

Experiences of (Mis)Recognition in Language Classes and Asylum Seekers' Camp: An Account

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Abstract

Encounters between immigrants and members of the host society throw up discourses on topics such as integration, assimilation, and discrimination. Some scholars have argued that the social class or educational level of migrants can play a significant role in their experience of living in the receiving society (Morrice et al., 2017; Portes, 2010). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to explore how a black asylum seeker perceived Italians from his experiences in language classes and an asylum seekers' camp. I tried to provide my understanding of why our experiences might not be similar. This study adopted a narrative method with an interpretative approach, in which narratives gathered from interviews were systematically analysed in order to arrive at an understanding (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). Drawing on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition (Honneth, 1995), the study found experiences of recognition and disrespect in the participant's story, with the experiences of misrecognition seeming to shape his perception about Italians. Glimpses of recognition included being seen and valued by teachers and camp operators as someone with the potential to be a successful student while clues of misrecognition included being disrespected by teachers and camp operators, one the one hand, and a feeling of being cheated or denied justice because he was black, on the other hand. This paper concludes that the participant perceived Italians as employing othering as a strategy to feel united and that a black person was not afforded the same rights to seek redress for the violation of their rights.

Keywords

recognition, misrecognition, asylum seeking, informal learning

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Introduction

This paper is part of my ongoing PhD study where I employ narrative methods to explore the learning experiences of asylum seekers in Italy. Using narrative methods have allowed me to explore the experiences of my participants from an insider's perspective. The concept of insider research refers to studies in which the researcher identifies with the participants "on some significant level" (Voloder, 2013, p. 3). In my case, I am a black Nigerian migrant who is carrying out a study on black asylum seekers and refugees (migrants), mostly from Nigeria. The objective of this paper is to explore the perception of Italians by a black asylum seeker based on his experiences in language classes and an asylum seekers' camp. Thus, I explore how the participants' interactions and experiences with Italians in the contexts of the classroom and camp shaped his identity in relation to Italians. Furthermore, I juxtapose my personal experience with Tamuno's experience to tease out similarities and differences, and I try to provide my understanding of why our experiences might not be similar.

While a good number of scholars have studied adult education in the context of migration in general and a few others have focused on asylum seekers (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Colliander & Fejes, 2020; Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018; Damiani, 2019; Fejes, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Morrice, 2013; Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015; Thunborg et al., 2021; West, 2014) not too many studies have focused on black asylum seekers' experiences and perspectives and how these impact their self-identity. Thus, my aim in this paper is to illustrate how Tamuno's experiences could be seen as an example of how experiences in language classes and camps can shape black asylum seekers perceptions about their host society due to the fact that it is usually in these contexts that asylum seekers first come into contact with members of the host society in Italy.

Although limited in scope, since this paper focuses on the experience of only one participant, West (1996, 2014) demonstrates how the use of a single story as a case can illuminate complex themes. Merrill & West posit that "Single life histories can provide rich material while the unique and human-centred can be used as a basis for generating highly original forms of interdisciplinary understanding, drawing on historical, social and psychological imaginations" (2009, p. 105). Rustin (2000, cited in Merrill and West, 2009) adds that individual case studies can bring to the fore what is common in human experiences.

Merrill and West (2009) and Merrill (2015) note that the use of single stories in biographical research is not without criticism. Some of the criticisms are that using a single story is too individualistic and that the focus is on the micro

level, and that the story might be atypical or eccentric. Merrill (2015), however, argues that exploring a single story has the potential to illuminate a person's life within a historical or social context. She adds that individual stories can reveal "the collectivities of lives, such as class, gender and race, the interplay between structure and agency, and history and the present" (2015, p. 1861) and "offer a rich insight into attitudes, meanings and complex behaviour as well as highlighting shared experiences" (2015, p. 1863). Furthermore, Merrill and West agree with Rustin (2000) that,

...the validity of individual cases rests in their capacity to generate understanding of how people make their worlds in interaction with others, in diverse ways. One good case study can, in its luminosity, reveal the self-reflection, decision and action, and/or the ambivalence, pain, loss, messiness and satisfaction in a life that has resonance and meaning for us all (2009, p. 167).

