation I had with Maria, a taverna owner in a small village in the north of Lesbos island on a summer night. I met Maria on a very remote side of the island where the refugees passed through in 2015. Quite typically, Maria asked where I was from and what I was doing on the island. 'I work with the refugees', I replied. 'In 2015 there were so many of them here around our village and I helped them', she said. Her eyes were filled with tears. She looked into my eyes for quite sometime and said 'the guests refused to eat our sandwiches' presumably avoiding to eat pork, I understood. 'But they must have been hungry', continued Maria. She was rather puzzled by the fact that people that hungry would refuse the food offered to them. All that Maria wanted was to show Greek hospitality, compassion and good will, to help a little bit towards the misfortunate people passing from her village. An analogy from the psychoanalytic work done in Gestalt Therapy namely the concept of 'swallowing' that Laura Perls (1992) develop on Nietzsche's metaphor of 'eating' (Edward & Smith, 2007). Laura Perls observes how children are fed and weaned (while Fritz was doing his military service). She concludes that infants, deprived of questioning, as they have not developed speech or the dental apparatus, swallow without biting, chewing or digesting. She concludes that swallowing is closely related to how the intellect or mental capacity are developed. Through the very act of being given food as helpless beings, the human

child is subjected to aggression. Questioning, criticizing – in other words biting and chewing or spitting the unwanted food is also aggression, she stresses but concludes the act of ‘refusing’ coming from the subordinated is often disapproved but she argues that this refusal is necessary for the organism to self-regulate (Conceito *et al.*, 2018) as it is the only way for the dislocated, tortured, perverted and the abused to keep alive. Language is undoubtedly part of this hospitality/hostility, conduct/counter-conduct duality, offered as an object to be taken and assimilated in the organism. But as this paper has tried to show this is a process requiring the will of the individuals. I hope by dealing with the notions of conduct and counter-conduct, I have problematized the compassioning of the asylum seekers that ultimately excludes them from schooling.

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## Notes

- (1) IOM, UN Migration. <https://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom>.
- (2) Geneva Convention. 1951. <https://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>.
- (3) Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylum. [http://asylo.gov.gr/en/?page\\_id=81](http://asylo.gov.gr/en/?page_id=81).
- (4) Hume, Tim. 2016. ‘Outrage Over Charlie Hebdo Cartoon of Dead Toddler Alan Kurdi as Sex Attacker.’ CNN, 14 January. <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/14/europe/france-charlie-hebdo-aylan-kurdi/>.
- (5) Save the Children. <https://www.savethechildren.net/about-us/our-partners/corporate-partners/bulgari>.
- (6) Hart, Jason (2016, April 4). Reclaiming Compassion, Rethinking Aid.
- (7) [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12388/pdf/1wie\\_teacher\\_training\\_participant\\_workbook\\_and\\_guide\\_2018.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12388/pdf/1wie_teacher_training_participant_workbook_and_guide_2018.pdf).

- (8) The Guardian (2016, January 5). Refugees in Lesbos: are there too many NGOs on the island? <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jan/05/refugees-in-lesbos-are-there-too-many-ngos-on-the-island>.
- (9) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/01/world/europe/greece-migrants-floating-barrier.html>
- (10) UNUESDOC Digital Library 2018. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261278>
- (11) <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/employment-and-education/access-education>.
- (12) Activities of international NGOs were terminated towards the end of fieldwork in July 2017 as the Greek government took over the management of the refugees which implied more jobs for the Greek nationals who often did not have any experience of working with refugees. There were also disputes between the local government, police, including counter terrorism services about some of the activities of the NGOs. European Parliament (2018, May 30). [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2018-002966\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2018-002966_EN.html).
- (13) [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583af1fb414fb5b3977b6f89/t/59bdbac7e5dd5bb0b4199411/1505606345541/4\\_PromisingPractices\\_SC+Serbia\\_WEB.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583af1fb414fb5b3977b6f89/t/59bdbac7e5dd5bb0b4199411/1505606345541/4_PromisingPractices_SC+Serbia_WEB.pdf).

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