Elderly care in a globalized world: a study of cross-cultural interaction in the context of Swedish elderly care

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Why study cross-cultural interaction in this context?
- 12.7% of Sweden’s 65+ population was born abroad (i.e., has an immigrant background)
- 8.2% of those 80+ have such a background as well
- 20% of new recruits in 2004 to community, medical, and welfare service sectors were foreign-born
- 14% of those working in these sectors were born outside of the EU

What does the literature on cross-cultural interaction in health and social care settings tell us?
- Focus has been on experiences. The understandings of ethnic/culture different ‘Others’ that precedes them remain unexplored
- Studies on caregivers’ experiences dominate the int’l. literature
  - Focus so far: caregivers from ethnic majority group
  - Remain unexplored: caregivers from ethnic minority groups
- Few studies focus on care recipients (particularly elderly)
  - Focus so far in Sweden: ethnic minority elderly
  - Remain unexplored: Swedish elders’ perspectives
- No study on care providers (as providers and as co-workers) AND care recipients

What is the methodological point of departure?
- An ethnographic study:
  - 333.5 hrs. of participant observation in 2 nursing homes (30 days in each setting)
  - 37 semi-structured interviews (26 elderly care providers, 8 elderly care recipients and 3 relatives to the elderly care recipients)

What are some of the themes from the preliminary findings?
- Lack of a common language/points of reference seem to be a problem
- The division of labor between workers is affected by assumptions regarding what Swedishness and non-Swedishness entail:
  - Swedishness = higher effectiveness
  - Non-Swedishness = a higher ‘human factor’/friendly approach’ to elderly care provision
- Non-Swedish care providers are believed to be bound to be the target of derogatory comments and behaviors by Swedish older people
- Cross-cultural interactions are challenging because understandings of old age are static and ideas of what ethnic relations entail are, in turn, essentialist

What will the contributions of the project be?
- To theory: Increased understanding of how ideas re: old age and ethnic/culturally-different ‘Others’ interact with one another in this context
- To practice: Identification of the challenges associated with the design of culturally-appropriate care

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