Squire (2008, 2013) suggests that in order to make a single story meaningful, there may be a need to include some description and theorising. Squire further suggests that the relationship between the researcher and interviewee can be a rich resource for analysing a single story. Thus, it will be useful for the researcher to demonstrate his reflexivity, and if possible include the participant's reflections. This view is supported by Merrill and West (2009) and West (2016). Squire (2008, 2013) and West (2016) further suggest that a study might be more enriched if the researcher maintains a long-term relationship with the interviewee and thus conducts several interviews with the interviewee. Multiple interviews about the same phenomena can also be conducted with different people (Squire, 2013).

In the following sections, I discuss the macro context of asylum seeking in Italy and informal learning. Other sections include methodology, analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

Macro context: Asylum seeking in Italy

Italy is a European country containing many transnational migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers since its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea makes it a popular destination for immigrants (Dovigo, 2019; Nuzzolese & di Vella, 2008; Paynter, 2022). Italian law makes provision for asylum seekers to be housed in reception centres or asylum seekers centres (Duso & Marigo, 2018; Paynter, 2020, 2022; Russo et al., 2016). In these centres, asylum seekers are provided with food, a bed, basic supplies, and a little money for expenses. During their stay in

the reception centres, asylum seekers receive education as well as education, legal, social, and health assistance. Learning and training provisions vary from one centre to the other. Russo et al. (2016) distinguishes between an asylum seeker and refugee in Italy: an asylum seeker is a person who has submitted an application for asylum, while a refugee is the individual whose application for asylum has been granted.

Asylum applications in Italy

Asylum seekers are expected to make their application for asylum as soon as they arrive in Italy; the law specifies a deadline of eight days from arrival. An asylum application can be made orally and in the applicant's language. In this case they would need an interpreter. An application for asylum can be made at the border with the border police or at the immigration desk of the police service. This place is called *questura* in Italian. When making the application, the applicant's biometric details are collected. If the application was made at the border, the applicant still has to go to the *questura* for formal registration (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2021). The police's or *questura*'s role is only to accept and register an asylum application and then forward the application to the "Territorial Commissions or sub-Commissions for International Protection" (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2021, p. 24). Within 30 days of submitting an application, the applicant is invited for an interview by members of the Territorial Commission or sub-Commission (hereinafter referred to as Commission throughout this paper). A member of the commission interviews the applicant but the decision on the application is taken by all members of the panel after discussing the application. The decision is supposed to be made within three days after the interview. If a negative decision is reached, the applicant has the right to appeal. This appeal is made before a civil court and it must be made within 30 days after the decision was given (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2016; Ghio & Blangiardo, 2019).

Integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy

Although Caneva (2014) claims that integration in Italy is (narrowly) conceptualised in terms of economic insertion or participation in the labour market, Italy complies with the European Union's integration policy (Scardigno, 2019) which is spelt out in Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council "establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person" (EU, 2015, p. 31). The integration of asylum seekers

in Italy operates in three phases. The first phase entails rescue and identification. Identification is carried out by fingerprinting and photographing the new arrivals. This happens at the places of disembarkation, and it is coordinated by national authorities. The second phase involves the accommodation of the newly arrived persons, and it is coordinated by local authorities. In the third phase, applicants for asylum and beneficiaries of asylum are involved in integration programmes such as language and vocational classes. These programmes are coordinated by municipalities and non-governmental organisations (European Social Policy Network, 2017; Ghio & Blangiardo, 2019).

