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Narratives of Recognition and Misrecognition: Exploring the Experiences of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy

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INTRODUCTION

The Journey to Becoming a Researcher

In introducing my thesis, I reflect on my connection to the research, the way I became aware of the philosophical/paradigmatic assumptions that I could adopt for my work, and thus, I explore my positionality in relation to the study. I also show how the research questions have evolved from my initial interests about adult education in Nigeria to a new and increasingly complex and contextualised study, related to the Italian context.

My Connection to the Research

Being a Nigerian, my thoughts at the start of my PhD were influenced by my desire to do something related to Nigeria with the hope of contributing to the lifelong learning landscape of my country. This was informed by a stint I had at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. So, my aim was to understand the state of lifelong learning in Nigeria vis a vis global practices and see if there were needs for improvement. My supervisor fully supported me on this. I initially thought of doing research on policies of adult education in my country. However, after doing two literature reviews, I felt the topics I was considering were not viable and I was not convinced carrying out the research was worth it. One of the topics I had considered was recognition of prior learning (RPL) and qualification frameworks in Nigeria.

While reading the literature on RPL, I came across an article, “Translating the initial assessment of migrants’ informal learning in practice” (Bencivenga, 2017). She explored how Italian organisations carried out the assessment of migrants’ non-formal and informal learning and skills, and she concluded that “the full scope of migrants’ competences and experiences, desires and expectations is not explored” (Bencivenga, 2017, p. 152) by the organisations she studied. Since her focus was on organisations that dealt with migrants who had residency and

work permits, I thought of studying the process by which asylum seekers and refugees' prior learning and experiences were recognised and validated in Italy. While discussing this with my supervisor, she mentioned the theory of recognition by Axel Honneth and commented that it had broader ramifications for an individual than just recognising their prior learning, since the theory of recognition addressed issues of value and respect accorded to a person not just based on their learning but because they are human beings. I considered her words and read about the theory of recognition, after which I decided to adopt Honneth's theory of recognition as the theoretical frame for a study on asylum seekers and refugees' learning experiences in Italy. I wanted to explore the experiences of recognition and misrecognition that asylum seekers and refugees may encounter in Italy when they approach learning situations. Among the aims of my study, I wanted to bring my findings to the attention of scholars, policy makers, adult education practitioners and migration workers in order to sensitise them and build theoretical and practical knowledge based on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. As I will argue, in fact, learners' experience is fundamental in adult education research (Jarvis, 2004; Knowles, 1970, 1972; Merriam, 2001, 2004).

I decided to explore asylum seekers and refugees' learning experiences in adult education centres in Italy. This choice needed considerations about my relationship with the participants, my status as a PhD student in Italy, and the resonances that the research created between their experiences and mine. I cannot claim neutrality when studying lives of African migrants, being myself from an African country, but also a man, an educated person, with different life experiences from theirs, so I thought that their experiences might give me the opportunity to make comparisons and interrogate my own.

This, I felt, would allow me to become reflexive and self-reflexive and also to understand how factors such as class and privilege may play a role in the experiences of migrants. By choosing this topic, the framework of policy and practice relevant to my research shifted from Nigeria to Italy. This is also an issue: I was a newcomer in Italy, unable to speak Italian, and unaware and unknowing of many aspects of the context where my research was starting. So, the research

itself became a way of exploring the Italian system of adult education and some aspects of Italian culture.

Besides, the decision on participants' recruitment (see chapter 3) was partly based on linguistic considerations; since I could not speak Italian, as many asylum seekers and refugees, I decided to interview participants who spoke English. The opportunity to carry out research using an insider perspective (which I explain in the following section) also partly influenced the choice of participants.

Locating My Research Approach and Paradigm, and Positioning Myself

While clarifying my research topic, I started to define the methodology I was going to employ. From my classes and readings on research methodology, I came to understand that any methodology one chooses should fit with one's questions, worldview and philosophy about research, because embedded in each methodology is one's ontology and epistemology. Before starting my PhD, I had never given thought to research philosophy or paradigms, and even the fit between paradigm and methodology because I always thought there were three types of research: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. It was important to learn that the landscape of research is much more articulated and each approach refers to underlying beliefs.

Over time, I came to align more with qualitative research approaches and I developed more awareness of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning them. I suddenly became sure I would adopt a qualitative approach for my study, but I needed to develop a more detailed and satisfactory grasp of research approaches. This brought me to read more about the assumptions of the qualitative approaches and their implications for research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I realised that my research interests aligned better with the qualitative worldview, since it best fits my topic which relates to exploring human experiences and the meanings assigned to them (Richards & Morse, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative research allows exploring phenomena from the insiders' perspective (Merrill & West, 2009; Schwandt, 2003). The

concept of insiderness refers to studies in which the researcher identifies with the participants on some significant level (Voloder, 2013). In my case, I am a migrant, Black and Nigerian who carried out a study with Black asylum seekers and refugees (migrants), mostly from Nigeria. The concept of insider perspective was initially a shocking discovery to me because I came from a positivist background (I came to know about this during my methodology classes and from my readings). My previous orientation about research was then based on the notion of objectivity. I had been made to understand that research should not be 'tainted' by the researcher's biases; the researcher should maintain (or appear to maintain) a distance between themselves and the subjects/objects under study. So, it was fascinating for me to find out about a research approach that acknowledged the place of relationship and even identification between the researcher and the researched, and that this relationship does not detract but can, with reflexivity, enrich the research, but I needed to understand it more.

I first tried to deepen my understanding of qualitative research and I found out that qualitative approaches are concerned with deep understanding of a phenomenon through in-depth analysis of cases, interpretation, meaning-making, very often by giving voice to marginalised groups or silenced experiences, hence creating stories and generating theories (Brinkmann, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, 2003a, 2005). This said, any claim on "qualitative research" as a coherent general field is not legitimate; the binary distinction between a "quantitative" and "qualitative" approach has been challenged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As a matter of fact, quantitative studies also need some form of interpretation. For some topics, generalisation is not a good choice, or is not possible; in fact, there are different approaches also to qualitative research, with different ontological and epistemological assumptions. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, the approach I have chosen in this research is narrative-interpretative. I will explicate this approach further in Chapter 3.

Like I wrote above, qualitative approaches to research seek to explore and understand phenomena that cannot be measured or objectified, hence taking a distance from the positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of positivism may be hidden in some qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln,

1994), since they shape Western mentality and appear to be common sense. Very often, qualitative methods address the meanings people ascribe to their experiences of phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), but they can also address processes, discourses, cultures, and narratives contained in human artefacts. Through in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, and aesthetic or performative methods, a researcher can aim to understand a situation, a problem or a phenomenon building from the participants' perspective (Brinkmann, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a) and/or their own. In fact, many qualitative researchers include themselves in the context of research, reflexively analysing their own experience, or procedures, or perspectives of meaning (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Leavy, 2020). Analysis of data (or the qualitative material) can be inductive, where the researcher moves from the particular to the general, that is, derives concepts or themes from raw data; or deductive, where the researcher applies a theory to their data (qualitative material). My observation is that many qualitative researchers seem to prefer the inductive approach (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Leavy, 2020).

As already mentioned, qualitative researchers are not afraid of recognising that they are part of the research context and make interpretations of their material in order to establish patterns from the materials they have collected. Interpretation is the core business of research (this is also true for quantitative data that need to be interpreted), and qualitative research is defined as "interpretative" by some authors to highlight the fact that researchers include their own interpretation and the participants' interpretation in the study. The researcher also explains how their values, biography, class, gender and race shaped their interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The implications of this for me as an "insider researcher" is that my interpretation of my participants' narratives is partly shaped by our common nationality, race and migration status, and partly by my own interests, questions, and worldview. So, from an interpretivist approach I have the responsibility of being reflexive about these influences, and try to use it to enhance the significance of my study.

In trying to build my own interpretation of qualitative research, in this study I have followed the following principles:

- Ontologically, I joined qualitative researchers who maintain that reality is constructed. Hence, there is no single truth out there; phenomena are in fact subjectively and/or socially constructed. Thus, there can be multiple interpretations (e.g., in social constructionism) or even multiple realities/multiverse (as in radical constructivism). The position of qualitative researchers towards subjectivity and objectivity can be diverse anyway. Since objective reality cannot be captured, researchers need to take an explicit position about their objects. What we know is a representation of reality by the subject who is experiencing it.
- Epistemologically, knowledge is a socially shared construct. So, the researchers question the way they construct the field, the research questions, and the relationship with the participants of their study or even the phenomenon being studied. The implication is that the interactions between the researcher and the researched, or with the context, are not neutral in shaping the meanings generated; hence, they need to be interpreted in order to understand their constitutive role in the process of research and in its outcomes.
- Methodologically, a panoply of methods has been created to enhance the possibility to understand reality in a complex qualitative interpretative way. They are very different in order to fit the research questions, the features of the context and participants' interests and motivations. The choice of methods also depends on the specific paradigm and theory that a qualitative researcher follows.

Generally speaking, if it is impossible to make generalisations, the aim of qualitative inquiry is to develop understanding, improve theory, construct discursive explanations about a phenomenon, often in relation to a particular context (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, 2003a, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Leavy, 2020). Most qualitative research is local or situational, but it can investigate universal and essential human phenomena. Context is emphasised in qualitative research; it is crucial to meaning-making in research. Nothing has a meaning out of context. Context refers to the linguistic, social, historical and cultural setting in which the research takes place and acquires meaning. However, it is not a mere and given "container" for human action; especially when we use a narrative approach, the context is an ongoing construction, weaved with the text: cum textus

(literally "with the text") is the Latin origin of this word. A situation or problem, a story, an observation cannot be understood in isolation from a context that needs to be defined and investigated as well.

Within the very wide umbrella of qualitative research, there are many different choices and possibilities. Identifying which paradigm I was working from was a struggle at the beginning of the study. The struggle to identify one's paradigm and indeed to find one's voice in research seems to be a common experience for PhD students choosing qualitative inquiry (Cunningham & Carmichael, 2018). My struggle was not helped by what seemed to me to be the lack of agreement on terms or categories of paradigms among scholars (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The lack of clarity in the definition and explanations of the paradigms left me in much confusion.

How did the notion of "paradigm" become so central for social science research? What are its advantages and disadvantages? A paradigm "consists of […] an array of assumptions about what exists […] how it may be known […] and how scientific work 'ought' to proceed… and a pattern of activities held to be consistent with these assumptions" (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 2). In other words, a paradigm is a framework used by a community of scholars to name their epistemological, ontological, methodological and ethical leanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, 2003a; Haigh & Withell, 2020; Scotland, 2012). It is "how the members of a research community perceive their field of study" (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014, p. 167). One implication of all the foregoing is that one's paradigm also imposes constraints or limitations on what we see in the world, as what we see is determined by the frame we use in seeing. I find this statement by Mary Gergen and Kenneth Gergen a good description of paradigm: "what we bring to the research is all-important. How we observe, what we find, and how we use the information will all be affected" (2012, pp. 27–28). The advantage of naming a paradigm then is that it makes clear to the researcher and other researchers the assumptions underpinning their study and the justification or appropriateness of the methodology used. A disadvantage might be that the researcher is constrained from considering other paradigms and therefore might be inclined to reject outright whatever outcome or idea that appears not consistent with the paradigm they work with.

A "paradigm" is a complex system of frameworks, entailing perception and action, which influence how one views reality. This construct has also been used to name, more generally, the frame of meanings with which we view the world, and this frame consists of our beliefs or general perspectives about the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pascale, 2011). However, if the paradigm coincides with the researcher's worldview, it is very difficult to give clear and sharp definitions. Different paradigms generate different realities (and vice versa: the paradigmatic choice is always embedded and historically/socially shaped). Kuhn states that paradigms "provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research" (1970, p. 10). In summary, in research, "…paradigm refers to the theoretical or philosophical ground for the research work. It is viewed as a research philosophy" (Khatri, 2020, p. 1435). Some of the paradigms identified by scholars include: positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical, feminist, constructionist, Marxist, among others (Brinkmann, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, 2003a, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Johannesson & Perjons, 2014; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2003; Richards & Morse, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Choosing a Paradigm

By the end of my methodology classes, and reflecting on my readings and first experiences in the field, I concluded that I leaned towards the view that considers multiple realities or perspectives, and that the researcher and participants co-create knowledge in doing the research. I also identified with the idea that doing research in this field should help to identify and challenge oppressive ideologies and practices. So, I decided to read about constructivist, constructionist and critical paradigms and at the end I adopted the constructionist paradigm as the main paradigm underpinning my study. I also decided that the research would have critical components.

Critical Research

Critical researchers are concerned about how participants can take control of their circumstances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b). Especially in education, this means to interrogate the possibility of conscientisation (Freire, 1998; Shor & Freire, 1987) in order to overcome oppression and augment human freedom. The main assumption of the critical paradigm is that human relationships are ruled by power, hegemonic discourses, and internalized oppression. So, this view creates a tension with constructivism. Is power "real"? Is the idea of power a construction? The critical paradigm espouses the view that reality (that is, the reality of power, oppression, domination) is shaped by historical, socio-cultural, socio-political factors, among others. The socio-cultural dimensions of human life – class, gender, ethnicity – entail some kind of power relationships between different social groups, and an internalisation of these relationships in the "character". Rubin and Rubin capture the philosophy of critical research this way:

> For those who accept a critical paradigm, the truth they study is the reality of oppression. Research is about documenting how that oppression has been experienced and how ordinary people can understand the causes of the prejudice, poverty, or humiliation they have suffered. Research should lead to action to reduce the problems caused by oppression… (2005, p. 26).

The essence of critical research in education is to understand the structures of power that shape human experience from outside and from inside, and one way of doing this is by investigating subjective narratives of society, life, and experience. Therefore, critical research in education attempts to identify the workings of dominant ideologies in how stories are told, that contribute to inequalities in the society (Finnegan, 2021). Critical research therefore has the potential to bring about knowledge which can push the marginalised or oppressed to act in order to seek liberation from oppressive ideologies. In other words, the final aim of critical research is empowerment (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and emancipation (Finnegan, 2019; Fleming, 2016; Mezirow, 1981; Shor & Freire, 1987).

This emancipation allows subjects to become relatively free from historical or biographical factors which are limiting them but are taken for granted as beyond their control. Thus, "Insights gained through critical self-awareness are emancipatory in the sense that at least one can recognise the correct reasons for his or her problems" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 5). Critical researchers hold the view that an individual may develop critical awareness about the

ideological assumptions that sustain one's perception of reality (Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow defines an ideology as "a belief system and attendant attitudes held as true and valid which shape a group's interpretation of reality and behaviour and are used to justify and legitimate actions" (1981, pp. 5–6). Critical research in adult education, therefore, aims to provide knowledge about the participants, the context and the larger system, based on an understanding of how individual lives are affected by oppressive practices and dominant ideology(ies). In some types of research (that is, engaged research, participatory studies), the participants themselves can be brought to challenge their own perspectives and take steps towards experiencing perspective transformation.

The Main Assumptions of Social Constructionism

While there is no single constructionist position (Galbin, 2014; K. Gergen, 2015; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010), some basic principles or assumptions are common to different applications of social constructionism. The main idea is that what is considered as knowledge originates from social or communal exchanges. What is considered 'reality' is a shared construction by groups of people with the same language, similar histories and ways of life (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003). The way a person or a group experiences the world and makes sense of it is largely the product of social interactional processes (Lock & Strong, 2010). Relationships are then considered as central to the construction of knowledge (Cojocaru et al., 2012; K. Gergen, 1985, 2015). Relationship is here defined as concrete interactions between people in a community. It is from our relationships (that is, communication, interactions) with others that we form our conception of reality (K. Gergen, 2009). Therefore, central to the assumptions of the constructionist paradigm is the communal construction of knowledge (K. Gergen, 1985, 2015; L. Yang & Gergen, 2012). Mary Gergen elucidates this point thus:

> Our cultures provide models not only for the contents of what we say but also the forms. We use these forms unwittingly; they create the means by which we interpret our lives. We know ourselves via the mediating forms of our cultures, through telling and through listening." (M. Gergen, 1997, p. 54).

In essence, social constructionism holds the view that people who speak the same language and share the same practices come to take for granted that they are also thinking in the same way. Hence, they are co-constructing a shared ongoing reality where many aspects seem to be normal or accepted as such. Common sense is based on this kind of process, and very difficult to challenge. This process is very effective: it allows humans to coordinate their actions and to feel that they are right. They do not need to question their assumptions; they use these assumptions automatically and uncritically. In educational terms, they learn and teach each other what is the world, and how life should be. This makes any change very difficult. This is an area where the social constructionist and critical paradigms may converge: they are both interested in going beyond what is apparent or what is told.

Kenneth Gergen explains the purpose of social constructionism in these terms:

> Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed (1985, p. 266).

He goes further to outline some fundamental assumptions of the constructionist paradigm:

i. "What we take as experience of the world does not itself dictate the terms by which they are understood" (p. 266). This means one should challenge the taken-for-granted way we perceive things because generally accepted categories or labels are contingent upon linguistic, historical or social contexts. There are no justifications for believing that the language we employ in describing an experience is a mirror of that experience. That is, the words we use in our description or explanation of an experience are not a direct reflection of the experience but the result of a socially shared understanding. "When we talk about the world, it is not a mirror of the world. It is a way of using words for some purpose, one interpretation among a possible infinity" (Yang & Gergen, 2012, p. 127). This assumption encourages one to challenge taken-for-granted processes or 'realities'.

ii. "The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (K. Gergen, 1985, p. 267). This assumption

foregrounds the place of relationships in the negotiation of meaning or process of understanding. What we say about our experiences is based on the understanding we share with "others" (both those we have interactions with – significant others – and the larger context – systems, discourses - that shape the dominant narratives in our social world, for example, media, landscapes, organisations…). How one describes one's experiences is also dependent on the discursive resources available in terms of definitions, analogies, exemplifications, etc. How I describe reality is a function of the words I have, the definition I am using, whose definition I am using and for what purposes. (The point about purpose is elucidated further in point (iv) below). In summary, "discourse" shapes what one says about one's experience. "Discourse" is a construction itself; it points at language and artifacts connected to the history of a group of people, used to consider the roots of taken-for-granted-assumptions, but it is also an elusive notion.

iii. "The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes" (K. Gergen, 1985, p. 267). This means that the validity or truth of an idea is not based on reality, but on the evolution of a society or group. Thus, interpretations, perspectives or descriptions of reality may change as social relationships evolve or through novel applications of words (Cooperrider et al., 1995)(Cooperrider et al., 1995). For example, what counts as morality or envy or love or lust and so on within a social group depends on the interpretation given to such acts within that group. Cooperrider et al. call this "indeterminacy of meaning" and go on to add that "Wittgenstein addressed this directly: usage determines meaning, it is not meaning that determines usage" (1995, p. 166).

iv. "Forms of negotiated understanding are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage. Descriptions and explanations of the world themselves constitute forms of social action" (K. Gergen, 1985, p. 267). This means when people talk, it is to elicit certain reactions from their hearers. Thus, discourse is a sort of performance with social meaning or implication; when we say something, or tell a story, we are usually (if unconsciously) trying to generate a particular kind of feeling or action in the audience. So, communication is not

just meant to describe or represent our experiences (that is propositional content, words) but to make our hearers feel or act in a certain way (presentation, performance, command).

