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A Grounded Theory for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy: the Case Study of Egyptian Minors

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Abstract

The article suggests to share a research first emerging categories according to methodological universe of the "Grounded Theory" based on a mental construction / orientation process. The main target is to investigate in the educational relationship between an unaccompanied minor (MSNA) and his educator, and so has also to consider the progressive changes in the learning of the language and the corresponding humanization of the same, so well the continued definition and shared construction of the intercultural practice. At this stage of doctoral research, some categories are emerging that are particularly pertinent to the Egyptian participants in the study. The Egyptians are the main nationality present in the Italian system of host. The theory which is emerging will be a scratch theory and does not have a validation target of preconceived hypothesis.

Keywords: Educational relationship; Egyptians unaccompanied; Foreign minors in Italy, Grounded theory; Refugee children.

MSNA (Unaccompanied Foreign Minors) is the real emergency for Italy starting from April 2011, as it became the input border for Europe.

Behind the acronym MSNA we can discover a complex, difficult, multidimensional world.

This phenomenon regarding different competence areas of several fields: juridical, pedagogical, sociological and psychological.

The theoretical sampling recommended by Grounded Theory method, has been made between December 2015 and January 2016 on the whole Italian territory.

Starting from 2014 the main presence of minors of Egyptian nationality was recorded, such following data have been supplied by "Ministry of Labour and Social Policy" on Oct.31st 2015.

After one year, unaccompanied foreign minors living on the Italian territory as of 30/11/2016 are recorded 17245, always mainly Egyptians.

Regarding the personal experience of educator and researcher, they gathered data concerning Egyptian minors through reception talks and on intensive interviews data, elaborating of "PEI" (individual plan of education) and also the social and educational relations from 2011 to 2016 (the biographical interviews in reception are over 300, while the intensive research interview are approx 20)

At this stage of doctoral research, some categories are emerging that are particularly pertinent to the Egyptian participants in the study and that can be grouped in the following macro-areas:

- migratory pathways;
- relationship with (female) educators;
- socio-cultural backgrounds.

According to the report (MSNA) issued by Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (data on 30/11/2016) the Egyptian minors are the largest community of unaccompanied minors in Italy (16% 2801 living and recording and 1513 untraceable).

Minors coming from the countryside are often illiterate also in native language, and often agree to arrange journey with their family, for them arranging the journey is the only possibility to emancipate themselves from poverty.

Regarding minors coming from average extraction families, often their parents are informed of many deaths that occur during the sea crossing, hence they try to discourage or prohibit the journey.

In every case, traffickers are skilled and persistent by proposing journey to an "imaginary garden" in Europe.

The media play a central role in the production of imaginative places where the "civilized Europe" is easily reachable thanks to Italian border and another consideration is our minor protection law.

Generally, it is not true that minors escape from poverty and wars: they flee from Egypt with the hope of finding a work and for the myth of sea crossing.

In my town they had left all, all for Italy¹.

¹ Elho Interview 17 years Egypt (middle class family - his mother works in a telephone company

They say that in Italy you are fine, also me....I wanted to go myself.....if they did.... they sent me photos on facebook, they have all, in Italy they can do everything²

This is an initiation rite, an emancipated excitement which often does not correspond to an equal awareness.

The idea of Italy as "cash cow" is stronger, in case the Egyptian minors already have an uncle, a cousin, or a family friend, and/or network of fellow countrymen who run businesses, in this case the good result of the educational project is almost doomed to fail.

At this purpose I make reference to a reflection and a happy metaphor that came out during an interview c/o Office MSNA of Rome:

More that unaccompanied minors, for Egyptian it should say ill-accompanied foreign minors. Working mainly with foreign minors of Egyptian nationality, which present approx. 90% of the received minors... I can realize that a big limit is represented by the occult presence of the family of these boys... or rather there is a strong family mission which requires boys to come to Italy to work and maintaining the family. Often family agreed to send their son to Italy for working and this was collected by the stories of the boys that are made to cultural mediators, at last to have a dowry for her sister's wedding... and feel no reasons! and upstream there is a debt incurred by the family to come to Italy and this debt must be paid, how?

with their work, whatever the cost... for which the law that allows the protection and the regularization, obviously not allow the child labor... and this will not accepted by the minor, and by his family.