Adult learning and education for asylum seekers and refugees in Italy

Slade & Dickson (2020) state that member states of the United Nations are obliged to provide access and ensure participation in adult learning and education for disadvantaged groups. In Italy, the Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA) (the Provincial Centres for Adult Education), which are the major public institutions for adult education in Italy, provide access to adult education and learning to asylum seekers and refugees. They are present in all the provinces of Italy, promoting adult education and lifelong learning in Italy. Part of the duties of these centres is the provision of educational offerings for immigrants. Therefore, adult persons seeking asylum in Italy mainly access formal education and vocational training through the CPIA. The CPIA is the successor to Centro Territoriale Permanente (CTP) (Permanent Territorial Centre) and other institutions that carried out evening classes (Daniele et al., 2018; Deiana & Spina, 2021; Loprieno et al., 2019; OECD, 2021). The CPIA was established by a presidential decree in 2012 and started operations in 2014/2015. The CPIA also offers qualification lower secondary school and upper secondary school courses for migrants and for Italians interested in continuing education (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Longo, 2019). While the CPIA is meant to serve both Italians and foreigners, the learners at the CPIA are predominantly foreigners who come to learn Italian due to its importance in aiding integration and due to it being part of the requirement for obtaining long-term residency (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Longo, 2019). Therefore, a major part of the CPIA's educational provisions is language classes for migrants (Deiana & Spina, 2021). These centres provide Italian language classes and classes for some other languages such as English, Arabic, French, and Chinese.

Informal learning

Thunborg et al. (2021) have studied how young adult asylum seekers in Sweden learn to belong to their host society. They found out that some learned to be

marginalised; some learned to be disconnected while others learned to be co-participants in the host society. This enlightens us to the fact that a lot of learning that is not organised or conscious is taking place among asylum seekers, and this kind of learning has the potential to shape the kind of self-identity asylum seekers construct and also how they perceive their host society. This kind of learning is called informal learning. Informal learning is one of the types of learning identified by the European Commission (2001).

According to UNESCO, informal learning “is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through interests and activities of individuals” (UIL, 2012, p. 10). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional though there are situations where it may be intentional (Rogers, 2014). Some other terms used for informal learning are ‘experiential learning’ or ‘tacit learning’. “Informal learning will include all the unconscious influences through the family and groups within the wider society, through religion and sport, through shared music and peer pressures in such things as dress and computer games, and through the many accidents which occur during the course of our lives” (Rogers, 2014, pp. 16-17). Thus, the scale of informal learning is as broad as the practice of living itself. In the context of migration, one of the ways in which informal learning takes place is when people make sense of what they need and how to act in their new socio-cultural contexts. Most often, informal learning takes place via “social learning, distributed throughout the lifeworld; it proceeds through social interaction”(Rogers, 2014, p. 41).

Theory of recognition

This research draws on Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition. Axel Honneth, in his work *The Struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts* (Honneth, 1995), sought to outline and explicate the conditions that can aid an individual’s self-realisation. He stated that social relations are regulated by mutual recognition or intersubjective recognition, and when an individual is accorded the recognition they feel they deserve, it can help them to develop a positive relation to self. Honneth identified three forms or spheres of recognition. They are: love, rights, and social esteem. Thus, these forms of intersubjective recognition are the conditions that can aid an individual’s self-realisation or development of positive self-identity.

The first sphere of recognition identified by Honneth is love. Love relationships, according to Honneth, are primary relationships that include friendships, parent-child relationships, and even erotic relationships. These are relationships that “are constituted by strong emotional attachments among a small number of people”

(Honneth, 1995, p. 95). This sphere is characterised by subjects' dependence on each other, and encouragement or affective approval are important. Essentially, individuals recognise each other as needy creatures and feel accepted by the other person when their needs are satisfied. Honneth claims that the sphere of love is "both conceptually and genetically prior to every other form of reciprocal recognition" (Honneth, 1995, p. 107). The sphere of love is thus regarded as the first stage of mutual recognition where positive affirmation from the significant other helps an individual to develop self-confidence.