Lock and Strong (2010) also espouse five tenets of social constructionism:

1. Meaning and understanding are at the centre of human activities. The focus is on how people make sense of each other's utterances and actions. What role do language and symbols play in bringing about a mutual grasp of the message(s) interlocutors are trying to pass across during discourse?
2. Meaning and understanding have their origins in intersubjective relationships and mutual agreements on the descriptions to be given to phenomena or actions.
3. Meanings and descriptions given to phenomena or actions are situational, that is, largely dependent on specific times and places since meaning-making is rooted in the ongoing social and historical development of a group of people.
4. As an extension of the previous point, individuals construct or define their (multiple) self-identities depending on the types of discourse they are engaged in. Humans present themselves in different ways according to the situation, with the purpose of projecting a particular identity during interactions with others. In view of this, social constructionism may be concerned with the construction of multiple identities, exploring the processes that make people construct their narratives of themselves in particular ways. For example, a person may present themselves as helpless before a benefactor or strong or self-sufficient before their spouse and children. Or a person might present themselves as victim of a situation or as brave, depending on who is the listener.
5. Social constructionism adopts a critical perspective in challenging social processes that people engage in unquestioningly with the aim of bringing about a change in such operations if they are found to be unjust.

These assumptions are very relevant to educational research; in fact, they entail processes of learning and education that are not intentional, as a "hidden curriculum" by which everybody

learn their place in the world. Such curriculum can be detected and de-constructed, at least partially, critically using the very same tools that built it, that is, interactions and dialogue. From a social constructionist viewpoint, social, linguistic and interpersonal influences are worthy of attention and analysis, because meaning is a product of dominant social and historical practices and discourses. When people interact with each other within a social system, over a period of time, they develop (learn) concepts, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions about the actions and roles of each other within the social system. These concepts, perceptions and beliefs become institutionalised or socially agreed upon by members of the society and consequently shape their view of the world or how they construct reality. Thus, our perceptions about the world are social constructs and this is why researchers in this paradigm do not make truth claims (Galbin, 2014) and encourage awareness of the way people perceive and experience the world.

In his contribution on social constructionism, Owen (1995) elaborates on the role of previous and current interactions in shaping how people see the world. In relating with people, we unconsciously imbibe assumptions and understandings constituting the frame within which we then interact with our world and interpret our experiences. Culture, that is every day or regular practices and occurrences, supply us with the resources to read our world. It is through the approval and disapproval of others that an individual comes to know what is considered acceptable, appropriate, unacceptable and inappropriate. Meaning – what we know or think we know - is thus not an individual endeavour but is constructed in interactions with others. This is why one of the goals of social constructionism is to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions "by considering who is acting on whom and in what context, for whose gain and loss" (Owen, 1992, p. 4). Social constructionism also encourages seeking out different perspectives in order to gain understanding of a phenomenon which is usually not linear but complex. This multiplication of versions of reality is important because a person's experience of the world is limited and dependent on many factors, situational (such as who is interacting with who, and where and when) and biographical (one's experiences that have shaped one's perspectives of meaning). This has very interesting educational consequences. In fact, changing situational factors (for example, with education or social work) can bring about significant changes in the

biographical narrative (for example, challenging previous learning and crystallised perspectives of meaning).

How taken-for-granted assumptions become perpetuated is explained by Bateson (1972) cited in Lock & Strong:

> In the natural living history of the living human being, ontology and epistemology cannot be separated. His (commonly unconscious) beliefs about what sort of world it is will determine how he sees it and acts within it, and his ways of perceiving and acting will determine his beliefs about its nature. The living man is thus bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which – regardless of ultimate truth or falsity – become partially self-validating for him (2010, p. 174).

Reading about social constructionism invited me to a major paradigm shift, particularly because of the claim that words or language do not mirror what reality or experience is or that nothing is real unless people agree it is (K. Gergen, 2015). For instance, Kenneth Gergen (2015) asserts that the word 'death' is not a description of a reality or a universal truth, but a construction based on what a community agrees to be death. This was confusing and disturbing at the same time. It was difficult for me to come to terms with such claims, but then I got some clarity from understanding that social constructionism does not argue that there is no reality, rather that when we are giving a description, it is from a particular tradition of understanding (K. Gergen, 2015). Thus, social constructionism does not deny or confirm what is there but it focuses on the description that we give about reality or truth. Still using the example of death, social constructionism holds that death means different things to different people in different traditions. So, while a biologist might see death as the termination of some bodily functions, a religious person might see it as a transition to another realm while yet another person might claim the dead person still lives on through their progenies or through their good works. Therefore, what we take to be a reality is interpreted within relationships with others or the traditions within which we interact with others.

The implication of this is that alternative viewpoints or descriptions about the same phenomenon may be equally valid. So, different viewpoints about the same phenomenon can

be legitimate within their specific traditions and contexts, which are illuminated by them. Mary Gergen and Kenneth Gergen argue for example, that different professions "have different vocabularies to describe things" (2012, p. 27). When we explore those vocabularies, we understand better what is at stake for each profession, their perspectives, and their limits. Social constructionism thus invites us to consider, appreciate and even question the many viewpoints and try to overcome the constraints and limits of our own history and traditions from appreciating multiple perspectives.

The implication of all the foregoing for me and my research is that I came to better understand that the aim of my research was not to establish "the truth" about my participants' experiences but to work with their interpretations of their experiences and also make my own interpretations of their interpretations. It was also important for me to keep at the back of my mind that no description is value-neutral (though this is not solely specific to social constructionism as most other qualitative methods hold the same view). Thus, I chose to be aware of the values embedded in my participants' narrations, and to question what purpose a narration was serving, and in whose favour or to whose detriment. I also tried to be aware that there are many ways of describing and explaining realities (multiple realities/multiple perspectives).

I tried to exercise my capacity to hold back the idea of being certain or definitive about what was real, no matter how obvious or compelling it appeared to me. This is an exercise of self-decentering, very important as well as difficult for a qualitative-interpretive researcher. So, I know that my endeavour is open to failure, since I am human and the human trend is to trust perception and take-for-granted assumptions. I have my own worldview. However, I am very interested in exploring and appreciating other possibilities. This means caution is needed while making interpretations of my narrative materials. I find these statements by Kenneth Gergen quoted by Lock and Strong, a powerful encapsulation of my thoughts:

> The [social constructionist] is little likely to ask about the truth, validity, or objectivity of a given account, what predictions follow from a theory, how well a statement reflects the true intentions or emotions of a speaker, or how an utterance is made possible by cognitive processing. Rather, for the [social constructionist], samples of language are integers within patterns of relationship. They are not maps or mirrors of other domains – referential worlds or interior impulses – but outgrowths of specific modes of life, rituals of exchange, relations of

> control and domination, and so on. The chief questions to be asked of generalised truth claims are thus, how do they function, in which rituals are they essential, what activities are facilitated and what impeded, who is harmed and who gains by such claims? (Lock & Strong, 2010, pp. 8–9).

Statement of the Problem

Defining the problem statement of my research, or what Creswell calls "creating a rationale for the need for the study" (2013, p. 130), was not easy because the field of migration appeared saturated to me, at first sight. There is already an abundance of research in migration studies within the adult education framework. I will say more on this in Chapter 2. Discussing my concerns with my supervisor, we came to the conclusion that most studies in adult education neglect the learning experiences of asylum seekers, particularly from a psycho-societal perspective integrating inner and outer processes. Creswell (2013) argues that the need for a study can come from both a gap in literature and from 'real life' issues. I think both apply in my case. The rationale for this study came from an observed gap in the literature as well as my personal interest to explore the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. This desire can be traced to my status as a migrant in Italy, and part of my desire is to see areas of convergence and differences in my experience and in the experiences of my research participants.

This Thesis: General Aim, Research Questions and Contents

My general aim with this research was to assess the validity of the construct of recognition in illuminating the learning experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy, and possibly bring new insights to the theory and in its interpretation. In order to do so, I will build, in Part One of the thesis, a theoretical and methodological framework, and clarify what can Honneth's theory of recognition bring to the field of adult education and learning.

Chapter 1 contains the theoretical framework for my research by introducing the theory of recognition by Axel Honneth. I also reviewed literature that shows how the theory of recognition has been used in the field of adult learning by scholars.

Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of immigration in Italy and the procedure for requesting asylum in Italy. I also discussed the educational provisions for migrants in Italy as well as the major public educational institution that provides education to migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees in Italy.

In chapter 3, I outline my methodology and methods including the challenges I faced while carrying out the research. I argue that this research is a co-construction of knowledge between my participants and me, and how a research relationship shapes the outcome of the research.

In Part Two, I will present how I have used the proposed theoretical and methodological framework to shape my research using nine (9) stories: three (3) stories of teachers and six (6) stories of asylum seekers in Italian public schools for adults. These stories are presented in Chapters 4-8 in the form of published papers and papers under review for publication. In Chapter 9 I provide an overview of the whole research by discussing my research in the light of what I consider the main emerging topics from the study. The conclusion chapter presents some of reflections on this research.

In this exploratory multiple-case study, my research questions are:

i. What learning experiences do asylum seekers and refugees have in Italy?
ii. How do they name and frame their learning motivations? How does this illuminate processes of oppression and recognition?
iii. What are the effects of asylum seekers' and refugees' learning experiences, and the meaning they assign to them, on the construction of an "empowered" narrative identity versus oppressive forms of self-narration?
iv. What dilemmas do asylum seekers and refugees face and how do they address the dilemmas?

CHAPTER ONE

The Theory of Recognition and Identity Construction

My Rationale for Choosing this Theory

In this chapter I build the theoretical framework for my research, starting from an analysis of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition. I have chosen this theory because of how it blends the psychological and sociological dimensions of human experience to provide an understanding of the role of relationships in the development of personal identity. The theory thus provides me with useful tools to explain how the experiences of my research participants have shaped their self-identity and sense of belongingness as asylum seekers and/or refugees in Italy. In the field of adult education research, the theory has been used by scholars to interrogate the experiences of non-traditional learners (Fleming, 1995, 2011b, 2011a, 2016; Fleming & Finnegan, 2014a, 2014b; West et al., 2013), refugees (West, 2014) and vulnerable persons (Sandberg, 2016; Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013). So, I consider the theory of recognition by Axel Honneth promising for my research, since it offers analytical insights about the role of adult education in how asylum seekers and refugees negotiate their identity.

While Honneth's theory of recognition has been criticised as insufficient for explaining causes of social conflicts and struggles, I agree with his arguments about the effect of intersubjective recognition on identity formation because I could relate to it on a pre-theoretical, pre-rational phenomenological level, being a Black migrant in a predominantly White society where I and others of similar skin colour experience misrecognition and disrespect regularly. I am also experientially aware of the effect of disrespect on my self-identity, and the internal struggle for recognition that takes place within me. I therefore find this theory useful in analysing my research materials because of the social position of my research participants who, as asylum seekers and refugees, have to engage in the struggle for recognition in their host society, albeit from a less privileged position than me.

Axel Honneth

Who is Axel Honneth? In order to understand his theory, there is a need to contextualise Honneth in his time, discipline, and school of thought (the Frankfurt School). He is German (European), a philosopher but also an interdisciplinary scholar. He was born in 1949 in Essen, Germany. He is a professor of social philosophy who has held positions as Director of the Institute of Social Research in the University of Frankfurt as well as a Chair at the Department of Philosophy, Columbia University in New York. His writings have been heavily influenced by the works of Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Lukács, Mead, Derrida, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Castoriadis, Foucault, and Levinas (Petherbridge, 2013), reflecting the interdisciplinary dimensions of his works. His writings have also been influenced by his background of growing up in a working-class society where he experienced shame, social suffering and feelings of disrespect. These experiences have guided his work and his theory of recognition is based on the idea of "phenomenology of social suffering, those lived experiences of disrespect that provide immanent resources within social life for the basis of social critique and transformation" (Petherbridge, 2013, p. 3).

In the first section of this chapter, I present Axel Honneth's arguments for a theory of recognition drawn from his work: The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts (Honneth, 1995) translated by Joel Anderson. It is in this seminal study that Honneth lays out his arguments for the theory of recognition. Subsequent sections of this chapter present some of the critiques to the theory and a narrative literature review on the use of the theory in adult learning and education. Finally, I propose a more complex view of the role of recognition in adult education and learning, as well as some concepts that may sustain research in the field, and maybe to operationalise the theory.

A Review of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition

The theory of recognition by Axel Honneth is an attempt by him to leverage on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's work, and more precisely "Hegel's early Jena writings" (Honneth, 1995, p.

1), to build a social theory that can provide a theoretical justification for explaining and interpreting processes for societal change. Honneth's aim, therefore, is to provide a critical framework to explain how societies develop, and to qualify these developmental processes (p. 171). In his seminal book, *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts* (originally written in German), Honneth reconstructs Hegel's notion of a struggle for recognition, that is the attempt by a person to seek redress for experiences of social disrespect. Hegel was a philosopher, but Honneth goes further to provide an empirical basis for the theory of recognition by drawing on the social psychology of George Herbert Mead as well as on psychoanalysis and social studies. Besides, his theory is aimed at opening possibilities for a better life. In fact, he would conclude the book by providing an ideal of ethical life which he developed based on the theory of recognition.

Honneth reveals that Hegel's original intention was "to provide a philosophical reconstruction of the organisation of individual ethical communities as a sequence of stages involving a struggle for recognition" (p. 67), but this plan was later abandoned by Hegel. While Honneth points out some weaknesses with Hegel's arguments for a theoretical framework for recognition (for example that Hegel's point of departure in developing a theory of recognition was rationalistic and speculative without empirical evidence), he also identifies some merits in Hegel's arguments which led him to take up the task of recovering and reconstructing the proposed model "in the light of empirical social psychology" (p. 68). Hence, the introduction of "an empirically supported phenomenology [...] allows Hegel's theoretical proposal to be tested and, if necessary, corrected" (p. 69). Honneth brings into the theory an empirical perspective, in order to show:

> first, whether Hegel's assumption that stages of recognition move in a certain direction can withstand empirical doubts; second, whether these forms of reciprocal recognition can be mapped onto corresponding experiences of social disrespect; and, finally, whether there is historical or sociological evidence for the claim that such forms of disrespect have actually served as a source of motivation for social confrontations (p. 70).

Hegel's assumption, according to Honneth, is that a good society is an "ethically integrated community of free citizens" (pp. 12–13). That is, in the ideal society every individual is guaranteed their freedom to fulfil their potentials or, put in another way, individuals are able to exercise their freedom to achieve their potentials. Individual freedom is guaranteed through the

mutual or intersubjective recognition accorded to one another in the society. That is, everyone in the society is recognised as free as well as possessing individual traits and abilities. Hegel's argument, as reported by Honneth, is that

> "to the degree that a subject knows itself to be recognized by another subject with regard to certain of its [the subject's] abilities and qualities and is thereby reconciled with the other, a subject always also comes to know its own distinctive identity…" (p. 16).

There is an assumption here about the need for reconciliation, since the societal bond is always under pressure, always threatened by conflict. A person, then, forms their identity as well as their position in society from the way others perceive and relate with them. Honneth points out that Hegel distinguishes between three forms of recognition. This distinction is based on the how as well as the what of recognition:

> […] in the affective relationship of recognition found in the family, human individuals are recognized as concrete creatures of need; in the cognitive-formal relationship of recognition found in law, they are recognized as abstract legal persons; and finally, in the emotionally enlightened relationship of recognition found in the State, they are recognised as concrete universals, that is, as subjects who are socialised in their particularity (p. 25).

Honneth reconstructs these three forms of recognition as love, rights and solidarity/social esteem. I will return to this distinction between the forms of recognition later. In order to reinforce and test the validity of Hegel's theoretical model of recognition, Honneth turns to the social psychology of George Herbert Mead, and especially to his seminal work on intersubjective recognition (Mead & Schubert, 1934). According to Honneth,

> Nowhere is the idea that human subjects owe their identity to the experience of intersubjective recognition more thoroughly developed on the basis of naturalistic presuppositions than in the social psychology of George Herbert Mead (p. 71).

Besides, Honneth claims that "Mead also aims to make the struggle for recognition the point of reference for a theoretical construction in terms of which the moral development of society is to be explained" (p. 71). The summary of the preceding statements is that Honneth holds the opinion that Mead's exploration of the topic of intersubjective recognition, from the perspective of social psychology, provides a sound terrain to explain how an individual

constructs their self-identity through interaction with others, as well as a confirmation of the basic assumption that society develops from the moral struggle for recognition or the struggle for equality that takes place within it. A clear submission in Mead's arguments is that "a subject can only acquire a consciousness of itself to the extent to which it learns to perceive its own action from the symbolically represented second-person perspective" (Honneth, 1995, p. 75).

One of Mead's fundamental notions is "the generalised other". The generalised other refers to a person or persons in the society from whom an individual learns societal norms in order to become an accepted member of the society (Honneth, 1995; Mead & Schubert, 1934). Honneth explains that Mead suggests a "psychological mechanism that makes the development of self-consciousness dependent upon the existence of a second subject" (1995, p. 75). This can be explained as "'I' exist because 'you' are there". Honneth sees a convergence between the positions of Hegel and Mead, especially as it relates to a subject's practical relation to self or formation of self-identity; both of them acknowledge the role of intersubjectivity in the formation of self-identity. Concerning the use of the term 'recognition', Honneth explains Mead's thought thus:

> If it is the case that one becomes a socially accepted member of one's community by learning to appropriate the social norms of the 'generalized other', then it makes sense to use the concept of 'recognition' for this intersubjective relationship: to the extent that growing children recognize their interaction partners by way of an internalization of their normative attitudes, they can know themselves to be members of their social context of cooperation (p. 78).

In developing the theory of recognition, Honneth took his point of departure from this principle:

> The reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee (p. 92).