We do interviews with the mediators, which boys etc. and often we call families taking advantages of the aid of the mediator to explain how things work in Italy... because they must understand that it is not the boy goes out and finds the money or there is also the possibility that he can find money doing little lawful activities.

This is for us a great frustration reason, as the minor does not recognize the authority of the adult figure that performs the educational task, while what matters to him is the family. So often, it is, as I often say, of minors "unaccompanied", but they are minors accompanied hurt or badly recommended.

Egypt is a state mainly militarized and deprived. The stories of boys shows that there are great social injustices, arbitrary army and heavy police. Another thing to underline is the great percentage of people who own weapons and firearms, but everyone knows how to use them.

² M.Sa. Interview Egypt "Average poor family but educated. travel attempts interrupted by detention in Scanderia town. He tried to leave 4 times before leaving.

They compare Italy as a Country where the rules are less strict and also the corresponding punishments and have a certain envy towards civilized Europe.

Here below I mention an except of interview with T. coordinator of 2 family-homes in Rome:

Regarding compliance with the rules.... sometimes it is necessary to impose oneself, as minor have the predisposition not to listen, a bit they slam the rules.

This is a predisposition of almost all adolescents ... more must think that these adolescents have grown in some particular contexts, rules are less, and they begin to work already by small... and in my opinion do not respect the rules is specific to the countries where exists military regime, i.e. Egypt....the rules are respected only by force.

Oral aggression and preening.

We can observe that Egyptian boys have a lively spoken, sometimes quarrelsome with highest voice tone and aggressive behavior

The educator in order to restrain this behavior must adopt a range of energies and strategies.

The aggression takes over nothing, if it angers his mother responded with the use of force.

Bad language is common and invests the family environment with great ease.

Utilizing physicality and violence (also for game) represents custom; to better explain I'm quoting two excerpts of interview with Elho and Na.

Elho: Learned the language (smiles....) and do not be silly

I: Interesting! Please try to explain me better

Elho: I have done so many bad things, I joked too with the other boys and they get angry. But for me life without joke, is nothing!

And even about violence:

Na: I changed myself so much ... When I was in Egypt, if someone told me a dirty word, I hit him but in my country is another thing in Italy is forbidden to beating. In Egypt there are also people which are strolling with weapons, normal people, like you and me, but strolling with weapons. In Italy this is not possible when I was in Egypt I had weapon

Interviewer: Which type of weapon?

Na: Weapon ... made so, also one big

I: But knives or guns?

Na: Guns

I: But you were not afraid?

Na: No, I was not afraid as there are some moments if you haven't these ones...

I: I understand you had to protect yourself but do you know the use?

Na: My brother taught me how to use it

I: and you never used the gun?

Na: Yes, I used a small gun... the big guns I can not use them

Talking about migratory warrant - reason of departure, we underline that in the period starting from the end of 2014 to May 2016 there have been openings of many fruit shops run by young Egyptian migrants in the urban territories of Rome: according the UPVAD Datas Confcommercio Roma - in the Roman province there are 1414 activities in the fruit and vegetable sector.

Following the traces of neo-Egyptian order just out of the protective circuit of the hospitality centers, a great number of ex-minors work in these fruit shops, and the foreign minors work as well.

What happens in these places? How many hours of work? What knowledge of their rights and duties does these young migrants have?

On average they must work 12 hours daily, and must unload truck boxes at 5,00 euro.

A high percentage of unauthorized departures are based on need to find a work.

The family house or the center is not able to work and defend the rights of minor, observing and trying to understand the bases of legislation: so in this way the operators become the enemy who prevents from achieving the objective.

In this case a minor has identified an uncle or cousin who has a commercial activity, the educational project becomes an obstacle which deteriorate relations among families. The educators feel flogged and have wasted his/her energy.

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