The second form or sphere of recognition identified by Honneth is the sphere of law or rights. According to him, this sphere refers "only to the situation in which self and other respect each other as legal subjects for the sole reason that they are both aware of the social norms by which rights and duties are distributed in their community" (Honneth, 1995, pp. 108–109). He explains that people should be seen as morally responsible persons with rights and capability to participate in societal affairs. Honneth uses the terms 'law' and 'rights' interchangeably. Honneth's explanation of the term 'rights' is that they are "those individual claims that a person can legitimately expect to have socially met because he or she participates, with equal rights, in the institutional order as a full-fledged member of a community" (Honneth, 1995, p. 133). Every individual deserves to be treated equally in society. That is, they must be accorded the status of a legal person; a person who possesses rights. The ability to exercise one's rights is what develops an individual's self-respect because it empowers the individual who bears rights to "engage in action that can be perceived by interaction partners" (Honneth, 1995, p. 120). Recognition in the sphere of rights requires a society to create conditions for individual rights to be accorded equally to everyone as free beings rather than granting such rights disparately based on membership of social status group.

The third sphere of recognition identified by Honneth is social esteem. This sphere concerns a person's traits and abilities. For this kind of recognition to take place there must exist what Honneth calls "an intersubjectively shared value-horizon" (Honneth, 1995, p. 121) because it is only when people share "values and goals that indicate to each other the significance or contribution of their qualities for the life of the other" (Honneth, 1995, p. 121) that they can mutually esteem one another. In the sphere of social esteem, the unique characteristics of a person or the specific contribution a person makes to the society are acknowledged.

Misrecognition (disrespect)

What if a person is denied the recognition they expect? Honneth calls it disrespect, and he says what disrespect, which he also calls injustice, does to a person is

that it “injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively” (Honneth, 1995, p. 131). This injury, according to Honneth, can cause a person’s identity to collapse. This highlights the vulnerability of humans in needing recognition from others in order to develop a good or healthy sense of self. Honneth categorises disrespect according to the three forms of recognition.

In the sphere of love, disrespect takes the form of any “attempt to gain control of a person’s body against his or her will” (Honneth, 1995, p. 132). So, this usually constitutes physical injuries or abuse such as torture or rape. This kind of injury causes both physical and psychological injury to the victim. The victim feels defenceless and at the mercy of another person. This form of disrespect damages a person’s self-confidence and leads to a loss of trust in themselves and others, thus impacting negatively on their relationship with others. Disrespect in the sphere of love destroys the “most fundamental form of practical relation-to-self, namely, one’s underlying trust in oneself” (Honneth, 1995, p. 133).

In the sphere of rights, disrespect takes the form of structural exclusion of individuals from the “possession of certain rights within a society” (Honneth, 1995, p. 133). This denial of rights or social ostracism, in the words of Honneth, is the refusal to accord to an individual the status of equality with other members of the community and the refusal to acknowledge such an individual “the same degree of moral responsibility as other members of the society” (Honneth, 1995, p. 133). This causes the individual to feel he does not enjoy the privilege of being seen as a full member of society having the same rights as others. Honneth states that, “For the individual, having socially valid rights-claims denied signifies a violation of the intersubjective expectation to be recognised as a subject capable of forming moral judgments” (Honneth, 1995, pp. 133–134). Disrespect in the sphere of rights thus takes the form of discrimination and injures a person’s self-identity with regard to self-respect.

The form of disrespect that can manifest in the sphere of social esteem is the downgrading of the social value of an individual or a group. This happens when an individual’s or a group’s characteristics, contributions, beliefs, abilities, or way of life are regarded as inferior or deficient. The result of this is that the individual loses their self-esteem as they are deprived social approval of their abilities and contributions. To experience disrespect in any of the three spheres of recognition thus is to be denied certain forms of recognition which can endanger a person’s sense of self or self-identity.