The import of this principle is that social relations are regulated by mutual recognition or intersubjective recognition. Like Hegel, Honneth identified three forms or spheres of recognition, and attempted to describe these forms of recognition "with regard to a) the medium of recognition, (b) the form of the relation-to-self made possible, and (c) the potential for moral development" (p. 95).

Love

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 relationships "are constituted by strong emotional attachments among a small number of people" (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" (p. 107) because it is in this sphere of recognition that individuals develop basic self-confidence:

> it is only this symbiotically nourished bond, which emerges through mutually desired demarcation, that produces the degree of basic individual self-confidence indispensable for autonomous participation in public life (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. However, one never outgrows this stage; so, when we face a new social context, and especially a challenging one, the need for love, for basic mutual recognition - "being seen" - is always there. This kind of recognition helps the subject to take steps in order to participate. I will elaborate later about this sphere of recognition for adult learning.

Rights

The second form or sphere of recognition identified by Honneth is the sphere of law or rights. According to him, it 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 (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. His definition of the term 'rights' is "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" (p. 133). Every individual deserves to be treated equally in the 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" (p. 120). This means that the awareness that one can embark on certain actions - because they have the freedom and the right to do so helps the person to see themselves as someone respected by others. The fact that other persons in the society acknowledge their right to carry out certain actions as well the opportunity to seek legal redress if the need arises, shows to a person that they are respected or recognised as a morally responsible person in the society. Here again, the consequence of this concept on my research is evident, and I will come back to it later.

Honneth concludes his explanation of the sphere of right by declaring that with legal recognition,

> […] one is able to view oneself as a person who shares with all other members of one's community the qualities that make participation in discursive will-formation possible. And we can term the possibility of relating positively to oneself in this manner 'self-respect' (p. 120).

So clearly, according to Honneth, recognition in the area of rights helps an individual to develop self-respect in their identity formation. He stresses that an individual who has no rights (or has no access to them) has no chance of developing their self-respect (p. 119). To strike this point home, Honneth quotes Feinberg (1980):

> Having rights enables us to 'stand up like men', to look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone. To think of oneself as the holder of rights is not to be unduly but properly proud, to have that minimal self-respect that is necessary to be worthy of the love and esteem of others. Indeed, respect for persons... may simply be respect for their rights, so that there cannot be the one without the other. And what is called 'human dignity' may simply be the recognizable capacity to assert claims (1995, p. 120).

In summary, 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 groups. However, in my observation,

the main problem with rights in democratic societies is that many rights are declared but not attainable in reality.

Social Esteem

The third sphere of recognition identified by Honneth is social esteem, which centres on the recognition of a person's traits and abilities or a group's characteristics. For this kind of recognition to take place there must exist what Honneth calls "an intersubjectively shared value-horizon" (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" (p. 121) that they can mutually esteem one another. In the sphere of social esteem, the unique characteristics of a person and/or the specific contribution a person makes to the society are acknowledged:

> […] social esteem can only apply to those traits and abilities with regard to which members of society differ from one another. Persons can feel themselves to be 'valuable' only when they know themselves to be recognized for accomplishments that they precisely do not share in an undifferentiated manner with others (p. 125).

The degree to which a person is accorded social esteem does indicate their status in the society. Honneth further notes that in the sphere of esteem, recognition can also be given to a group's distinctive characteristics. In this case, an individual takes on the collective identity of their group, and the experience is "a feeling of group-pride or collective honour" (p. 128). The individual identifies themselves as a member of a valuable group that can accomplish things together; things that other groups in the society recognise as worthy. Thus, within such a group from which an individual draws their identity and feeling of esteem, there is a sense or undercurrent of solidarity. When an individual's uniqueness is recognised outside of the identity of their social group (that is, for their individuality), Honneth points out that such recognition helps the individual to develop their self-esteem.

Denial of Recognition/Disrespect/Misrecognition

What if a person is denied the recognition they expect? According to Sandberg and Kubiak, "Individuals are also at risk of misrecognition, disrespect or non-recognition" (2013, p. 353). What disrespect or misrecognition does to a person is that they feel humiliated, and their self-identity is injured or damaged (Honneth, 1995, 2004). This injury or damage, according to Honneth, can cause a person's identity to collapse. This highlights the vulnerability of humans in their need for recognition in order to develop a healthy sense of self. Honneth categorises disrespect according to the three forms of recognition examined above.

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). D'Avila & Saavedra (2011) call it *mistreatment*. An extreme form of disrespect in this sphere is physical injuries or abuse such as torture or rape. This kind of injury causes both physical and psychological harm to the victim, who 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 relationships with others. Other forms of disrespect in the sphere of love are less visible but extremely harmful; being neglected, not seen, not listened to. This form of disrespect conveys the sense of "you do not exist" to an individual. As said above, this need emerges in new contexts, also in adult life. Adults who were abused or neglected or silenced in earlier experiences will struggle more than others. Disrespect in the sphere of love threatens an individual's physical integrity (O'Brien, 2013) and destroys the "most fundamental form of practical relation-to-self, namely, one's underlying trust in oneself" (Honneth 1995, p. 133).

An individual's social integrity can be threatened or violated through exclusionary or discriminatory practices in the society on the basis of gender, race, disability, etc. A person's honour and dignity can be threatened through "embedded prejudices" (Fleming, 2016). 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 and

deprivation of rights (D'Avila & Saavedra, 2011) 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 (sometimes unconsciously) that they do not enjoy the privilege of being considered as a full member of the society who has 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" (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. They are deprived of the ability to see themselves as legally equal to other members of the society, to talk back to power and claim their rights.

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. D'Avila & Saavedra (2011) call it degradation. 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 of the possibility to bring an original and personal contribution to society, hence they do not receive social approval of their abilities and contributions. They develop the sense that they do not have anything of positive significance to contribute to the society: "In order to acquire a successful relation-to-self, one is dependent on the intersubjective recognition of one's abilities and accomplishments" (Honneth, 1995, p. 136).

While many writers, including me, use the term "misrecognition", Congdon (2020) prefers the term, "failures of recognition" which has "misrecognition" as one of its types. According to him: Failures of recognition include, at least, (i) non-recognition, in which people are treated as if socially invisible or worthless, (ii) misrecognition, in which people are treated in ways that only partially or distortedly do justice to their worth, and (iii) ideological recognition, in which apparently affirmative gestures strengthen conditions of oppression (Congdon, 2020, p.

3). 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. Insults and humiliation can lead to the destruction of the individual's self-confidence; being excluded from certain rights can damage a person's self-respect and one's self-esteem can be shattered if one does not feel honoured or that their abilities are recognised by the society. In short, misrecognition can destroy an individual's sense of self, identity, value and autonomy (Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013).

The Struggle for Recognition and Social Justice

Honneth (1995) argues that the struggle for recognition provides an explanatory model for the causes of social conflicts. He avers that individuals' struggle for recognition can arise from the experience of being disrespected (p. 138). This experience can be a "motivational impetus" (p. 138) for seeking recognition because individuals' agitations can only be assuaged by seeking a redress of their situation. This struggle brings about societal development and progress. He points out that disrespect in the spheres of rights and social esteem (more than in the sphere of love) is the cause of societal conflicts (p. 162). When individuals' experiences become typical for a whole group, then the group begins a collective struggle for recognition. This usually takes the form of restitution or correction for the disrespect they are experiencing. Thus, according to Honneth, the theory of recognition "suggests the view that motives for social resistance and rebellion are formed in the context of moral experiences stemming from the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition" (p. 163). Hence, social struggles usually result from the denial of expected recognition to certain groups in the society. Honneth further explains that social movements spring up when people from the same group suffer similar experiences of disrespect and decide to organise themselves and collectively demand for recognition. He points out that involvement in such a social cause "can indirectly convince themselves of their moral or social worth" and "restores a bit of the individual's lost self-respect" (1995, p. 164), by getting recognition from the others in the group.

Honneth notes that his arguments might be misinterpreted to mean that all social conflicts are caused by the struggle for recognition. He points out that it is not the case, as historically, many conflicts have been caused purely by struggle for economic survival. He however maintains that some other social struggles arise from the collective feelings of being denied legal or social recognition. The collective interest behind a struggle might have a deeper or underlying cause that arose from a struggle for recognition and respect. This might be the case when a society accords recognition or respect to those who are wealthy or have financial means. He explains that conflicts arising from struggle for economic survival are about "competition for scarce goods" (p. 165) while conflicts arising from the demand for recognition are about "a struggle over the intersubjective conditions for personal integrity" (p. 165). He makes effort to point out that the "model of conflict, based on a theory of recognition" (p. 165) should not be seen as a replacement for the other model of conflict which he calls the "utilitarian model"; in fact, the theory of recognition should extend the utilitarian model.

In a paper titled, "Recognition and justice: Outline of a plural theory of justice", Honneth explains that his idea of justice is a society where all members "have equal rights among one another and hence affords each of them the same autonomy" (Honneth, 2004, p. 356). Fleming points out that "Honneth's work attempts to make social issues such as poverty, unemployment, injustices, globalisation and abuses of power open to being understood in recognition terms" (2016, p. 21). These instances of misrecognition give rise to the struggle for recognition by those who feel that they have not been given their proper recognition in the society. Struggles for recognition can be observed in the resistance by certain groups of people to unfair, unequal or disproportionate treatments and undignified characterisation or profiling by the dominant class or group (O'Brien, 2013). As already mentioned, misrecognition at the societal level can be in the form of denying an individual or group of individuals their legal rights and social value. Fleming, citing (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 242) states that the objective of Honneth's critical theory "is to identify experiences in society that contain 'system-exploding energies and motivations' in pursuit of freedom and justice" (Fleming, 2016, p. 14).

The struggle for recognition leads to clamour for social change and emancipatory projects or collective political action when a group of people experience misrecognition or disrespect (Fleming, 2011b). "As long as people are denied the recognition they deserve, society will be normatively deficient" (Fleming, 2011a) with attendant conflicts and crises. In a nutshell, "the recognition of human dignity comprises a central principle of social justice" (Honneth, 2004, p. 14).

Honneth's (2004) idea is that justice is present in the society to the degree that every member of the society receives social recognition that makes them a full citizen. For Honneth, social equality and opportunity for everyone in the society to form their identity are important to the discourse of social justice. So, he advocates for equal treatment of all members of the society where the enablement of each person's self-realisation is guaranteed. Honneth argues that "the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate' (Honneth, 2004, p. 352). He however warns that it is not in all cases that a struggle or demand for recognition is defensible or morally legitimate. He argues that the legitimacy for a struggle for recognition can be judged by considering the objectives of such a struggle and determining if they indicate societal developments that align with our notions of a fair and just society. Honneth's main argument is that social recognition is necessary for justice:

> The justice or wellbeing of a society is measured according to the degree of its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition in which personal identity formation, and hence individual self-realization, can proceed sufficiently well (Honneth, 2004, p. 354).

Honneth asserts that "[…] it is the three principles of love, equality and merit that collectively determine what ought currently to be understood by the idea of social justice" (Honneth, 2004, p. 355) because individuals' identity formation is grounded in these spheres. Thus, social justice should be viewed according to the opportunity for individuals to be recognised in their personal needs, legal equality and contribution to the society. The possibilities for an individual to express their autonomy to demand and receive recognition in any of the spheres of love, rights and social esteem form "the normative core of a conception of social justice" (Honneth, 2004, p. 359). Therefore, the recognition of an individual's specific needs and particular

capabilities at a certain point/context are necessary conditions for social justice. In essence, Honneth' notion of justice is the presence of social freedom where every person possesses the potential to have a better life and realise their desires and abilities (Fleming, 2016).

Serving the Good: the Ethical Meaning of Recognition

Honneth also does not fail to mention that social theory has focused too much on the utilitarian model to the extent that it has overshadowed the significance of recognition-theoretic models. He argues that recognition-theoretic models can function as an explanatory model for the causes of social conflicts as well as to serve as an 'interpretative framework for a process of moral formation" (Honneth, 1995, p. 168). Morality, which is a term that runs through Honneth's work on the struggle for recognition, refers to a worldview or situation in which all human beings are treated equally as autonomous persons. This also means that all human beings in the society are treated in the same fair way. For Honneth, the concept of morality is "one of several protective measures that serve the general purpose of enabling a good life" (Honneth, 1995, p. 172).

Honneth's attempt in developing the theory of recognition is to advance the concept of the 'ethical life'. This concept of ethical life, according to him, refers to all the conditions that are necessary for an individual to develop a good self-identity. Since a positive sense of self develops with the experience of intersubjective recognition, there is a connection then between the ethical life and intersubjective recognition because patterns or forms of recognition reveal to us the intersubjective conditions necessary for developing a healthy self-identity. Thus, ethical life can be identified in

> a society in which the universalistic achievements of equality and individualism would be so embedded in patterns of interaction that all subjects would be recognized as both autonomous and individuated, equal and particular persons (Honneth, 1995, p. 175).

So, the ethical society is the society where conditions for self-realisation for everyone are present.

In essence, Honneth has attempted to outline and explicate the conditions that sustain an individual's self-realisation and flourishing. These conditions are the forms of intersubjective recognition - love, rights and social esteem - which characterise what he calls the 'ethical life'. Recognition in the sphere of love is a necessary precondition for the other two spheres, because it is in this sphere that an individual develops "the degree of basic self-confidence that renders one capable of participating, with equal rights, in political will-formation" (Honneth, 1995, p. 38). Intersubjective recognition in the sphere of rights means individuals have the same rights as others and the freedom to make decisions that will be respected by others. For the sphere of social esteem, recognition refers to the acknowledgment of and value given to one's traits, abilities and accomplishments. Denial of recognition in any of these spheres can impact negatively on a person's self-identity. Denial of recognition in the spheres of rights and social esteem can lead to experiences of social shame and rage, and if this disrespect is deemed as typical for a group of people, it can set in motion social conflicts or struggle for recognition by the affected persons who will view such struggle as the path to liberation.

Criticism of Honneth's Theory of Recognition

Honneth's recognition theory has not gone without criticism. For example, it has been criticised for developing a normative theory that focuses on the modern society only (Nour, 2011). It has also been criticised for its deficiency in providing "the intellectual foundations for a critique of work; in particular, of the specific forms taken by working activity under capitalism" (Boston, 2018, p. 111). Boston points to Deranty's argument that Honneth's recognition theory should have gone beyond critically analysing workers' remuneration and social status as forms of recognition, "but what they actually do at work and under what kind of conditions" (Boston, 2018, p. 111) in order to explain and/or criticise the psychological and social impact on workers of such work activities and conditions. That is, according to Honneth's argument, workers struggle for better wages because their contributions are not recognised. Thus, a worker can be said to have received recognition, if they receive appropriate remuneration and are seen by members of the society as making meaningful recognition to the society through their work. However, citing Deranty, Boston argues that Honneth's theory of recognition does not take into account the conditions under which an individual works, whether it is conducive to their

mental well-being or not or whether the working conditions allow workers to develop their abilities further.

Fleming (2016) identifies Nancy Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) as the most popular critic of the theory of recognition. According to him, Fraser argues that recognition theory overlooks unfair access to economic resources. She contends that social struggles should be analysed not just from the viewpoint of recognition but also of distribution. In other words, Fraser argues for caution in linking all issues of justice to recognition, instead she argues for a distinction to be made between recognition and redistribution. She contends that both cultural and economic justice are needed for participatory equality which should be the supreme moral principle of a liberal society (Honneth, 2004). Zurn summarises Fraser's argument: "a sufficiently differentiated account of struggles for social justice should analytically separate struggles according to the causal roots of the injustices, and that maldistribution may follow a different dynamic than misrecognition" (Zurn, 2003, p. 526).

Honneth's response to Fraser's criticism is that conflicts, including conflict distribution of economic resources, stem from the struggle for recognition (Fleming, 2016). According to Honneth, "the distinction between economic disadvantage and cultural deprivation is phenomenologically secondary in character and refers more to differences in the respects to which subjects can experience social disrespect or humiliation" (Honneth, 2004, p. 352). Struggles about distribution are just a specific category in the struggle for recognition where individuals' or groups' agitations are for the appropriate evaluation of their social contributions (Honneth, 2004). Honneth also opposes Fraser's argument, as according to him, the dualist model proposed by Fraser only deals with already identified injustices while those injustices not yet revealed are not taken care of by the model (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b). So Honneth's aim is to have a theory that can account for causes of different struggles for recognition. It is worthy of mention though that Honneth has also made revisions to his theory of recognition in order to address criticisms that the theory has received (Fleming, 2016). Zurn (2003) asserts that Fraser's position has caused recognition theorists to rethink their positions.

Congdon (2020) proposes that a philosophical theory of recognition should be critical, minimally idealist and historicist; he maintains that Honneth's theory does not meet any of these criteria. The 'critical' criterion means the theory should be able to draw "a distinction between due recognition and failures of recognition" (p. 2). The "minimally idealist' criterion refers to the theory's ability "to accommodate the mediating role of subjectivity in human receptivity to value" (p. 2). The third criterion, 'historicist,' is that the theory "should not rule out a priori that the values involved in recognitive practice are historically emergent and potentially subject to change in the future" (p. 2). According to him, Honneth does not provide a sound argument for distinguishing between due recognition and failed recognition. In order to redress this, Congdon suggests the adoption of the Aristotelian-recognitive paradigm in the conception of recognition as it fulfils all the three criteria of critical theory. He explains the Aristotelian-recognitive paradigm:

> The core thesis behind this approach is that the development of agents' recognitive sensibilities – that is, agents' socially trained sensibilities to the evaluative qualities in others that merit love, respect, and esteem, as well as sensibilities that alert one to instances of misrecognition and other recognitive failures – should be understood on the model of the development of a kind of practical wisdom or phronesis in Aristotle's sense. The notion of phronesis at stake here is that of a critical perceptual capacity, developed via socialization and habit, for discerning value-laden matters of practical importance in concrete settings (Congdon, 2020, p. 9).

Congdon claims that the Aristotelian-recognitive paradigm fulfils the criteria mentioned above because it adopts "a historicized conception of evaluative objectivity" (p. 12).

