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On being trapped into the wheels of integration: The case of a Somali migrant in a small village in The Netherlands

Following Hutchins (1995), D'Andrade (1991) and Gee (1998), we can think of cultures and communities therein as socially distributed knowledge systems of meaning making and actions (Schutz 1962) across various socio-cultural and socio-linguistic arenas. Communities are, in fact, subject to variable attributions of meaning by institutional interlocutors that through their discourse practices come to frame the single member as either well or ill fitting. For example, when dealing with a third country national inserted in a civic integration program aimed at rendering him/her integrated into mainstream society, organizations possess oral, written, web based, non-verbal, and numeric information, enhancements and constraints that manifest either his/her integration.

Bearing the above backdrop in mind in the present contribution, part of a larger ethnographic interpretive research project called asylum 2.0, I will focus on the bureaucratic practices stemming from the trajectory that a Somali migrant has to face when living in a small village in the south of the Netherlands. More specifically, the my contribution invites you to join me in the investigation of how integration is perceived and managed from the top-down perspective of three different institutions and the bottom-up practices of the migrant. The web of institutions under investigation consists of a school, a municipality and a work organization. These institutions should all enhance a migrant's integration pathway. Rather, the figure of the migrant finds itself immersed into a web of 'bureaucratic rituals' (Cicourel 2018) that take on a life of their own. These rituals, in fact, come to construct an extensive domain of limited intelligibility of overlapping discourses where the migrant agent results as failing to integrate.

This contribution concludes by drawing some considerations on how interactional conditions and social status discrepancies between applicant and civil servant institutions differ in their respective understanding of primary needs for integration. This all relegates the 'foreign' subject to be in need of further policy measures for integration rooting him in a bureaucratic immobility with, as bottom line, 'nothing to do with you, my friend, but, well yeah, these are the rules'.