Methodology and context

This study adopted a narrative method with an interpretative approach, in which narratives gathered from interviews were systematically analysed in order to arrive at an understanding. (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). Thus, for this paper, narratives from an interview I had with an asylum seeker were transcribed and interpreted. Before the interview, I explained my aim to the participant, after which he signed a consent form prepared by the ethical committee of my university. The interview was transcribed in full and there was no attempt to ensure the grammatical correctness of the speech. Pauses are indicated by three dots. Four dots are used to indicate that a speech has been shortened. Italics were used when the participant was reporting someone else's speech. For the sake of anonymity, the participant's name has been changed. In the analysis, I tried to "understand the overall form, or gestalt of lives, for appreciating the significance of the detail" (Merrill & West, 2009, 136) and identified themes in the narrative material. As much as possible, I tried to remember that our relationship was not neutral. On the one hand, I considered how his interpretation and perception of me, and how I asked questions and the relationship between us, would shape the stories he was telling me (Riessman, 2008 cited in Bochner & Herrmann, 2020; Formenti, 2014; Galimberti, 2014. On the other hand, I tried to be reflexive in my analysis of the interview, asking myself how it was shaped by my memories of it, my own experience and identity as a black man and PhD student with funding and who came to Italy with a visa, and how oppression, recognition, and privileges may clash, in our stories (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020; Chant, 2016; Cunningham & Carmichael, 2018) (Chant, 2016; Cunningham and Carmichael, 2018; Bochner & Herrmann, 2020).

Tamuno

Tamuno arrived in Italy in May 2018. He first attended language classes and then middle school at an adult education centre in the Lombardy region of Italy. At the time of the interview, he was about to start high school and also begin an apprenticeship as a welder. He was 25 years old at the time of the interview. The interview lasted for close to two hours. Throughout the interview, we switched between standard English and Nigerian Pidgin English. Nigerian Pidgin English is a mixture of English words with words from Nigerian languages, so a majority of the population regardless of their educational status are able to communicate in Pidgin English.

Analysis

Arrival and motivation for learning Italian language

Tamuno narrated that he arrived in Italy from Libya in May 2018. He arrived in Sicily where he was placed in a camp. He noticed that most of the people in the camp were not going to school and instead were going out to beg, which was not the kind of life he wanted, so he left Sicily with the hope of going to Germany, which he had heard was better than Italy. Tamuno's decision to go to Germany was informed by what he was told by other asylum seekers while he was seeking information about Italy and other countries in Europe during his first days in Italy. He was told that in Germany he would be sent to school and he could become anything he wanted to be in life. This shows one of the ways informal learning takes place: peer learning. A lot of learning apparently takes place among peers, that is, when asylum seekers, like any other group of migrants, encounter one another and exchange information in a new society.

On his way to Germany, Tamuno was stopped by the police in Switzerland and was brought back to Como in the northern part of Italy. He was later transferred to a camp in Lecco in the Lombardy region of Italy where after some months he was registered in an adult education centre. Tamuno was told by camp operators that learning Italian was necessary for communication and for him to achieve his life's dreams in Italy. This apparently served as a motivation for him to attend Italian language classes. Furthermore, another way by which asylum seekers acquire informal learning is through interactions with camp operators. Usually, camp operators are asylum seekers' first contact in Italy apart from the official who received and processed them on arrival. So, most of the information about what they need to do is acquired from camp operators:

I told them what I want to do. So, they said, "Okay. First, you will start Italian school. When you start learning Italian, this is a way of communicating with people. You will be able to communicate with us, we will be able to communicate with you because Italy don't speak English." So... because I speak English... So... "Then you will be able to choose the road and your dream, what you want to face in life and continue with that. So, because you are enable to speak English," Italian language sorry.

Tamuno also spoke about another motivation for attending school. He said living in camp made him feel like he was not in control of his life. Experiences in camp, such as lack of freedom and deprivation induced painful feelings, and

he related that this made him resolve to take every opportunity that may present itself for him to go to school. The implication of this is that Tamuno saw language learning and formal education as his way out of dependency and to regain control of his life. He probably thought that learning the language and getting an education would help him secure a good job and thus be able to afford to rent his own accommodation and live the way he would like to live. The painful camp experiences, which are experiences of misrecognition, served as a spur for Tamuno to seek recognition through formal learning. Thus, attending classes was one of the strategies he adopted in his search for recognition.