Theory of Recognition and Adult Learning: A Review of the Literature

In this section, I explore the writings of different authors who draw on Honneth's theory of recognition in their research. My intention is to show the relevance of this theory for adult education research and the potential of Honneth's work in enhancing the contribution of critical social theory to theories of adult learning as a tool for emancipation (West et al., 2013). Emancipation is a keyword here. In fact, Honneth's position is that critical theory, and indeed, any social and political theory, should investigate social problems with the aim of bringing about emancipation (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b; Zurn, 2017). In selecting the works, I used terms such as 'adult learning and the theory of recognition' and 'Axel Honneth and adult learning' but I did not find many relevant materials, so I decided to use the snowball method,

meaning I identified a research paper that dealt with adult education and the theory of recognition, and I then checked its bibliography for titles relating to adult learning and the theory of recognition. I also checked the bibliography section of the other papers to find more relevant titles. My findings show that the theory of recognition is not widely used in adult learning and education research. Furthermore, most of the papers I found were empirical (focusing on learning in higher education, adult schools, and improvement of adult educators) and some authors (West, 2014; West et al., 2013) integrated the theory of recognition with other concepts, for example, from psychoanalysis and other theories.

Huttunen (2007), in his theoretical reflection on the Fraser-Honneth debate and how this illuminates the place of identity and status models of recognition in adult education, states that the task of adult education is to promote a society where love, caring and reciprocal recognition exist, allowing everyone to be able to develop a healthy relation to self, and work towards self-realisation and flourishing. This theoretical paper highlights Honneth's recognition theory's relevance to a socially oriented theory of adult education. It is worth noting that Huttunen calls Honneth's version of recognition as social recognition since this model of recognition "refers primarily to people's respect, love, and caring for each other…" (2007, p. 432). The other version of recognition identified by Huttunen is critical recognition which "refers to universal political and economic justice" (2007, p. 432). He identified Nancy Fraser as one of the proponents of this critical model of recognition. Huttunen (2007) therefore contends that when the arguments of these two models of recognition - social and critical - are considered together, critical adult education is able to advocate for and promote a just society as well as a loving and caring society where every individual can develop a healthy self-identity and lead a good life (or what Honneth and Hegel call 'ethical life').

Murphy and Brown (2012), in their theoretical paper where they called for an exploration of a more relational approach in teaching and learning in higher education, emphasised the need to give more consideration to the relational or intersubjective aspects of the classroom situation where recognition and mutual trust are central as an alternative to the dominant neo-liberal or consumerist approach to education. According to them, "[…] learning is always the result of a

relational activity from which the subject is continually being recreated through intersubjective processes that shape identification through a process of self-other recognition" (Murphy and Brown, 2012, p. 645). They contend that the desire for respect and recognition is embedded in the learning process because "Education is, in essence, an experiential process of self-other recognition – of 'coming to know' oneself, as constructed through self-other recognition" (Murphy and Brown, 2012, p. 651).

They argue that different types and experiences of engagement with learning in higher education, such as collaboration, group study, independent study, success and failure, have the potential to threaten (or enhance) a person's self-identity. I can recognise this relational dynamic in my own experience, since I have also struggled many times with my identity as a PhD student. I questioned myself several times when it seemed as if I was not at the level of other scholars or when I was struggling to understand a particular concept. Many times, I wondered if my research would be of a good quality. As many other PhD students, I asked myself if I was doing the right thing; if I had the competence and capability a researcher should possess. In these cases, receiving assurances and commendations from my supervisor, and other scholars that I respect, such as Prof. Linden West, has helped me to think maybe I can do this (scholarly research). The theory of recognition offered an interpretative framework for these experiences, highlighting the relevant role of good enough relationships (Winnicott quoted by West, 2014) in academic learning.

In order to overcome challenges that may threaten students' self-identity, Murphy & Brown (2012) propose that exploring a relational pedagogy conceived from an understanding of intersubjective recognition can be a way to help students maintain a healthy sense of self. According to them, adopting a relational pedagogy helps educators/teachers to appreciate the impact of intersubjective processes on the learning process. That is, there is an acknowledgement that learning is not limited to cognitive processes alone but also includes the affective aspect. This realisation can contribute to the development of a model of learning that takes into consideration the relational dynamics among all the persons involved in the learning process in order to have more positive experiences. However, in order to do so we need a theory

and a practice of human relationships. Honneth does not say much in this respect. This is why Linden West (2014) introduces Winnicott and the idea of creating a safe space or transitional space to sustain adult learning (see more below).

Fleming (2016), in an empirical paper, points out the links between adult learning and theory of recognition. Reporting the findings from an EU funded project on Access and Retention of Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education, he reveals that confidence, respect and self-esteem were the themes found in the interviews conducted with the participants in the project. Fleming further reveals that intersubjective recognition emerged from the research data as a major motivation for why students applied to college and the reason for their determination to complete their course. The desire for recognition informed why the participants decided to go to college. The interviewees had experienced disrespect at work or in school based on "a perceived lack or undeveloped capability" (Fleming, 2016, p. 18). So, education brought them respect and esteem and illuminated their desire to be held in high esteem, to be on an equal footing with other people. Many interviewees expressed a feeling of proving their worth to themselves and others, as an emerging experience from being enrolled in a course, depending on the experience they had at university. As an example, one of the interviewees had experienced misrecognition earlier in life which made her not to go to college – she heard a trusted teacher say to her mother that she would never go to college. The lack of support and encouragement from her previous teachers led her to believe she was stupid at that time but on returning to formal education and receiving support and encouragement of her teachers she assumed the identity of a confident learner.

Fleming (2016) is among the authors who are responsible for introducing Honneth in the field of adult education and learning, and for showing the potential of recognition theory as a standpoint for critical and engaged research. His work is very relevant also for the connections he makes with other theories and authors such as Freire, Mezirow, Belenky, Negt. For example, he points out a link between the theory of recognition and transformative learning, the theory developed by Jack Mezirow (1978) in the United States. In his original and deep interpretation of both theories, Fleming (2016) contends that recognition is pivotal to the learning process,

namely by engendering and sustaining critical thinking, a fundamental outcome of transformative learning. In order to build an atmosphere or space that can foster transformative learning, all the three forms of relating to self which were espoused by Honneth in his theory of recognition are necessary conditions. He explores these conditions from the perspective of the adult educator, or teacher. Self-confident, caring and loving teachers are necessary to sustain transformative learning in the classroom. Teachers who are aware of their legal rights and possess self-respect are the ones who can recognise the legal rights of others.

Furthermore, only teachers with a healthy self-esteem can recognise the contributions of others. According to him, all these qualities will allow for mutual support, peer-to-peer teaching and learner-centred activities in the learning situation. All these are features of a democratic discourse in which individuals exhibit tolerance of opposing views, reciprocity and productive engagements. These are historically the rules for good pedagogy in the tradition of adult and popular education. Fleming concludes that, "Teaching adults is a process of mutual recognition between teacher and learner. Teaching that is informed in this way has the potential to strengthen identity development" (2016, p. 22). In this kind of teaching model, intersubjectivity is important for learning, transformation, emancipation, equality and justice, and this should be the aim of adult education. Fleming's view corroborates Murphy & Brown's (2012) view on the significance of intersubjective recognition in adult learning.

In a research paper titled, Recognition and adult education: an incongruent opportunity, where he drew on interviews with adults participating in Municipal Adult Education in Sweden, Sandberg (2016) argues that adult education can be a transitional space where vulnerable individuals can regain recognition lost in the labour market. Sandberg claims that, "To understand the relationship between adult education and recognition, there is a need to understand the students' relationship to family (love), society/the state (rights) and the job market (solidarity)" (2016, p. 270), because these are relationships that help individuals develop their self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem in order to achieve a healthy sense of self. According to Sandberg, narratives on why individuals are engaged in adult education are important to seeing the link between adult education and recognition. For example, adult

education can provide the space for individuals to re-negotiate their identity when they are experiencing employment problems, discrimination or problematic relationships. In this way, adult education is seen as a supporting mechanism for individuals in the struggle for recognition. This view agrees with Fleming (2016) reporting that some adults return to higher education in a search for recognition (see above). Adult learning can thus be a means by which some adults seek to gain recognition, albeit unconsciously in many cases and it can also be the space where some adults experience recognition and a shift in their identity.

Sandberg (2016) cited the example of Sweden where free adult education may be seen as a source of hope by adults who are unemployed or in precarious employment. According to him, free adult education offers these adults the opportunity to chart a new pathway for themselves. Being able to participate in adult education for free, without any obligation, would make the participants feel recognised as citizens who possess rights because access to education is seen as one of their rights. Thus, Sandberg interprets the opportunity to participate in adult education as a possible form of recognition itself – recognition in the sphere of rights. Besides, if the adult sees it as an opportunity to 'make up for past failures', then it becomes a way to redeem their self-respect and self-esteem. However, if we think more critically about the context, process, and subjective meanings, it can be an "incongruent opportunity".

In fact, recognition and self-worth are not the linear and simple outcome of the chance offered by the system to acquire certifications and opportunities for better jobs. "Free education" is offered within a larger discourse where adults "learn or die" - in the knowledge society, epistemic capital is an obligation. The dominant narrative about adult education as providing people with the opportunity to renegotiate their future and develop a positive relation to self is maybe true but surely partial. Sandberg seems to have an overly positive generalised reading of free schooling for adults; he sums it this way:

> Adult education has the potential to help build up a lowered sense of self-worth – it enables feelings of being respected, esteemed and part of society to be regained by individuals. It also becomes a place for dreaming about, and struggling for, a more positive future (2016, p. 276).

Sandberg however points out the tension in the system, between the provision of free adult education - and maybe a good learning space - and the misrecognition experienced in the labour market. In fact, adult education:

> […] provides temporary stability that can potentially enhance a sense of respect that a disrespectful labour market and society/state (employment office, etc.) previously damaged. However, these students are clearly not in a position to undertake a more collective struggle to receive greater respect from society […] There is not a clear and determined element of struggle among the students and it is not evident that adult education as an institution truly actualises its potential for developing social freedom (2016, pp.277-278).

His critical position points to the lack of collective engagement and disempowerment; his focus is social freedom and maybe the need for activism. These arguments are different from Flemings', but complementary. I would argue that the reason for this conclusion by Sandberg might not be far-fetched: the outcomes of the learning experience depend on the process and type of adult education setting, as well as subjective experience and interpretations, as I will argue with my research. So, the declared purpose and the real practices of adult education can be more or less congruent with the need for recognition; the process might determine what experience of recognition learners will have, hence we have to look into the process and listen to learners if we want to know and understand if and how their learning experience will lead to social and emancipatory change or not.

Adult education for the mere purpose of re-skilling or upskilling individuals - the dominant narrative in these times - might bring about self-confidence or self-respect or self-esteem for the individual (internal changes), while popular education or civic education like the Freirean model has the potential to bring about social and emancipatory changes. The two narratives, often constructed as conflictual in the literature (individual vs. social change; skills vs. holistic approach; banking education vs. liberation), could find a mediation in the process and experience of learners.

Sandberg and Kubiak (2013) explored the place of Honneth's recognition theory in the processes and practices of recognition of prior learning (RPL), studying the experiences of paraprofessional workers in health and social care in the UK and Sweden. They claim that by

making all learning experiences (including non-formal and informal) visible and recognised, RPL can improve self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, RPL has the potential to contribute to a person's healthy self-identity (Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013). The authors carried out biographical interviews with 14 participants, then selected 6 participants as case studies. The participants' narratives were positive about the opportunity offered by the RPL process as a form of recognition of their capabilities, more especially, when they are praised for a job well done by their supervisor. This observation seems to connect recognition to receiving an appreciative feed-back. Obtaining the needed qualification was also narratively constructed as "an obvious recognition of the skills the individuals possessed" especially when the qualification was obtained under a national accreditation system. What seems interesting to me, was that during in-class stage of the RPL process, participants recounted that they experienced a sense of solidarity and recognition from other learners. This peer-to-peer relationship gave them understanding, sympathy and moral support from others in the class.

Sandberg & Kubiak (2013) argue that misrecognition takes place when individuals do not receive support in their perceived areas of competence or in their aspirations and goals but instead are underutilised or asked to follow a path they feel is incongruent with their aspirations. This can elicit resistance to learning from such individuals. Here again, the process and experience of learners seem to matter a lot. A participatory approach to RPL or the opportunity to demonstrate one's competence are different ways in which RPL can enhance people's sense of self.

A different perspective, combining adult education, psychoanalysis and social imagination, is offered by West (2014), using the story of Matthew, a refugee in London, and showing how care and concern (recognition in the sphere of love) shown by significant others (lecturers in this case) in the classroom situation can contribute to an individual's self-development. From Matthew's narrative, West (2014) pointed out how relationships with teachers, a personal tutor, sympathetic staff and students were also pivotal to his academic progress. The feeling of being seen and valued by others, through the forging of caring relationships, helped him to overcome self-doubts and gain self-confidence. He became more agentic and became a student advocate

and community researcher. Being accepted into the university was, in itself, also a form of recognition for Matthew. This 'achievement' boosted his sense of confidence and esteem.

West, Fleming and Finnegan (2013) argue that in higher education, acceptance by teachers and significant others can enhance students' self-confidence while the feeling of being granted the status of a student with the same rights as other students can improve a person's self-respect. Moreover, being honoured for one's academic achievements and other qualities can strengthen their self-esteem. It is not automatic, however. The authors use different theories to elaborate on the conditions that make recognition possible. From the narratives of two non-traditional students in higher education institutions in England and Ireland, they found that commendations from tutors and colleagues, feeling valued by others, were among the conditions which fostered a more positive sense of self in the students. This can be explained by connecting the theory of recognition (Honneth, 1995) with a theory of the 'good enough relationship' (Winnicott, 1971) and a critical appraisal of the process of socialisation into the academic sphere (Bourdieu, 1986). The implication of this for adult learning is that mutual recognition and good enough human relationships in the learning situation are essential to individuals' quest of achieving a more positive relationship to self. Besides, some awareness of one's own path and struggles, and the possibility to enhance self-reflexivity, can sustain further transformation.

Furthermore, the desire for recognition can also be a motivation for participating in adult learning, not least because "[…] education […] has the possibility of becoming a locus for fostering and supporting social equality and facilitating the individual, interpersonal and social skills needed for a democratic egalitarian project" (West et al., p. 132). In other words, participation in higher education for some persons (such as non-traditional students for whom access to higher education is not easy and full participation is hindered by social factors) may be some sort of a search for recognition.

Fleming and Finnegan (2014b) explored further the experiences of non-traditional students in higher education institutes in Ireland with a view to projecting their voices particularly as it pertains to access to higher education. They argue that the theory of recognition can be useful for understanding student experience and they found that for non-traditional students, the decision to attend college may be a form of a search for recognition and also that positive experiences in higher education can help a person overcome or deal positively with negative experiences in their past. This is a pointer to why access to higher education for persons from disadvantaged backgrounds is important. However, the experiences of HE for non-traditional students can be very disappointing and frustrating depending on the pedagogical model employed and relationship that exists among learners. This is why Fleming & Finnegan (2014b) advocate for higher education to be a space where everyone has the chance to develop or improve their self-respect, self-confidence and self-esteem. Apart from enhancing equality within higher education institutions, a culture of intersubjective recognition in higher education will equip students (and teachers) with the ability to promote egalitarianism in the society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the main features and criticisms of Honneth's theory. Then, I reviewed some research in adult learning and education that drew on the theory of recognition or addressed the pedagogical implications of the theory of recognition for adult learning. Some of these implications include the need for adult learning as a potential experience of recognition and the need for a kind of education or pedagogical model that promotes a loving, caring and egalitarian society. This can be achieved by using the principles of recognition here defined in designing and managing the learning space, but also in training adult teachers and educators to the capability for implementing a welcoming relationship (love), equal and empowering processes (rights), and approaches that enhance the students' contribution and uniqueness (self-esteem).

The learners can also improve their own capabilities for recognition - of oneself and the other - by observing the application of these principles in learning spaces, as well as co-participating

and teaching each other (peer-to-peer recognition). One strategy for promoting the principles of love, care, empathy and equality in learning spaces is to adopt a relational pedagogy that takes cognisance of the affective elements in the learning process. This demonstrates the understanding that the learning process is not solely cognitive but also entails the affective, which if not handled properly has the potential to derail the whole learning process. This entails taking care of difficult struggles around power and the unconscious.

If we are aware that participation in adult learning and education always brings into the space some search for recognition by learners, adult educators should learn:

- how to build loving, caring, empathic and supportive relationships; to encourage persons who might already be dealing with a bruised self-identity as learners to deal with their past hurts and to achieve their life aspirations;
- how to develop knowledge and a critical understanding of people's rights and ways to implement social justice and democracy in their action, not least by addressing or managing discrimination and stereotyping due to race gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, among others;
- how to build the learning experience in a way that enhances singular contribution, skills and resources that every learner may bring to the society, and nurture reciprocity and interpersonal recognition among learners.

This theory will be tested and hopefully enriched by my case studies, and in Chapter 9, I integrate Mezirow's transformative learning with the theory of recognition in order to explain how experiences of recognition might have contributed to how my participants were able to overcome dilemmas and also developed their identity.

CHAPTER TWO

Immigration and Education of Migrants in Italy

In this chapter I discuss immigration, asylum seeking, integration of migrants and education of migrants and asylum seekers in Italy. This is a very complex topic and a full understanding of the Italian policies on migration goes beyond the objectives of my work. Nonetheless, in order to understand the context, and its implications for my research, it is important to know how the Italian system works. My aim then is to provide a brief overview of the asylum situation in Italy and the educational provisions available to asylum seekers and refugees. Hence, the chapter presents some data and research about the asylum situation in Italy.

Immigration and Asylum Seeking in Italy

Italy is one of the European countries with many transnational migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. In 2021, Germany, France and Spain, respectively were the three main destinations for asylum seekers in the EU. Italy was number four (European Commission, 2022b, 2022a; European Council & Council of the European Union, 2022; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Eurostat, 2022). Italy's proximity to the Mediterranean Sea makes it a popular destination for immigrants from Africa (Dovigo, 2019; Nuzzolese & di Vella, 2008; Paynter, 2022). In 2013, immigrants accounted for around 7% of the Italian population (Caneva, 2014). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported that 83% of migrants and refugees who entered Europe in 2017 arrived in Italy (Bencivenga, 2017). The number of foreigners living in Italy for humanitarian reasons amounts to 1.8% of foreign-born migrants in the country, which is 0.13% of the Italian population (Russo et al., 2016). Russo et al. (2016) point out that the popular press and public discourse portray immigrants who arrive by sea in uncomplimentary terms.