Experiences of recognition

Tamuno narrated that his teachers in the language school in Lecco were supportive and showed interest in his learning progress. Even when he was transferred to another camp which led to him leaving the school, he still kept contact with his former teachers who would send him lessons and exercises to do:

The teachers are good. The teachers are good. The teachers are good. I can say they are good.... When I come to class, I stay in my chair.... So, I respect you, respect me. "Good morning." "Good morning, teacher. How are you?" "Are you here?" "Yes." "Sit down." I go to my seat and sit down. I will wait for the time of the lecture. I listen to the lecture. I ask questions where I did not understand.... Like the teachers there, even when I told them that I'm going out, dem like, "Why?" I told them, "I got transfer. I'm not at Lecco again. I'm going back to Monza." So dem say, "Eeyah, eeyah."So, most of them, they send me message in my Instagram, like lessons of the day for my level to go through....

Tamuno related that his teachers were not happy to see him go. They kept offering him educational support to help keep him updated in his learning. This would seem to reveal something like the supportive relationship which evokes recognition in the sphere of love that, as mentioned above is proposed by Honneth (1995, 2004). Feeling recognised by teachers can make a student feel valued and make them want to stay in school (Fleming, 2016; West, 2014; West et al., 2013). Tamuno also conveyed a sense of an expectation of mutual recognition between teachers and students (asylum seekers). Teachers were not the only ones who showed him support. Tamuno talked about a particular camp worker who helped him with his language learning. This person observed that Tamuno was serious with his language classes and he monitored his progress and helped him with his homework. He also gave him constant encouragement. This again

suggests recognition in the first sphere, love. Going by Honneth's arguments, all these forms of support Tamuno received contribute to feelings of self-confidence (Honneth, 1995, 2014). These experiences of feeling seen and valued as a student promoted a positive self-identity in Tamuno. They helped him to create an identity of someone with the potential to succeed academically. This encouraged him to keep studying. In his narration, he also positioned himself as an agentic subject who understood and was committed to doing what he needed to do to succeed in Italy.

Experiences of misrecognition and disrespect

Tamuno narrated some unpleasant experiences he had both in class and in camp. These experiences influenced his perception of Italians, particularly when it concerned matters of respect and justice between Italians and black people. He remembered a teacher who talked disrespectfully to students in his language class:

Yeah, like me, I saw some teachers. The manners... like there is a teacher, I will not call her name there in CPIA. I will not call her name. So, like the way she talk to student is not no, no, no. It's not... Because if the student began to talk to her the way she talk, there will be argument. There will be problem in the school.

Tamuno described the teacher's behaviour as unacceptable. There are glimpses of misrecognition between the teacher and the students. Tamuno implied that she treated students like children. What could have made Tamuno feel this way? Was it the way she addressed the students? Or could it be the way students had to seek permission for things such as answering the call of nature (as we will see below)? Tamuno's narration indicated that the teacher did not regard her students as morally responsible adults but as immature children.

Tamuno had an angry exchange with the teacher one time when she made a racist remark about another student. According to Tamuno, he challenged the teacher for uttering such an expression. From that point, he never had a good relationship with the teacher; she lost his respect:

...there is one Nigerian girl that is always come to school. There is a time that girl began... There was a day that girl stand up... stood up to go and ease herself in the bathroom. The teacher said no. So... The girl don't know how to speak Italy but the girl has lived in Italy for five years but she refuse to go to school in the initial place. So, the girl was like... she sat down, like

respect. Okay. The girl told me where we are sitting, “*Tamuno...*” He called my name. He said, “*I want to ease myself.*” I say, “*Go now.*” He say, “*The teacher said, “No.”* I say, “*Stand up. Go again.*” He stand up. She stood up. The teacher ask her to sit down.