While Italy is only number four among the countries with high numbers of asylum seekers, it is a transit country for those going to other countries. According to Borri and Fontanari (2017), before 2011, the major preoccupation of EU countries was to control undocumented migration but with the uprising in Tunisia, which started the Arab Spring, the discourse shifted from illegal or undocumented migrants to refugees and asylum seekers. The Tunisian situation forced many people to leave Tunisia and they headed towards Lampedusa in Italy. The EU and other European countries left Italy to deal with the problem alone. "The Italian government decided to issue a six-month humanitarian document to all Tunisians stranded in Italy, which allowed them to freely move across the Schengen space. Many Tunisians headed to France" (Borri & Fontanari, 2017, p. 25). As a result, the French government closed its border with Italy and returned many refugees to Italy. On another front, the war in Libya in 2011, caused about 30000 people to leave. These persons also headed to Italy, and as in the Tunisian case, the EU and other countries left Italy to tackle the problem. In Italy, these refugees were not able to settle down; many of them were homeless, and after some time they moved to other parts of Europe. At this point, the refugee situation was still considered manageable but the situation was aggravated with the Syrian civil war in 2013 and 2014 which made hundreds of thousands to head for Germany through Greece, Italy, Turkey and the Balkans. While some countries, like Macedonia and Greece, facilitated the movement of these refugees for example by proving special trains, some countries closed their borders. In fact, Hungary indicated its unwillingness to accept refugees. As the crisis was going, Germany decided to open its borders to Syrians.

The increase in the number of migrants into Europe has proved to be a political challenge to not only Italy but other countries in Europe (Androvičová & Boleček ová, 2019; Bartram et al., 2014; Castles, 2000, 2018; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018). The governments of these countries have found this challenge difficult to handle. One of the reasons for this is the efforts by nationalists to make political gains from the issue of immigration. They do this by feeding on the suspicions and doubts of members of the host society by portraying migration as a challenge to national identity and cultural traditions and call for stricter immigration policies. The argument that immigration can lead to the erosion of cultural values, and thus a challenge to national identity has led to political conflicts in many European countries.

Ultranationalist groups embark on campaigns to proclaim the dangers of migration. Some of the claims are: that a large number of asylum seekers refuse to return to their home countries after the rejection of their asylum application (Čáky, 2019); immigrants, particularly asylum seekers and refugees, are prone to criminality (de Coninck, 2020); the sheer number of foreigners can have a disintegrating effect on their society - migration is a threat to societal cohesion (Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018); the cultures of the host society and the migrants' society(ies) are fundamentally incompatible – for example, Muslim migrants in Europe are seen as a threat to European culture/civilisation (Bischoff, 2018; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018). In Italy, some political parties with anti-immigration stance also sprang up, such as the Lega Nord and the Five Stars Movement. These parties claimed that Italy cannot accept all immigrants but promised to support projects that would tackle illegal migration from Africa but these projects had to be situated in Africa and not Italy. Lega Nord went ahead to secure 17.63% in the 2018 parliamentary elections (Čáky, 2019).

Russo et al. (2016) distinguish between an asylum seeker and refugee in Italy: an asylum seeker is a person who has submitted application for asylum while a refugee is the individual whose application for asylum has been granted. Italian law makes provisions for asylum seekers to be housed in reception centres or Asylum Seekers Centres (Duso & Marigo, 2018; Russo et al., 2016). In 2015, the Italian Ministry of Interior estimated that about 100,000 asylum seekers were living in Italian reception centres (Borsari et al., 2018). Nuzzolese & di Vella (2008) claim that most generally asylum seekers arrive with either false documentation or no documentation at all. One of the reasons for this is that persons who faced persecution in their countries of origin might have had to flee without their documents or they might have forged documents to evade arrest.

The Main Changes in Italy's Integration Strategy

Immigration is a recent phenomenon in Italy as the country was more of an emigration society until the mid-1980s (European Commission, 2022a; Open Migration, 2016), and the country was unprepared for welcoming thousands of migrants, initially from Eastern Europe and, with

the third millennium, increasingly from Africa and the Middle East. According to the European Commission (2022a), Italy promulgated its first legal document for the integration of migrants in the mid-1990s. Furthermore, there is no single standalone legal framework that regulates asylum seeking in Italy rather asylum seeking is regulated by several pieces of legislation that target various aspects, for example, reception procedures for asylum seekers and procedures for determining the status of an asylum seeker.

Due to the increase in the number of asylum seekers in Italy, the country steadily expanded its structures for receiving, processing and accommodating asylum seekers by establishing new centres of extraordinary reception, "Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria" (CAS). By 2017, these centres were accommodating 80% of asylum seekers arriving in Italy (Paynter, 2020, 2022). In these centres, asylum seekers were provided with food, bed, basic supplies and a small pocket money. During their stay in the reception centres, asylum seekers could receive education as well as legal, social and health assistance. Learning and training provisions could vary regionally and from one centre to the other, also depending on the resources of the local community. Thus, currently in Italy, there are two parallel systems for the reception and integration of asylum seekers: the Sistema Accoglienza Integrazione (SAI) formerly known as SPRAR or SIPROIMI and the Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (CAS). The SAI system is managed by municipalities and NGOs while the CAS system is managed by the local branches of the ministry of interior, called prefectures (European Commission, 2022a).

In 2017 a new national plan (Ministry of the Interior, 2017) was published for the integration of asylum seekers/refugees. The asylum process became stricter. Applicants' opportunity to appeal an application rejection was reduced from two to one (European Social Policy Network, 2017; Paynter, 2020). New policies were based on the objective to reduce the numbers of immigrants, especially illegal ones. The Italian government securitised its borders in order to block the entry of asylum seekers; it signed an agreement with Libyan authorities to apprehend and prevent asylum seekers from entering Italy (Paynter, 2022). This outsourcing of border control is however not limited to Italy as some other European countries, particularly, EU member-states, did the same (Marabello & Riccio, 2018).

During this period, especially in 2018, with Matteo Salvini as Minister of Interior, anti-immigrant, and particularly anti-Black sentiments, increased and manifested in individual and governmental actions. For example, in November 2018, a decree was enacted by the Italian government to eliminate the 'humanitarian protection' category (Bianco & Cobo, 2019; Paynter, 2020). This category had been created for persons who though were not deemed as refugees but were considered as deserving protection. That is persons who do not qualify as refugees but who have been able to sufficiently demonstrate that if they are returned to their country of origin, they face a risk of suffering serious harm. One of the immediate consequences of the government's action was that persons who were hitherto recognised as being under humanitarian protection could not renew their documents when they expired. "The decree also doubled the time migrants could be held in detention and limited access to established integration programs to legally recognized refugees" (Paynter, 2022, p. 6).

One can say that on the face of it, there seems to be institutional or legal recognition for asylum seekers – the ones who satisfy the Italian government's definition of asylum seekers – in Italy, as there are provisions for their basic needs to be met. However, whether asylum seekers and refugees feel recognised by the state and society is another matter, and this is what this research aims to find out. Among the social and long-term implications of these actions of the government was the increase of hate speech that fuelled negative, derogatory assumptions about asylum seekers, particularly Black asylum seekers, as criminals and dangerous. Paynter (2020, 2022) also found out that refusal of asylum claims increased from 55% in 2018 to 80% in 2019.

Administration of Migration in Italy

Migration and asylum matters in Italy are coordinated among different levels of government and institutions. The Presidency of the Council of Ministries provides policy direction while the Ministry of Interior oversees the implementation of the policies on migration. The actual implementation of the migration policies falls directly under the purview of three directorates of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration within the Ministry of Interior:

- Central Directorate of Immigration and Asylum policy
- Central Directorate for Civil Services Immigration and Asylum, and
- Central Directorate for Civil Rights, Citizenship and minorities.

Other institutions whose responsibilities involve migration include the Department of Public Security, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the National Council for Economy and Labour; the "Consulta per i problemi degli stranieri immigrati e delle loro famiglie" (Consultative body for the problems of immigrants and their families); and the "Consigli territoriali per l'immigrazione" (Territorial Councils for Immigration) (Caneva, 2014; European Migration Network, 2019).

The Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration is concerned with the processing of asylum applications, granting of citizenship status, implementation of voluntary return, among others.

The Department of Public Security is responsible for border control, issuance and renewal of residence permit, tackling irregular migration and enforcing expulsion.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies coordinates access to the labour market and social services.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is in charge of issuing visa and maintaining relations with other countries and international organisations (European Migration Network, 2019).

Asylum Application Procedure 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 8 days from arrival. After the Dublin Regulation, asylum seekers who arrived in Italy have to make their application for asylum in Italy because the Dublin Regulation states that if an applicant enters an EU member state irregularly, the member state where the applicant first entered will be responsible for examining their application for

international protection. The Dublin Regulation, whose proper designation is *Regulation (EU) No 604/2013* of the European Parliament and of the Council is the instrument that establishes "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 *Regulation (EU) No 604/2013* replaced *Regulation (EC) No 343/2003.*

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, 2016). 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 thirty 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 thesis). 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 sought before a civil court and it must be held within 30 days after the decision was given (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2016; Ghio & Blangiardo, 2019).

An application may be stalled if an applicant leaves the reception centre or pre-removal detention centre. The reception centres or pre-removal detention centres are considered the place of residence of applications for asylum applicants and if an applicant leaves the centre before they are interviewed by the Commission without a valid justification, their application is suspended but they can request for their application to be reopened. Statistics on asylum applications in Italy show that "In 2020, 21,200 asylum requests were registered in Italy, which

correspond to less than 39% compared to 2019. The main countries of origin are Pakistan, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Tunisia and Nigeria" (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2021). Only 28% of the 40,800 asylum decisions issued in 2020 was positive; 22% was for international protection while 6% was for special/humanitarian protection category.

While the whole asylum application process is expected to be concluded within six months, if there are exceptional circumstances that prevent a decision within the deadline, there is an allowance of three more months. Because of the possibility of extension, there is a provision for a maximum of 18 months for each asylum application to be considered. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2021) reports that in almost all EU countries the regular application period of 30 days to complete the whole application process is usually not adhered to and applicants are not informed about the inability of the Commission to reach a decision before the 30 days deadline due to the complexities that surround asylum applications (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2016, 2021). (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2016). Furthermore, the European Council on Refugees and Exile claims that "The rules provided in the recast Asylum Procedures Directive in relation to the maximum duration of an asylum procedure are far from straightforward" (2016, p. 2). Thus, there is no clear benchmark with which to measure the timeframe of asylum applications among EU member-states. This can be confusing for asylum seekers and persons who are not familiar with the asylum process. More concretely, for the asylum seeker, the confusion can be exacerbated by the uncertainty that surrounds the whole process and the feeling that decisions are taken arbitrarily, depending on the whim of those considering one's application.

Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy

Although Caneva (2014) argues that integration in Italy is (narrowly) conceptualised in terms of economic insertion or participation in the labour market, Scardigno (2019) claims that the country abides by the European Union's integration policy through actions to prioritise the active inclusion and participation of asylum seekers and refugees into the economic and social

system by acknowledging the importance of access to education and recognition of qualifications acquired outside of Italy.

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).

Catalano (2016, p. 62) in Dalziel & Piazzoli (2018) however paints a not too rosy picture of migrants' integration in Italy by contending that in Italy there is "the systematic negative representation of migrants in Italy as a burden to Italian society" (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018, p. 9) and the host community is reluctant to engage in any exchange or dialogue with immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. Paynter (2022), who discusses how the distinction between refugees and economic migrants shapes public opinion about migrants' deservingness and the impact it has on migrants' notion of deservingness, states that there is widespread assumption in Italy that Africans are economic migrants and thus are not 'real' asylum seekers. This also means that they use up resources and provisions for real asylum seekers.

The media in Italy also do not help matters as they often depict refugees and asylum seekers in derogatory terms (Russo et al., 2016). Venturini and Villosio (2018) also point out that foreigners in the Italian labour market are mostly concentrated in poorly paid and low-skilled jobs, even when they possess high qualifications. This reality is described as the 'racialisation'

of knowledge (Bencivenga, 2017) or 'ethnicisation' of jobs (Venturini & Villosio, 2018) with the consequence that migrants' full potentials are not exploited.

Furthermore, with the enactment of the law, DL n. 113/2018, otherwise known as Decreto Salvini, which abolished the category of 'Humanitarian Protection,' persons under this category were excluded from integration programmes. Furthermore, "[…] asylum seekers will be hosted exclusively in CAS and First Reception Centers (CPA) […] For this reason, they might no longer be entitled to receive integration support (e.g., work orientation services, legal and psychological support)" (Bianco & Cobo, 2019, p. 3). This also means that there is no longer an obligation by reception centres to provide language classes to asylum seekers. However, the law guarantees linguistic education to beneficiaries of international protection and minors (Bianco & Cobo, 2019). Bianco and Cobo (2019) also describe Italy's integration practices as assimilative due to the emphasis on acquiring Italian language in order to obtain long-term residency and Italian citizenship. They however point out that this is a more common feature of the integration policies of other European countries. The fact itself that "integration" (and not "inclusion") is the dominant word in policy documents and discourses shows that migrants are expected to make the biggest effort of adaptation. The implication of this, as argued by Bianco and Cobo, is that language teaching in Italy and other European countries does not consider the linguistic needs of specific persons but instead are focused on preparing asylum seekers for the labour market.

Studies have been carried out to explore different programmes and strategies designed to help asylum seekers integrate into the Italian society. Some of these studies are presented below, including a number of actual programmes being implemented for asylum seekers and refugees' integration.

i. An experiment, which was carried out in the 2016/2017 academic year at the University of Padova found that given the right conditions, adult refugees "could tap into their intercultural literacy and achieve a high degree of agency" (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018,

p. 29). The project, Cultura e Accoglienza, gave opportunity to 30 asylum seekers as "guest students" at the University of Padova. Participants in the project remarked that they did not have enough opportunity to practice their Italian outside their classes and thus could not engage in extensive valuable communication (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018). This is because of the difficulty to gain entry into informal networks and this lack of opportunity denies them the possibility to develop a rich vocabulary. This highlights the fact that language skills are developed in everyday conversations with different people (and this is a problem for an asylum seeker) but inclusion is not only about language acquisition, it is coming to each other, and the policies or the structures as they are now do not sustain this.

ii. A research carried out to find out "how schools and child psychology services can increase effectiveness and quality of programs addressed to refugee children and families" (Dovigo, 2019, p. 1) in Northern Italy discovered some interesting things. The data revealed five main causes of the difficulties schools and health services face in dealing with refugee children and their families:

a) Linguistic mediation is unavailable except there is a formal request for it and it is for a limited time.
b) Educational and health practitioners view refugee children (RC) and families as vulnerable (and a burden) because they assume that they have been exposed to traumatic experiences. This makes the practitioners focus on providing post-traumatic intervention for refugee children and family. One of the obvious drawbacks of this approach is that the complexity of the refugees' previous experiences and current need is undermined as they are viewed as a uniform population.
c) The screening of refugee children who are about to start school is fragmented, focusing on different parts of their personality. A single child can be attended to by teachers, support teachers, child psychiatrists, psychologists, speech and psychomotor therapists, and social workers who all focus on different aspects of the child's personality and make separate observations which may not be eventually harmonised.
d) Children and their families are constantly assessed according to the typical level of educational, health, and social skills using psychological or educational tests that have

been developed for children with no migration background. This produces a negative description of the child and hinders "the process of empowerment on which integration is primarily based" (Dovigo, 2019, p. 10).

e) Lastly, refugees' social capital is usually low. So, refugee children face a high risk of discrimination or marginalisation among their peers. Is it possible that adult refugees face the same kind of difficulties? This is a question that researchers might want to carry out studies on.

Duso and Marigo cite some projects for the academic integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy:

1. inHERE: Coordinated by the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED) and funded by Erasmus+ action. The project's aim was to simplify access to the university by refugees through the exchange of good practices by participating institutions.
2. Refugees Project: Established in the 2015/2016 academic year at the University of Padua to provide a simple procedure for recognising refugees' academic credentials, it is "an example of good practice that allows young people fleeing conflicts and violence to continue their higher education in Italy and become members of the student and civic community" (Duso & Marigo, 2018, p. 150).
3. U4Refugees (University for refugees): To provide refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to proceed with their studies in Italian universities. The project partners were the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), the Italian Conference of University Rectors (CRUI), the UNHCR, and the Ministries of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs.
4. Unibo for refugees: Established by the University of Bologna for refugees and asylum seekers, who possess the qualifications demanded by the university to enrol in single courses, to be exempted from registration fees and receive study grants.

Finally, findings from Bencivenga's study on the initial assessment of migrants' informal learning by some Italian organisations show that the "full scope of migrants' competences and experiences, desires and expectations is not explored" (Bencivenga, 2017, p. 152). In fact, the research showed that "interests and desires are not even mentioned in initial assessment and

evaluation perspectives, and when migrants arrive at other organisations, they may have already been 'formatted' to show proper desires and interests" (Bencivenga, 2017, p. 152). This shows that while there are a number of commendable services and programmes designed for the inclusion of immigrants into the Italian society, there is still room for improvement.

Second Language Learning for Vulnerable Adult Migrants: The Case of the Italian Public School (CPIA)

Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA), the Provincial Centres for Adult Education are the major public institutions for adult education in Italy. They are present in all the provinces of Italy and they are playing a role in 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 CPIA. 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). CPIA was established by a presidential decree in 2012 and started operations in 2014/2015. CPIA also offers lower secondary school and upper secondary school courses for migrants and for Italians interested in continuing education (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Longo, 2019). While CPIA is meant to serve both Italians and foreigners, the learners at 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 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, though most times immigrants attend this school to learn Italian language because of the benefits of being able to speak Italian. Apart from the diversity among learners in terms of nationality, there is also a diversity in educational attainment among learners (Longo, 2019; Robino et al., 2020).

Mainly, CPIA provides education to persons who did not complete compulsory education (which entails primary education and lower secondary education), persons who completed compulsory education and who would like to undertake the second cycle of education (which entails upper secondary education and vocational training) and persons who would like to take Italian language courses. The language courses are designed for the award of a qualification not lower than the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Bianco & Cobo, 2019; Loprieno et al., 2019). According to Loprieno et al., "A2 level (or higher) are the only ones recognized by the Ministry of the Interior for long term residence permits" (2019, p. 9). Learners can also obtain a diploma in technical and vocational education (Loprieno et al., 2019). Learners are awarded certificates by CPIA for all courses completed. Only learners who attend 75% of classes are allowed to sit for examination. The competences acquired by the learner are listed on certificates issued by CPIA.

OECD (2021) reports that in the school year 2019/2020 there were 130 CPIA across Italy except the regions of Trentino Alto Adige and Val d'Aosta. The region of Lombardy with 19 centres had the highest number of CPIA, followed by Emilia Romagna and Piedmont with 12 and 11, respectively. In the academic years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, there were 249,000 students in all CPIA centres in Italy. This number reduced to 236,000 in the 2019/2020 school year. In the 2019/2020 session, Lombardy had the highest number of students in CPIA with 39,000. Language learning takes a huge share of the courses offered by CPIA (details below). The courses are organised in three strands:

- Level 1 courses, which are organised in two teaching periods. The First Period corresponds to primary (scuola elementare) and lower secondary (scuola media) schools, while the Second Period corresponds to a certification of basic competences common to the first two years of vocational and technical upper secondary education (scuola superiore). Level 1 courses are organised around four axis: i) Languages axis; ii) Mathematical axis; iii) Scientific-technological axis; and iv) Historical and social axis (for the First Period) or Historical, social and economic axis (for the Second Period). Each axis includes a number of competences.
- Level 2 courses, aimed at obtaining a technical, vocational or artistic upper secondary school diploma. Teaching is divided in three periods for each field of study: (i) First Period, aimed at acquiring the necessary certification for admission to the third and fourth years of upper secondary institutes; (ii) Second Period, aimed at acquiring the necessary certification for admission to the last year of the courses; (iii) Third Period, aimed at acquiring a technical, vocational or artistic upper secondary school diploma. This diploma gives access to tertiary education.

- Literacy and Italian language courses (Percorsi di Alfabetizzazione e Apprendimento della Lingua Italiana - AALI), which are mainly addressed to foreign people and are aimed at the acquisition of a certificate proving a level of knowledge of the Italian language not lower than the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Courses focus on 5 areas (listening, reading, oral and written interaction, oral production and written production) for a total of 20 different skills (OECD, 2021, pp. 21–22).

The Level 1 and literacy courses are solely organised by CPIA while the Level 2 courses are organised by CPIA in conjunction with secondary schools that have agreements with CPIA. The certificate awarded after Level 1 is called 'Certificato delle competenze di base acquisite in esito all'assolvimento dell'obbligo di istruzione', that is, compulsory education certificate. This certificate acknowledges that the individual has acquired basic learning skills. After completion of Level 2, learners are awarded an upper secondary diploma, 'diploma di istruzione tecnica, professionale e di licei artistici'. This diploma could be for technical education or arts education or professional schools (Daniele et al., 2018). As mentioned earlier, after the completion of the literacy and Italian language classes, a proficiency certificate in Italian language is awarded for a level not lower than the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Bianco and Cobo (2019) claim that CPIA centres are currently adapting their teaching strategies to be able to effectively teach asylum seekers and refugees. They claim that materials currently in use are for the teaching of Italian as a foreign language and not for the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees. They advocate for materials that address asylum seekers and refugees' needs so that they can find the lessons useful. "For example, Italian language lessons should provide basic lexical knowledge, covering issues such as the asylum procedure, Italian documents, medical needs, job seeking, etc." (Bianco & Cobo, 2019, p. 3). They also argue that the number of hours (20) assigned to 'alphabetisation' (literacy), that is for persons who are illiterate, is not enough. They call for the number of hours to be increased so that illiterate asylum seekers can be equipped to undertake A1 and A2 language classes. Furthermore, they recommend that CPIA courses should take into consideration that adult learners have to juggle working and studying at the same time which is not easy (Bianco & Cobo, 2019).

Deiana & Spina (2021) carried out an investigation of the initial and summative language testing and assessments administered by some CPIA centres in 130 CPIAs across ten (10) Italian cities and made some instructive findings about CPIA's language courses. For example, the majority of teachers in CPIA's language courses are primary school teachers with only a few teachers trained to teach Italian as a second language. This situation suggests that most teachers in CPIA's language courses are not trained to teach adults and foreigners. This claim is corroborated by Longo (2019) and Loprieno et al. (2019). Deiana & Spina (2021) however report that some teachers in the study, though they were trained as primary school teachers, were indeed capable of teaching Italian language to adults and foreigners. Lopriena et al. (2019) state that in the provinces of Cosenza and Catanzaro, CPIA teachers who were drawn from primary school were given refresher training.

Deiana & Spina (2021) also found that a significant number of students did not understand what was being done in class. Longo (2019) pointed out low levels of completion among students enrolled in A2 Italian classes at a CPIA in Lecce: only 46% in 2017 and 61% in 2021 achieved the final certification. The reasons for this may be inadequate attention to assess the students' proficiency level in the Italian language, at start, or the lack of qualification among language teachers. Longo (2019) also notes that motivation to attend language classes among forced migrants is usually dependent on whether they think they have a high chance of succeeding in the application for legal residency.

Admitting that placement assessments are not easy, Deiana & Spina (2021) argue that ensuring trained and skilled teachers carry out these assessments will produce better outcomes. Concerning the initial assessment, Deiana and Spina also found "…lack of valid and shared practices. CPIAs are still not equipped with national and shared guidelines concerning the accoglienza" (2021, p. 76). Instead, teachers relied on their experiences to carry out the assessment. The same situation is applicable to evaluative assessments; there are no national standards for end-of-course assessments. This point is worthy of note because the end-of-course assessments can have consequences for the granting or refusal of residence permit to long-term immigrants in Italy (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Loprieno et al., 2019). Thus, they make a

case for end-of-course exams to adhere to principles of "validity, objectivity, reliability, and fairness" (Deiana & Spina, 2021, p. 77) as well as employing well-trained and qualified teachers who can teach Italian as a second or foreign language.

Conclusion

After this exploration of the Italian context of learning for migrants, namely for asylum seekers and refugees, there are some topics that will be very useful in the interpretation of my field data, since they have direct and indirect effects on recognition, learning, and identity. These include learning content, qualification and training of teachers, and adult teaching strategies. I have also tried to show the political and social context in which asylum seekers and refugees live. Their feeling of being recognised also depends on the treatment they receive, the provision of services, clear communications about their rights, understandable procedures, times and processes, and the presence of stereotypes and prejudices in the dominant discourse also bears its weight.

In Chapter Four, I present an exploratory narrative study that I conducted while I was still working on my research questions and methodology. Its aim was to allow me to better understand the Italian context from a more relational and meaningful perspective, so I decided to interview three CPIA teachers. One of the three teachers I interviewed was also the deputy director of her centre.

CHAPTER THREE

Narrative Methodology and Co-construction of Knowledge: Participants' Voices and a Researcher's Challenge

In this chapter, I discuss my research methodology, methods and ethical considerations. I also mention some of the challenges I faced while carrying out the research. I start by clarifying the meaning of telling, listening to, and analysing stories in narrative inquiry. I argue that a narrative approach entails a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants because the relationship between them shapes the knowledge that is produced.

The Role of Stories in Human Lives: Complex Layered Objects

I employed narrative methodology or narrative inquiry in this research. My decision was informed by my understanding of the centrality of stories to human existence and also because of my desire "for a more human and justice-focused" (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020, p. 6) research. Stories or storytelling is an integral part of human life (Clandinin et al., 2016). "As human beings, we experience our worlds and live our lives by telling stories" (Anderson, 2016, p. 215). Humans lead storied lives individually and socially (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). At different points, we are either telling a story or listening to a story. The stories we tell and the ones we hear reveal as well as build the meaning we attach to societal happenings, processes and expectations. When we tell stories, we construct images and assign meanings to actions, whether ours or of others. This means a storyteller brings their perspective to the story (Formenti, 2014). This is the subjective reading of storytelling: at a micro-level, a story illuminates individual ways of seeing, experiences and representations.

Besides this, there is also an inter-subjective reading. Telling stories "is the means by which we represent our experiences to ourselves and to others; it is how we make sense of our lives

and fill them with meaning. To study persons is to study beings existing in narrative and socially constituted and shaped by stories" (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020, p. 2). The interdependence of human beings belonging to the same group or organisation creates shared stories, meanings, and perspectives, through the coordination of actions and meanings. We tell a story in a specific way because we have learnt what can and cannot be told, and how. Formenti (2014) writes that stories encompass more than personal meanings and describes them as cultural artefacts produced by social and relational circumstances, that is, the meso-level of interaction. Embedded in stories are an individual's connections to their family, environment, culture and relationships. In other words, a story does not belong to only the subject, that is the individual telling it. Stories are also influenced, at a macro-level, by using a specific language and cultural framework, and by factors such as class, gender, age and education. Storytellers reveal much of their society and culture.

Formenti (2014) uses a systemic framework to point out these different levels – micro, meso, and macro – as both levels of systemic functioning and levels of analysis for stories: The micro level encompasses the teller's ideas, perceptions and emotions about an event; the meso level shows how the storyteller's proximal relationships, such as family and friends, build coordinated meanings; and the macro level involves the construction of meaning in the wider society or culture. The import of the different levels to storytelling is that it makes us aware of the effect that dominant discourses and cultural or societal practices can exert over what is told, foregrounded or silenced in a story. So, it is important to understand that a story is a complex and layered object. It can be interpreted in many ways. When we listen to stories, we need to be aware of the ideology and perspectives that frame it (Formenti, 2014), not least, our own. This is why I find the constructionist approach appropriate in conducting narrative inquiry; social and historical contexts are taken into consideration when making sense of a story in narrative inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2017).

Narrative Inquiry

Conducting an inquiry into people's stories, then, is a challenging enterprise; stories tell much more than what appears at their surface. However, they do not explain themselves alone. The researcher's activity is necessary to interpret them. Researchers, then, might need to take note of how "the myths within a wider culture infuse and shape individual narratives" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 10), and ask themselves whose position they will take in analysing them.

In studying narratives or stories, researchers focus on the ways in which people express their experience of the world (Clandinin et al., 2017; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narratives or stories can be used for chronicling, confirming or criticising human experience, for example, social structures, lifestyles, policies, among others. (Formenti, 2014). An important thing to note is that telling a story is a social performance since it always involves an audience. In research, it may entail an interviewer/interviewee relationship, a group setting, or other contexts of interaction. Each context has its rules, constraints, and allowances.

Story telling is the act of attaching meaning to (an) experience(s). So, a story is different from an experience. Chant stresses that, "Memories exist in the present as a perspective on the past. The factual relationship between the experienced and remembered past is not perhaps of great importance when studying stories" (2016, p. 220). More than anything, the study of narratives or narrative inquiry places people and meaning making at the centre of research. It also allows for the development of reflexivity, relationships, dialogue collaboration and embodied interpretation (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). Bochner & Herrmann (2020) in their chapter contribution, "Practicing Narrative Inquiry II: Making Meanings Move", identify eight principles that can be found in narrative inquiry practices though they noted that not all narrative inquiry entails these principles. The principles they have identified include:

1. The researcher is part of the research data;
2. A social science text always is composed by a particular somebody someplace; writing and or performing research is part of the inquiry;
3. Research involves the emotionality and subjectivity of both researchers and participants;
4. The relationship between researchers and research participants should be democratic;

5. Researchers ought to accept an ethical obligation to give something important back to the people they study and write about;
6. What researchers write should be written for participants as much as about them; researchers and participants should be accountable to each other; the researcher's voice should not dominate the voices of participants;
7. Research should be about what could be (not just about what has been);
8. The reader or audience should be conceived as a coparticipant, not a spectator, and should be given opportunities to think with (not just about) the research story (or findings) (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020, p. 6).

These principles encapsulate a reciprocal relationship and respect between the researcher and the participants in a research as well as a realisation of how the different subjectivities of the researcher and the participants can shape the research.

A major preoccupation of narrative inquiry is what Bochner and Hermann (2020) call 'narrative identity thesis'. This refers to how stories shape our personal identity and even reshape it. It is about how people think back about their lives and recount how they handled critical moments of their lives and how their interactions with others have shaped their identity. This again points to a connection between narrative inquiry and constructionism. The act of storytelling happens in a domain of intersubjectivity: a storyteller employs their subjectivity in telling a story while the listener(s) also involve their subjectivity in interpreting such story. So, by the end of the storytelling, both parties may have the impression that they arrive at a shared interpretation or at least have some sort of reciprocal engagement thanks to the story told. In other words, narrative inquiry is about the "negotiation of a shared narrative unity" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). The mediation of memory and relationality in storytelling and the fluid nature of assigning meaning to experience indicate that stories are open to revision depending on circumstances, and thus are constantly under construction. In other words, stories change with time and space (Formenti, 2014). Going further, stories "are developed in a context with its own possibilities and constraints. Different contexts create different narrations" (Galimberti, 2014). This realisation can be a cause for caution by listeners or readers to avoid falling into the trap of taking a story as an account or reflection of the experience it describes.

The building of a story is a sort of putting oneself on a stage and creating plotlines about the events of life. Bochner and Herrman write,

> Storytellers portray the people in their stories, including themselves, as characters: protagonists, antagonists, heroes, victims, or survivors. Usually, the stories revolve around an epiphany or dramatic event. The events take place somewhere, sometime—in a scene that can provide context and give setting, framing, and texturing to the story. The point or goal of the story is to come to terms with, explain, or understand the event(s): Why did this happen to me? How can I understand what these experiences mean? What lessons have I learned? How have I been changed? (2020, p. 8).

Bochner & Herrmann (2020) also note that telling a story might serve different aims for the storyteller and the researcher. While the researcher's aim is to get the most out of the story and explain how it makes sense, the aim of the storyteller might be relational with the hope that the listener can identify with or get into the story, or give recognition? Some of my research participants were simply happy to be seen and managed their social identity to show their better side. Formenti puts it this way: "A story is a metaphor that stands for different things for the storyteller, for the ongoing conversation (it's here-and-now context), and for the wider "culture"" (2014, p. 131).

Narrative Inquiry or Inquiry into Narrative?

Bochner and Herrman (2020) distinguish between two strands of narrative inquiry: Narrative inquiry that takes the form of personal narratives by the researcher(s) such as autoethnography or duoethnography, or take the form of analysing narratives told by others. They term the former, 'narrative analysis' and the latter, 'analysis of narratives'. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) also distinguish narrative inquiry into 'narrative inquiry' and 'inquiry into narrative'. The implication of this is that narrative can be a method or a phenomenon. In narrative analysis (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020) or narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), the research product is a story while in analysis of narratives (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020) or inquiry into narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), stories are treated as data and analysis is used to identify the themes within or across stories.

'Narrative analysis' has five distinguishing features (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020)

i. the author employs the first-person narrative;

ii. the focus is on generalisation with a single case over an extended period of time as against generalisation across cases;
iii. the text adopts a literary style with the presence of a narrator, characters and a plot;
iv. the work contains private, personal and emotional details of the writer;
v. the narrator depicts relationship dynamics among the story's characters across time variations.

Furthermore, narrative analysis invites readers to think with the story and not about the story. That is, the story serves as evocative material for the listeners/readers. It is about getting into the story and engaging with it with all our senses; being affected by the story and relating with it (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). For researchers, researching into stories or narratives can trigger their/our awareness of the meanings and perspectives that they/we are bringing into the research; sometimes it can challenge them/us and provoke dilemmas. It is about taking a story to heart and examining it within the framework of our personal lives, and having a sensual and embodied relationship with the story; seeing and feeling the story in our being.

'Analysis of narrative' or 'narrative under analysis' refers to research where narratives are seen as data to be systematically analysed (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020) The object of study are narratives which are analysed with a view to arriving at an understanding and interpretation. Narratives are treated as data to be made "amenable to conceptual analysis and theoretical explanation" (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020, p. 19) Researchers who employ this method make interpretations and inferences from

> conventional practices of sociolinguistic, conversational, and discourse analysis of what is said or told (producing themes or topics), how the telling is organized (its structure), how it is performed (voice, language, inflection, drama, comedic), and/or how it functions intersubjectively to achieve an implicit or explicit goal, a means to an end (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020, pp. 19–20).

Narratives are subjected to transcription and interpretive practices. Form and content of stories are foregrounded in the bid to understand identity formation in human interactions. Bochner & Herrmann summarise the differences between the two strands of narrative inquiry this way:

"Whereas evocative narrative takes the standpoint of the storyteller, narratives under analysis are governed by an analytical standpoint that positions the researcher as Other to the storytellers whose texts are to be analyzed." (2020, p. 21). It is important to point out that my research falls within what Bochner and Herrmann term 'analysis of narratives' but for the purpose of this study, I will still maintain the use of the term, 'narrative inquiry'.

Positioning, Relationship and Integrity in Narrative Inquiry

An important matter to consider in narrative inquiry, as with other qualitative research methodologies, is the researcher's or interviewer's positioning. There may be different ways to put it: from the positivist objectivist position, the researcher's influence over the interviewing or storytelling process is a problem. From a constructionist-critical perspective, it is a feature of human relationships, and an occasion for reflection. So, the researcher's positionality needs to be stated explicitly and critically analysed, then interrogated in the relationship with the other: how does the other respond to the researcher(s). I subscribe to the view that researchers "play a major part in constituting the narrative data that [they] analyze. Through [their] presence, and by listening and questioning in particular ways, [they] critically shape the stories participants choose to tell" (Riessman, 2008, p. 50). There is a need, then, for the researcher to be reflexive about how their positioning as well as worldview (and any other factor) shapes their interpretation of the narratives. It is important to understand that narrative inquiry entails "both the individual story and the co-creation of a story between the researcher and the narrator" (Chan, 2001 cited in Anderson, 2016, p. 215).

Also pertinent is the relationship between the researcher and participants. The kind of relationship that exists between a researcher and a participant determines how the participant engages with the interview process. A participant's perception of the researcher will shape what they say or do not say, and because of this, a researcher who favours an interpersonal and intersubjective approach might want to try and create a good enough relationship (Merrill & West, 2009). This means a researcher who prioritises a safe and trusting relationship between them and the participant is more likely to elicit the interest of the participant and receive rich

responses. There is also the possibility/risk of the participant thinking the researcher could help them out of a crisis situation instead of going to an expert or professional. This may happen, for example, when the researcher is a professional therapist, or a professional, so they will have to find a way to negotiate the line between being a researcher and therapist in the interview situation (Merrill & West, 2009).

The exchange between the researcher and the participant is therefore dependent on the researcher's perspective of human relationship. While a researcher might be insistent on steering the interview to strictly address their research questions, another researcher allows or prepares for unpredictability in the interview situation and tries to manage the situation as best as possible to give the participant space to tell what they want to tell and as practicable as possible address their research questions. In fact, there is an opportunity to learn from the participant's perspective of what is relevant. Thus, it may not be unusual for a narrative researcher to change their research questions based on how their interviews unfolded. This often happens when the researcher relinquishes or shares control of the interview process with the participant, allowing the participant to determine the course or direction of the interview. Moreover, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write that, "A sense of equality between participants is particularly important in narrative inquiry" (p. 4).