The lady eventually went to the bathroom but as she was going, Tamuno said the teacher spoke some words of insult in Italian which he understood. Tamuno challenged the teacher for uttering the insult. This led to an angry exchange between him and the teacher. The teacher then went ahead and called his camp operators and reported that he was disturbing the class. This was an attempt to intimidate him into unquestioning submission to the teacher. This narration by Tamuno suggests clues of mutual misrecognition between Tamuno and the teacher. Tamuno said the teacher’s actions made him to stop respecting her. He recounted that he told her he could not respect her since she did not respect others. This shows how (mis)recognition can be intersubjective. In this narration, Tamuno constructed an identity of confident and courageous subject who though was still waiting for his asylum application to be approved but still demanded to be respected.

Italy is one – A chauvinistic slogan?

I asked Tamuno if it was not possible to report teachers who treated students wrongly, he replied that reporting Italians would not yield any result. He explained his reasons for saying so.

Like people say Italy are one and Italy call them Italy Uno. They always say Italy is one. So, most people has complained even in camp, people that stayed in camp, like for example now, I’m staying in camp. Like there’s some things my workers is doing. I talk to maybe the boss of the house, tell him this thing is not good. Look at what this person did. Instead of that worker... I have never seen any black being supported even during my stay of Italy, my camp, my school or anywhere or anywhere I enter, black get problem with Italy, Italy man will support black.

Tamuno claimed that reporting an Italian over a wrong done to a black person is an exercise in futility as nothing will be done about it. He claimed that Italians had a solidarity that made them support each other over black individuals even when an Italian was clearly in the wrong. He narrated that this solidarity is expressed in the slogan “*Italia uno*” which translates to “*Italy is one*”. While I have never heard the slogan before, it seems Tamuno’s experiences of discrimination seem to have influenced his interpretation of this slogan.

Tamuno's story reveals a probable source from which he learned about the slogan, 'Italia Uno'. He narrated how a friend of his told him about the slogan and what it meant:

...The boy said, *"I'm working with... I work with Italy. I came here. I'm in this country for ten years before you. So there is nothing you will tell me about this country. Italia Uno, you no dey hear am for television?"* When he tell dat word, I say I dey hear am. So Italia Uno. That is Italia One. So when he tell me all those things, I was like... I said no problem. Thank you....

Tamuno narrated that his friend said having lived in Italy for ten years, he had observed that Italians would never admit a wrongdoing against a black person. They would also support each other against a black person. This friend claimed that this was what 'Italia Uno' meant. This gives us a clue that one of the things that had influenced Tamuno's perception about Italians was what friends and acquaintances told him. The role of informal learning in shaping Tamuno's perception about Italians is again demonstrated.

Tamuno narrated another story to reiterate his position that Italians supported each other against blacks. He complained about a teacher and another asylum seeker, a student in the same class, who corroborated Tamuno's complaints about the teacher's attitude but instead of investigating his complaints about this teacher, her behaviour was excused by his camp officials as human behaviour. In his view, this was because he and the other students were black. He claimed that if Italians made the same complaints, the outcome would have been different:

Like this one in Monza here, she don't have manner, like manner. Ask anybody. Ask that Gloria, maybe she will still...

So, I told them (camp operators). So, when they (camp operators) tell her, she said, *"Haha, but I'm not like that now."* One boy that's in office, that go to the same school with me said, *"You said what?"* Everybody in the office start laughing. That means what this boy is saying, the former boy is saying is truth because the one in the office that is with them... Like that day, they are... all of them they are talking in the office. When they called that woman, they was like talking to her saying this is what so-so boy talk o, is it true? She said, *"No, no, no, no."* The other boy that's in the office that hear their voice said, *"You said what?"*

Oh, who is also a student too?

Who is also a student, “*You said what?*” He say, “*Even that boy don’t know you. You are even more cativ, more bad than the experience of that boy because I started school before that boy.*” So, everybody start laughing in the office. So... Instead of them to support, like we... they still try to like, “*Human being are like that*” because it’s still their people. They still cover her. They didn’t say anything o or report to school, anything o, say these people are complaining. Because if it’s Italian – I stay with Italians – they will call school. They will tell school, “*These people are complaining. Investigate this person. So if there is a manner... at least calm her down. Let her know sey this is school*” and all that but they will not. They didn’t do that.