Another thing to keep in mind when carrying out a narrative inquiry is how to show the integrity and rigor of the analysis undertaken. That is, demonstrating how one came to the decision on what to and what not to analyse as well as how the analysis of the narratives was done. While doing all of this, the researcher must remember that they are re-presenting another person's story, and that they have an obligation to both the participants and to the readers. So, care should be taken in navigating the tensions that may arise from trying to balance re-presenting participants' stories as well as writing for those who will read the work. The researcher must be aware of the need to keep a clear distinction between their voice and that of their participants, and for both of them to be heard (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Selecting My Method: Biographical Narrative Method

Within narrative methodology or inquiry, I have chosen to use biographical methods because I believe they offer a great potential in achieving my research aims. Thus, while the research is not a biographical study, I have used biographical methods – particularly in analysis and interpretation – in the sense that I examine the cultural, social and economic structures, and sometimes, historical structures, that shape an individual's story (Morrice, 2011). Using biographical methods also makes me pay attention to how the participants compose their stories and develop reflexivity. Merrill and West in their book, Using Biographical Methods in Social Research state that "biographical methods offer rich rewards in making sense of self and others in social and historical contexts" (2009, p. 9). This statement seems to me coherent with the main theoretical underpinning of my research, that is Axel Honneth's theory of recognition (see Chapter One), whose major proposition is that intersubjective recognition provides a veritable means of building a sense of self (Boston, 2018; Congdon, 2020; Fleming, 2016; Fleming & Finnegan, 2014a, 2014b; Formenti & West, 2018; Honneth, 1995; Petherbridge, 2013; Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013; West, 2014; West et al., 2013).

Biographical methods "offer rich insights into the dynamic interplay of individuals and history, inner and outer worlds, self and other" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 1). Like some other qualitative methods, biographical methods are interested in people's experiences and the meanings people make of their experiences as well as looking for uniqueness and similarities among stories of people's lives. The emphasis is on interacting with people and trying to understand how they make sense of their experiences. Biography "enables us to discern patterns but also distinctiveness in lives." (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 2) Thus, a central issue when using the biographical approach is the link between the particular and the general, and between the unique and the common. Biographical methods focus on people and their subjectivities, and more often, biographical researchers are interested in 'giving voice' to the marginalised and challenging dominant ideologies (Merrill & West, 2009).

The family of biographical methods is very large and diverse, also due to the development of these methods in different disciplines, countries, academic traditions and philosophies. Here again, different paradigms, theories, and ways of doing are present. Being aware of the multiplicity of terms and practices in this genre of research allows one to avoid a superficial approach. In fact, in different languages, different terms are used to label the same method, and a label might mean different things. Therefore, I adopt the definition given by Merrill and West that biographical method "denotes research which utilises individual stories or other personal documents to understand lives within a social, psychological and/or historical frame" (2009, p. 10). My main interest in this research is individual stories, and my main means of eliciting stories or narratives is interviews.

Reflecting on my positioning within the theoretical landscape, I identify or aspire to identify with the critical theory perspective, as I elaborated in the introduction. This is probably borne out of a desire for research to lead to positive change in the society, and change seems only possible if we are able to identify the obstacles to social justice and the structures that maintain power and oppression. Coupled with this general interest is that my current research is about a particular segment of the society that risks discrimination and marginalisation – asylum seekers. So, my aim is that my research can collect their narratives through which the wider society can have some inkling about their experiences. Besides, by analysing their narratives, I hope to highlight hidden structures, relational dynamics, and patterns of experience in the learning context where they are embedded. I am concerned about matters of social justice and human dignity. Merrill and West state that:

> Critical theory has sought to challenge and critique dominant ideologies and power structures which attempt to represent the existing social order as natural and right, as part of stifling potential dissent. The approach strove to expose inequalities and injustices in society, perpetuated by ruling elites or classes… A critical orientation has to do with struggles to emancipate people from relations of dependence shaped by powerful ideologies that persuade them that the social order – around processes of production or reproduction – is 'normal' (Merrill & West, 2009, pp. 67–68).

Merrill and West (2009) also posit that through critical theory, we can interrogate people's stories and biographies and gain an understanding of how oppression, inequalities and harsh

realities can shape their narratives and actions. So, critical theory challenges otherwise taken-for-granted assumptions. It also brings to the fore the relationship between the individual and the collective. We are able to understand the common experiences of people with similar backgrounds, as in my case, asylum seekers.

Building the Field: CPIAs and Asylum Seekers in Lombardy

The process of deciding who or what institution to work with in research is one that can cause anxieties for PhD students (Merrill & West, 2009). One reason for this is the pervasive influence of positivistic assumptions in the academia (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There may be a false expectation that big numbers are better, but this form of inquiry does not need representative sampling. However, the choice of who and how many needs to be explicit. Since the aim is not generalisation, but the identification of patterns, the main question is not about numbers, but about the composition of the sample, diversity and the richness of the experiences represented by the participants. Biographical researchers favour small samples to keep it manageable, because narrative material needs a lot of work, and the process of analysis requires in-depth interpretation in order to build thick descriptions of participants' lives. Then, decisions about the selection of research participants depend on the discipline, on the research questions, on context, and availability.

Despite its preference for small samples, biographical method has the potential to highlight what is representative in people's experiences. Merrill and West explain that through biographical method:

> We can recognise in others' lives things we and a range of people share, and good research can help us see others, but also ourselves, in a new light... Good biographical research in the main is not about numbers per se but the power of description, analysis, insight and theoretical sophistication (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 105).

Each interview is a unique piece that needs full attention. We can have good biographical studies on one single life or a few lives, and also bigger studies, where computer-assisted analysis and some quantification are used to manage with the complexity of the corpus of data.

According to Beitin:

> Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggest that an appropriate sample size for phenomenological research can range from 6 to 12 participants—provided there is thematic redundancy after hearing the narratives of 6 participants. Creswell (1998) recommended between 5 and 25 participants, with another researcher (Boyd, 2001) prescribing a more flexible range of 2 to 10. These differences extend to other common qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, and make it difficult for qualitative researchers to predetermine a sample size (2012, pp. 243–244).

Some important considerations when deciding on the research participants include the relevance of people and their stories. The persons chosen are those who have potentially rich stories with substantial material pertinent to the research aims. Howard Becker (1998, p. 67) cited in Merrill and West make a vital comment, “We can't study every case of whatever we're interested in, nor should we want to” (2009, p. 104). This can be a reassuring statement for students who might be anxious or disturbed about choosing a small sample.

I involved in my study asylum seekers who had attended or were attending the courses at Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA) in the region of Lombardy, Italy. CPIA is the government agency responsible for adult education in Italy, and it also provides education to foreigners (see Chapter Two). This choice ensured that the formal learning experience of the participants in Italy was covered in their learning biography, as CPIA is where most asylum seekers get their formal learning experience. The participants came from four different CPIAs in different cities or towns in Lombardia. My participant selection followed an opportunistic, purposive and snowball method. The inclusion criteria were attendance at CPIA and ability to speak English. But in one instance, the participant could not speak English. He spoke French. I decided to interview him because the participant who introduced me to him felt that having travelled down to their location, I should not interview just one person. He said he wanted me to maximise the opportunity, and he offered to interpret.

Opportunistic sampling is when researchers take advantage of situations to interview individuals, through luck, chance, the right word being said, or because people offer themselves (Miles and Huberman, 1994 in Merrill & West, 2009, p. 107). I employed the opportunistic sampling method at start by seeking for participants in my church. The church I attend is predominantly Nigerian, comprising university students, asylum seekers, permanent residents, among others. I would tell church members that I needed to interview persons who had attended or were attending CPIA. At times, the person I approached would tell me that they themselves were attending CPIA or had attended CPIA; at other times, they spoke to others on my behalf. Another instance of opportunistic sampling happened when I interviewed some CPIA teachers during my initial study to understand my research context (presented in Chapter Four). One of the teachers told me her boyfriend was an asylum seeker, and she convinced him to participate in my interview.

According to Merrill and West (2009), the name, purposeful sampling, can be used interchangeably with theoretical sampling, and this refers to:

> […] selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical proposition [...] and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 108).

I employed purposeful sampling by approaching, in one case, the school administrator of a CPIA, and in another case, the head of an organisation providing help to asylum seekers. I described the criteria for inclusion and they were able to find some persons who were available. "Snowball sampling involves the researcher asking participants if they know of other people – friends, work colleagues or members of the family – who might be willing to be interviewed" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 109). The snowball method came about when a participant I interviewed suggested his friend to me.

I interviewed ten (10) asylum seekers/refugees, three (3) CPIA teachers, one (1) social worker who is Italian, one (1) camp operator who is Nigerian and one (1) other person who is the

president of the association of Nigerians in Milan. The interviews with persons who were not asylum seekers were carried in order to understand my research context before my interactions with asylum seekers/refugees.

Some of the experiences I had with recruiting participants in my study included meeting people who either flatly refused to participate or promised to participate but they did not. Rubin and Rubin state some reasons participants may be taciturn in granting interviews: “Too often they find that they are the objects of research, spend a lot of time for someone else's benefit, and get nothing out of it. Research just repeats the exploitation they have experienced” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 94). In my case, I felt those who flatly refused were not sure about who I was. So, they did not trust me. This is understandable because they probably did not want to imperil their chances of having their asylum application approved. For those who did not get back to me, they cited time as the reason because they had to go to work. So, participating in an interview would mean spending a lot of their time for my own benefit.

Narrative Interviews as a Process of Co-construction of Knowledge

Interviews are a means (not the only one) by which a researcher elicits details about the research topics from participants. Though not the only one, interviews are a major process of co-constructing knowledge in narrative research (Riessman, 2008). During interviews, participants tell stories about their experiences (Brinkmann, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In the narrative-biographic approach, the interview is a relationship between the researcher and the participant (Atkinson, 2012; Brinkmann, 2013; Merrill & West, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview can also be seen as “a creative act” (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 114). That is, the researcher and the participants are engaged in co-creation of meaning and understanding. Some scholars describe the narrative interview as social interaction or practice (Brinkmann, 2013; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Warren, 2012). In this relationship or social interaction, “knowledge is actively formed and shaped… Interview situations fundamentally, not incidentally, shape the form and content of what is said” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012, p. 32).

Gubrium and Holstein explain that "The circumstances of narrative production are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating the meanings that ostensibly reside within individual experience" (2012, p. 32). This means the story or narrative told has to be interpreted in relation to the context of its production: the material circumstances, the space and time chosen, the kind on interaction that takes place between the participant and the researcher, and so on. Rubin and Rubin point out that, "Unlike survey research, in which exactly the same questions are asked to each individual, in qualitative interviews each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share" (2005, p. 5).

The researcher can enhance the quality of the interview by using reflection and reflexivity about various contextual factors, before, during, and after the interview, and by questioning the kind of relationship that is developing or has been developed between them and the participant. During the interview, there will be clues about the participant's interpretation of the relationship, so it will be possible or advisable to communicate and meta-communicate about it; besides, the relationship can become itself a substantial focus of analysis. A good interviewer therefore needs to be present, listening, attuned and reflexive. For biographical interviews, "using non-threatening and open forms of questions" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 114) is really important, particularly when discussing sensitive and emotional issues. Rubin and Rubin have this advice: "[…] because the interviewer and interviewee interact and influence each other, the interviewer has to be self-aware, examining his or her own biases and expectations that might influence the interviewee" (2005, p. 30). They also advise the researcher to develop his or her personal style.

The advantages of the interview method include:

- Providing deeper information than what surveys provide in terms of really personal or private matters, for example a person's lived experience, cultural knowledge and personal worldview or perspective. This is what scholars refer to as thick description;
- Opportunity to explore and uncover what might be ordinarily hidden from the common view;

- Allowing for deep reflections by both researcher and participants which can be transformative;
- Revealing unquestioned assumptions and practices that influence people's actions and meaning-making processes;
- Throwing up multiple, and even opposing views or perspectives about reality,
- Allowing for richer and fuller understanding of phenomena (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Some of the downsides of interviews include the fact that participants can outrightly tell lies, or select what to say, if they think they will be judged, or they may tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear. Thus, the important point to note is that there is no "truth", and relationships develop in time, so this relationship has many limits, and the story is very situational. Some participants may lack confidence feeling they are not knowledgeable enough. Some participants may not have enough linguistic competence or habits to talk about themselves, or previous experiences hindered their capacity to talk about their experiences. Asking sensitive questions can also place a strain on the interview relationship. The interview can as well lead to some painful disclosure for both participants and researchers, and in some cases put the interviewer in a moral or ethical dilemma, creating anxiety, stress and tensions, which if not handled well might torpedo the whole interview. It is also possible that a participant's view might not be theirs but a manifestation of a dominant ideology. Interviews can also be time consuming, and as such, some potential participants might be unwilling to participate or even turn down the invitation to participate in an interview, thus making it difficult to get participants for one's research (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

As much as possible, I endeavoured to ensure that the participants in my interviews understood that I was interested in their learning experiences and not about any other thing they might not be willing to talk about. I was aware of the peculiar situation of the participants as asylum seekers. Some of them were wary about talking since they had already given a version of their story to the government officials in charge of their asylum application. This means that I did

not try to probe about their journey from their countries to Italy, especially for those who came through Libya, an experience that could have been excruciating for some.

Initially, the major aim of my research was to explore the experiences of adult asylum seekers at CPIA, but when you do biographic research the urge to ask (and listen to) what is relevant for the participant, can show you aspects that were not initially taken into account. So, I discovered from most of the interviews that other experiences were as well important, if not more important, to asylum seekers. In addition to their CPIA experience, some other major issues that most of the participants spoke about include other trainings or learning they had acquired, camp experience, racism and discrimination in Italy, and future aspirations and ambitions. In such a situation, Rubin and Rubin (2005) advise:

> To get that depth of understanding, design must remain flexible. Each major new discovery may require a redesign, figuring anew whom to talk to, where to carry out the study, or what concepts and themes to focus on. The interview questions the researcher intends to ask may differ from the ones actually asked if the interviewee goes in an unexpected but relevant direction (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35).

The implication of this was that I had to change my research questions to accommodate some of the emerging themes in my interviews. Specifically, the interviews I conducted led me to expand my initial research aim. Initially, I set out to explore asylum seekers'/refugees' experiences in CPIA which was limited to their experiences in formal education. However, the interview materials revealed that many asylum seekers/refugees were involved in non-formal learning or vocational training. This informed my decision to explore the learning biographies of the participants in order to capture their formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences.

During the interviews, I strove to build an interactional or conversational rapport in the spirit of "equal and democratic relationship" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 116) with the aim of demonstrating to the participants that their views were important. As much as possible, I made it obvious that I knew little or nothing about their particular experiences except for what I have heard from previous interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I tried to present myself as someone

who was eager to hear what they had to say. I tried to stress to them that I was new in Italy, and thus a novice in many aspects. Whether I succeeded in projecting myself as a willing learner instead of an authority, can only be fully answered by each participant but on a number of occasions, during the interviews, the participants tried to explain how things worked in Italy to me. During the interviews, whenever they spoke about an experience that I had also had – as a Black migrant – in Italy, I would mention it as a way of identifying with them. Reciprocity and self-revelation are encouraged by Rubin and Rubin:

> When interviewees tell you in detail about their experiences, they expose themselves to you and trust that you will not violate their confidence or criticize them. They deposit a part of themselves, an image of who they are, into your safekeeping and in doing so end up feeling vulnerable. You have an obligation to show concern with the emotional impact of the interview, perhaps by making the interviewee more comfortable about revelations by exposing what you feel in turn […] Rather than just asking and listening, sometimes researchers may need to answer some of the same questions about themselves that they have posed to the conversational partner (2005, p. 83).

Reciprocity and self-revelation demonstrate to participants that the researcher is empathic, which may create a deeper sense of trust and mutuality (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Participants may also feel less exposed. I maintained a relationship with many of the participants after the interviews. In fact, we still exchange text messages. My feeling is that not communicating with them after the interview will seem like I just used and dumped them for my selfish interests. An interesting situation was when a participant became really insistent about me getting a job, because, according to him, I needed to be earning money. After several calls, and sometimes admonishment from him, he stopped communication because he felt I was not serious. Even when I sent him messages, he did not respond.

I conducted semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) using some general guides I had prepared (Merrill & West, 2009). Usually, the first question I asked was to tell me about how they got to CPIA or their experience so far in CPIA. Each interview would normally proceed according to the participant's response to my questions. This practice is corroborated by Rubin and Rubin (2005): "Researchers listen to each answer and determine the next question based on what was said. Interviewers do not work out three or four questions in advance and ask them regardless of the answers given" (2005, p. 12). The implication of this

is that interviews will be unpredictable. If the interviewee gave a long answer or told a story in relation to a question, I would follow-up with questions derived from their response but if they gave a short or direct answer to my question, I would ask one of the questions I had prepared. Also, while allowing the participants to say whatever they would like to say, I was also conscious of guiding the interview to cover my research questions. These are the advantages of semi-structured interviews:

> Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews also give the interviewer a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide. And, compared to unstructured interviews, the interviewer has a greater saying in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 21).

Thus, I usually employed or asked main questions, follow-up questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Almost always after each interview, I wondered if the interview covered all my research questions. I doubted if I asked the right questions, and at times I asked myself if I knew exactly what I was looking for in the research. The feeling of uncertainty or not doing enough or not having 'good enough' interviews pervaded my study. Knowing I was not alone in this kind of struggle (Merrill & West, 2009) provided just a little comfort but I really desired to be absolutely sure I was doing exactly what I should do. After I spent some time thinking about why I always came away with the feeling that my interviews were not 'good enough', I concluded it was because I was interested mainly the participants' experience in CPIA, which was apparently not a major part of their lives, and so, I could not expect to spend an hour asking someone about a minor part of their lives. So, I decided to allow each interview to take its own form without any attempts to strictly make it conform to my research questions. This led to changes in my research aim and questions.

Some major limitations of this study are the fact that I conducted only one interview with the participants and the narrations from the interviews revolve around the participants' experiences in Italy. Only two participants spoke about their experiences in Libya. Though many of the participants mentioned some things about their lives in their home countries, the references

only gave a small glimpse about their lives in their home countries. It is for this reason that this study cannot claim to be biographical but like I mentioned earlier, biographical methods were only employed in the research. One major reason why I did not ask the participants questions about their experiences prior to their arrival in Italy was the awareness of the likelihood that they had experienced some painful or even traumatic events. So, I wanted to be sensitive to the emotional wellbeing of the participants by avoiding asking questions about their past and reasons for leaving their country (Morrice, 2011). I also felt asking such questions without establishing a level of trust between the participants and me might be counterproductive. Unlike Morrice (2011), who had the luxury of time due to the fact that she interacted with her participants for five years, and thus was able to ask sensitive questions in later stages of the research, I was only able to conduct one interview with each participant. The lockdown imposed during the coronavirus pandemic was a major reason I could not have follow-up interviews with the participants. And even when I tried to contact some of them after the lockdown, they would respond that they were busy.