Discussion

The objective of this paper is to explore the perception of a black asylum seeker about Italians from his experiences in language classes and asylum seekers’ camp. The study found experiences of recognition and disrespect in Tamuno’s story, with the experiences of misrecognition seeming to shape his perception more than the experiences of recognition. Glimpses of recognition included being seen and valued by teachers and camp operators as someone with the potential to be a successful student, while clues of misrecognition included being disrespected by teachers and camp operators, one the one hand, and a feeling of being cheated or denied justice because he was black, on the other. Thus, Tamuno’s construction of his perception of Italians is that Italians use othering as a strategy to feel united. He constructed a self-identity of someone who did not expect to be treated with justice by Italians.

According to Honneth, experiences of misrecognition can impact a person’s self-identity with respect to self-respect negatively. I would like to argue that integration cannot take place when a person’s self-respect is impaired and that two things might result from such an injury to a person’s self-identity: (1) negative assimilation, where the immigrant feels compelled to become similar to members of the host society with regard to values and traditions (Bartram et al., 2014), thereby taking on a new identity, and (2) a struggle for recognition, whereby a person attempts to seek a redress of their situation (Honneth, 1995). Tamuno has not presented himself as a helpless asylum seeker. He constructed himself as person who demanded to be accorded the recognition he deserved. Honneth (1995) argues that individuals’ struggle for recognition can arise from the experience of being disrespected (p. 138). This experience of disrespect, he

says, can be a motivational impetus (p. 138) for seeking recognition because individuals' agitations can only be assuaged by seeking a redress of their situation and when individual experiences become typical for a whole group, then the group begins a collective struggle for recognition.

Tamuno's story shows that his perception was shaped by his informal learning experiences: what he learned from others and his personal experiences. He learned from his encounters with Italians as well as what his friend told him that he was an 'other' who was treated differently and without the same rights as Italians. Just like Tamuno, most of the perceptions I have about Italians today were shaped by what I have been told by other Nigerians, many of whom advise me about Italy by the virtue of the fact that they have spent more years in Italy than me. My perception about Italy and Italians has also been shaped by the interviews I have conducted for my PhD research. While I have had similar experiences to other black migrants, regardless of whether or not they are asylum seekers, some of the experiences asylum seekers have told me are not what I have experienced.

Unlike Tamuno, I have not had any major conflict with an Italian except for a particular time I felt that a neighbour was being racist. I lodged complaints against her with the hostel concierge who addressed the matter with this neighbour. She came and apologised and told me she was not racist. I was really surprised. I concluded that the senior concierge took my complaint seriously and remonstrated with this neighbour causing her to come to me and apologise. My experience therefore is different from Tamuno's in this regard. What could account for this difference? Is it because I am a PhD student while Tamuno is an asylum seeker? Is an asylum seeker seen as someone who is vulnerable and who could be taken advantage of? Or is it because the university frowns upon racism and seeks to ensure equal treatment for all regardless of nationality or skin colour while this is not the case with those who work with asylum seekers?

Conclusion

This paper has presented an account of only one participant, Tamuno, and it has illustrated how experiences of misrecognition had shaped the participant's perception about Italians. His experiences were varied. He had positive experiences as well as negative ones but it appeared that the experiences of misrecognition shaped his views about Italians. How his experiences of recognition affected his perception of Italians is not evident in the material. Tamuno seemed to make the allusion that Italians use othering as a strategy to be feel united and that a black person was not accorded the same rights to seek redress for the violation of their rights. The implication of this for persons who work with asylum seekers

is to be conscious of providing an environment for asylum seekers and refugees to experience the “ethical life” (Honneth, 1995, p. 173). In other words, an environment where conditions for self-realisation are present for asylum seekers and refugees. That is asylum seekers and refugees need to feel like they possess equal rights and opportunities to flourish as Italians.

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