Recording of Interviews

The interviews were audio recorded using a recorder and my phone. Informing the participants that I needed to record their narratives was one of the few things that made me anxious. This is because from what I learned, asylum seekers are careful about whom they talk to because they do not want to say anything that contradicts what is in their asylum application. And some of the questions they asked me include: “Are you a journalist?”, and “Are you working for the government?”. I always tried to explain that I was a university student who was interested in their learning experience because, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 116) participants “[…] want to know that you are on their side, or at the least, they want evidence that you are not a loose cannon, an unpredictable person who can do them damage.”

As the interview progressed, most of the interviewees became comfortable with the presence of the recorder or even forgot about its presence (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) but a couple of the participants indicated that they could not answer some questions because the interview was

being recorded. Merrill and West (2009) acknowledge the different reactions participants may exhibit towards being recorded:

> Some biographical researchers prefer to take detailed notes rather than use digital or tape recorders (Horsdal, 2002). We favour recording interviews, partly to enable us to listen more attentively, but their presence needs to be talked about with our interviewees. In running workshops for doctoral students, the use of recorders can be a major topic for discussion. One would-be biographical researcher, after being interviewed, felt he was talking to two people: the interviewer and the recorder. He was aware that someone else – a transcriber – would listen to the material and this made him feel, initially, uneasy. On the other hand, most people will accept the use of recorders and soon forget their presence (although remaining anxious, perhaps, as to who will have access to the material). We need to talk openly about such matters with our subjects as part of building good and reflexive practice (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 124).

Transcription

I transcribed all the interviews in full. I struggled initially with how to transcribe the interviews because I was concerned that most of the participants did not speak grammatically correct English. There were times we switched into Nigerian Pidgin English. I was concerned that the academy would view less grammatical English with disdain (I guess I was just a novice researcher). I decided to ask my supervisor's opinion. So, I sent her an email to inform her about my dilemma and to ask what the best way was to transcribe my interviews. Her reply was that it was far better to keep the original language. She however asked me to look for works of researchers who had faced the same problem. I went further to seek advice from a group of professors and PhD students that I belonged in. I wrote about my dilemma and gave excerpts of some of the statements that were giving me concerns. After extensive deliberations, I came to the conclusion that it was important to use the exact words of the participants. The interviews were transcribed in full and in narrative form and there was no attempt to ensure the grammatical correctness of the participants' speeches. Pauses are indicated by three dots. Four dots are used to indicate that a speech has been shortened or that some parts of the material have been omitted. Insertions by me are indicated by the use of brackets. Italics were used when the participant was reporting someone else's speech.

Making Sense of the Interview Materials

When we collect people's stories, we have to make sense of what we have heard through analysis. "Analysis helps us to make sense of a person's story but also to move beyond description, as important as this is, to refine understanding in more systematic and sustained ways" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 128). The process of analysis in biographical method, and indeed qualitative research, is usually recursive, thus taking place throughout the research process and not only at the end of the research, and analysis entails description, interpretation and theorising (Merrill & West, 2009). While returning from each of the interviews, I would think about what I had heard, and try to make sense of it in relation to my research aims and questions. Throughout this research, the major struggle I had was how to make sense of the interview materials. Many times, I felt like I was in a rut, with progress being difficult but after reading how some scholars analysed their materials, I started getting insights into how I could make sense of my interview materials. One major influence on how I carried out the interpretation of the materials was Merrill and West (2009).

I tried to be conscious of the values embedded in my participants' narrations, and also thought about what purpose they were trying to achieve by telling me certain stories. Was the person trying to present themselves as a victim and thus elicit feelings of pity or sympathy? Were they trying to create an image of agentic personality? Were they trying to whip up sentiments against their teachers or camp operators or the host society? One important principle I adhered to was to allow the data to speak for itself as much as possible in order to give voice to the participants (Merrill & West, 2009).

Case Studies, Portraiture and Proforma

In making sense of my narrative materials, I employed two main methods which are in fact interconnected. These are case studies and thematic narrative analysis. In using the case study method, I presented a participant's story and focused on the details in the story. This was informed by the richness of the materials and my desire to appreciate the significant details in each story (Merrill & West, 2009). Using "'telling' case studies" (West, 1996, p. 47) to create a portrait of the participant, allows for a holistic interpretation of their story. The case studies

are presented in Chapter Five, "*Rukevwe - "I wanted a better me"* and Chapter Six, "*Tamuno – Treated as an 'other' in Italy*". I used thematic narrative analysis in Chapter Four, "*Questions of (Mis)Recognition in the Relationship Between Italian Teachers and Asylum-Seeker Students*"; Chapter Seven, "*Learning to live with discrimination"*; Chapter Eight, "*Lifelong learning provisions for asylum seekers in Italy: What is missing?"* and Chapter Nine, *"Dilemmas and Identity Transformations: An overall discussion"*. The stories are grouped together based on the way they illustrate different facets of the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. Thus, each group of stories provides a different insight about the experiences of the participants. Thematic narrative analysis focuses on the content of the story rather than the precise way the story is structured. The main intent is to keep the story intact for the purposes of interpretation (Reissman, 2008). Chapters Four to Eight have either been published or presented at conferences (and for this reason, repetition of some topics can be observed in the chapters). Though they are autonomous, the chapters are interconnected. The connections are presented in Chapter 9.

In order to be reflexively aware of the various factors that shaped the participants' stories and my interpretation of the stories, I created a proforma (Merrill & West, 2009) to provide an analytic space for me to be faithful to my constructionist-critical approach. Brinkmann points out that "[…] the "meanings" that qualitative interviewers are commonly looking for are often multiple, perspectival, and contradictory, and thus they demand careful interpretation" (2013, p. 24). Thus, I created the proforma with the awareness of the possibility of multiple, perspectival and contradictory meanings. Below is the proforma which served as my interpretation guide.

The constructionist approach:

- What is the general/major interpretation the participant gave to their experience? Whose definition or description are they using?
- In whose tradition/system/culture/context/practice is the reality they are describing a reality? Theirs? Mine? Ours? Nigerian? Italian?
- What value is embedded in the participant's narration?
- In whose favour or to whose detriment is the narration?

- Could the participant's experience have been otherwise? What other possibilities or alternatives can I explore?
- In what way is the participant's experience similar to or different from others? In case of difference, how can this be explained or accommodated?

The critical approach

- Is the emancipatory domain present in CPIA's educational provision of adult learning and education?
    - Emancipation refers to perspective transformation where the focus is on guiding learners to "identify real problems involved in reified power relationships rooted in institutionalised ideologies which one has internalised in one's psychological history"

Levels of interpretation

- What is the micro level implication/interpretation?
- What is the meso level implication/interpretation?
- What is the macro level implication/interpretation?

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations include carrying out research in such a way that participants are not harmed. This requires honesty, respect and concern for participants, protecting confidentiality, asking for permission before recording the interview, etc. Ethical considerations that guided this research include: anonymisation of participants' names, obtaining their informed consent before starting the interview, explaining what the interview was about and sending their transcripts back to them to check for the accuracy of the transcription. The consent form was the one designed by the University of Milano-Bicocca which required me to state important information about my research. I was acutely aware that my research participants were likely to have undergone interrogations, interviews and questionings while making their asylum applications (Morrice, 2011) in addition to being required to sign various documents. Thus, I was aware of the need to be sensitive enough to be clear about the purpose of the interviews

and how I would use them. After explaining what the interview was about, I gave the participants the form to read and sign. I gave them one copy while I kept one copy. I also let them know that I would be recording the interview. On one occasion, a participant also recorded the interview with his phone. After transcribing, I sent the transcripts to them. I received replies from only two persons. The rest did not reply.

Rubin and Rubin gave a succinct summary of the ethical concerns a qualitative researcher should have:

> Because responsive interviews depend on a personal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and because that relationship may result in the exchange of private information or information dangerous to the interviewee, the interviewer incurs serious ethical obligations to protect the interviewee. Moreover, the interviewer is imposing on the time, energy, emotion, and creativity of the interviewee and therefore owes loyalty and protection in return (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 36).

Field Notes/Reflections

One of the primary tools of gathering data in narrative inquiry is field notes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) Fields notes entail the observations of the researchers about the interview context. The researcher writes anything that strikes them. Some of the things a field note can contain are: researchers' feelings and attitudes, participant's portrait, feelings and attitudes, the description of the interview location, sounds, smells, atmosphere; the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee as manifested in but not limited to: attitude, awkwardness, tensions, friendliness, distance; the researcher's ideas before, during and after the meeting. I took field notes or more appropriately, field reflections on what happened during each of the interviews. The field notes I took were useful while making the portraits of the participants and while making interpretations.

Journal Records

Keeping a journal is also an important activity in narrative inquiry. Besides, in adult education a learning journal is often used to sustain the learner; so, for a PhD student it becomes a very useful tool for improvement. The researcher/learner documents their feelings, growth and development, fears, successes, disappointments, revelations as well as how their ideas are developing or changing. Journaling is useful for reflexivity. Depending on the type of narrative inquiry, both the researcher and participants can keep a journal (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), for example in a cooperative or collaborative inquiry. I also tried to keep a record of the evolution of my research, particularly my experiences on the field and my reflections about my experiences. During the analysis of my interview materials, I consulted the reflections and included some of them in my work.

Final Writing of a Narrative Study

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) explain the complex nature of the final writing in a narrative inquiry:

> There is frequently a sense that writing began during the opening negotiations with participants or even earlier as ideas for the study were first formulated. Material written throughout the course of the inquiry often appears as major pieces of the final document. It is common, for instance, for collaborative documents such as letters to be included as part of the text. Material written for different purposes such as conference presentations may become part of the final document. There may be a moment when one says "I have completed my data collection and will now write the narrative," but even then narrative methodologies often require further discussion with participants, such that data is collected until the final document is completed… It is important, therefore, for narrative researchers to be conscious of the end as the inquiry begins (p. 7).

Just like Connelly and Clandinin noted, materials from my analysis that I used for conference presentations were further developed into five articles for journal publication. These articles became Chapters 4-8. Chapter Nine is an overall discussion that presents a synthesis of Chapters 4-8 and integrates my interpretations of the overall results while Chapter Ten presents the conclusions of the dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Questions of (Mis)Recognition in the Relationship between Italian Teachers and Asylum-Seeker Students[1]

Abstract

The potential of the classroom as a relational space for the development of a positive sense of self by asylum seekers has received scant attention in literature. My PhD research explores this potential using Honneth's theory of recognition. In this paper, I work on a small part of my study, involving three teachers from an adult education centre in Italy. By employing narrative inquiry, I search for clues of recognition in the teachers' narratives about their perceptions and values, relationships with learners, and understanding and concern for learners.

Keywords: Migration, asylum seeking, recognition theory, adult learning

Introduction

In this research paper, I examine the relationship between specific groups of teachers and adult learners, namely asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa in northern Italy. My aim is to explore the potential of the classroom as a place where asylum seekers (just like any adult learner) can develop a more positive sense of self through the experience of intersubjective recognition, as stated by Honneth's theory of recognition (Honneth, 1995).

In this article I analyse three interviews with teachers from Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA), a government-run adult education institution in Lombardy. This study is part of my ongoing PhD research where I employ narrative methods to investigate the

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perspectives of both teachers and students. Although more limited in scope and centred only on teachers' narratives, this present article nonetheless provides some insights about the teachers' perceptions and values, relationships with learners, and understanding of and concerns for learners. These factors may contribute to guaranteeing recognition, sustaining learners in developing a healthy sense of self.

My principal aim in this study is to explore how the classroom can be a potential space for intersubjective recognition, especially within the particular context that asylum seekers find themselves: apart from the lucky few who are able to find jobs, most have little to no contact with members of their host society, and often the contact they do have is with social workers, camp workers, or teachers.

Few studies have focused predominantly on asylum seekers' enactment of their sense of self through positive relationships with their teachers; one notable study in this area is West (2014). Other scholars have studied adult education in the context of migration from other perspectives (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018; Duso & Marigo, 2018; Fejes, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Morrice et al., 2017; Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015). Therefore, I believe it is worthwhile to explore the relationship as experienced on both sides, and its effects on learning outcomes.

Migration Challenges and the Role of (Language) Learning

The influx of refugees into Europe presents social inclusion challenges to EU member states (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017). However, this issue is not unique to Europe, since integrating migrants into host societies is a global challenge (Brown et al., 2020). Buber-Ennser et al. (2016), drawing on an OECD study, pointed out that refugees and asylum seekers often face difficulties when entering the educational or employment system of their host country. They noted that the OECD study called for refugee integration programmes to be customised due to the diversity of the refugees' backgrounds. It is also important to understand that integrating

adult immigrants into their new society is not a simple process; it has to be based on mutual respect between the immigrants and the host society (Damiani, 2019). Similarly, Caneva (2014) called for the host community and immigrants to work together in order to create a cohesive society. To achieve this, the host community should view all immigrants as people who can contribute meaningfully to society, and there should be a willingness to allow them to contribute their quota to society building. Bradby et al. (2019) have suggested that social anchoring may help refugees and asylum seekers settle down in their new location.

Social anchoring refers to the provision of appropriate support to newcomers to "restore a sense of security and meaning" as "a means of re-making resilience in a new setting" (Bradby et al., 2019, p. 535). That is, social support systems should help them settle down and imbue them with the hope of leading a good life in their new society. One such form of social support is the provision of educational and learning opportunities. Indeed, the importance of migrants' education has been reasserted over time in various conventions, recommendations, and resolutions (Brown et al., 2020). Usually, language learning is one of the first learning opportunities provided for immigrants by the host community, and is among the primary efforts undertaken by the host community to help facilitate a successful integration process (Burns & Roberts, 2010).

The role of language learning or the requirement of language proficiency for the inclusion or integration of migrants into their host society has been discussed by many scholars (Alhallak, 2018; Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Caneva, 2014; Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018; Damiani, 2019; Fejes, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Morrice et al., 2017; Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015). Andersson & Fejes (2010) opined that language is an important tool for understanding one's social context. Dalziel & Piazzoli (2018) asserted that language learning is part and parcel of the resettlement process for immigrants. Damiani (2019) highlighted the importance of linguistic integration of migrants into their host communities, and stated that it is crucial for fostering intercultural understanding as well as social inclusion. However, while Morrice et al. (2017) acknowledged that transnational migration presents migrants with the challenge of learning a new language, they also claimed that "state funded education for migrants has been

narrowly framed and often limited to language, culture and employment training, while the education needs of the longer term settled population in relation to transnational migration have been largely ignored" (Morrice et al., 2017, p. 130).

Notwithstanding the above, it is clear that learning within these facilities goes beyond courses: the teacher-student relationship is an experience of mutual learning, and recognition is one of its effects, as I will argue.

Learning Provisions for Asylum Seekers in Italy

Adult asylum seekers in Italy access formal learning mainly through CPIA, the government agency responsible for adult education in Italy and which also provides education to foreigners within each province. The centres therefore play a significant role in Italian policies to sustain adult education and lifelong learning. They were launched in the 2014/2015 school year to replace other institutions that carried out continuing education and evening courses. They offer basic literacy courses and Italian language training to foreign adults, qualification courses for the first or second cycle of education as well as for young people aged 16 and over. The first cycle of education comprises primary and lower secondary education, whereas the second cycle offers two different pathways: upper secondary school education and vocational training (*Italy | Eurydice*, n.d.).

Theory of Recognition

Axel Honneth's theory of recognition provides a critical social framework to explain and interpret processes for healthy societal change and building solidarities (Honneth, 1995). It explains how societies develop or inhibit human flourishing. Honneth's theory is "grounded in love and processes of recognition" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 21). Justice, based on social equality and the opportunity for everyone to form their identity, is present in society only if every member receives social recognition that makes them a full citizen (Honneth, 2004). Therefore, he advocates for equal treatment and the enablement of each person's self-

realisation, since "feeling recognised and legitimate in groups and whole society" (Formenti &West, 2018, p. 18) is an essential experience for the human being. Conversely, "the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate' (Honneth, 2004, p. 352). The struggle for recognition, which can arise from the experience of feeling disrespected, provides an explanatory model for social conflicts (Honneth, 1995). Honneth's preoccupation or focus are the patterns of intersubjective recognition at various levels, which may be expressed in three forms, that is, love, rights, and esteem (Boston, 2018; Honneth, 1995), with the resultant effects of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Self-confidence is enhanced when one experiences acceptance from others. Self-respect is forged when one feels accepted as being part of a community of rights. Self-esteem comes from being honoured through the acknowledgment of one's abilities (Honneth, 1995; West et al., 2013, Formenti & West, 2018). In an educational context, West et al. (2013) explain that self-confidence can be reinforced when a student experiences acceptance from lecturers and significant others. Self-respect can also be enhanced when a person is accorded the status of a student with similar capabilities as others. Self-esteem may result from the feeling of being honoured in the educational milieu. These claims are also supported by scholars (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014; Formenti & West, 2018; West, 2014; West et al., 2013).

Methodology and Context

This study adopted a narrative method (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). I held interviews with three teachers who teach at a local CPIA in the region of Lombardy. My initial intention was to gain an understanding of the context in which asylum seekers learn, before interviewing asylum seekers themselves, who are the main subjects of my PhD research. After communicating with the head of the centre, I was able to interview three teachers. The only criterion for selection was their ability to speak understandable English. The interviews took place on the same day in the same place, a public park, because that was the way the participants wanted it due to the difficulties of moving around as a result of restrictions put in place because of the coronavirus pandemic.

I interviewed them in turn but on many occasions, those who were not being interviewed interjected in my interview with their colleague or helped out by offering details. The downside to interviewing them together was that the first interview seemed to frame and partially shape that of the other two. I also felt awkward asking questions that I had already asked and also thinking that the participants would not want to contradict their colleague(s). After the interviews, I felt that the participants provided information that made me understand the context better, particularly about CPIA and the challenges faced by the students, but maybe information was lacking on students' motivations and interests.

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then sent to the participants. Two of them gave feedback. The interview transcripts were first coded manually, and later using free computer software, QDA Miner Lite.

In the presentation of my analysis, I will first provide portraits of my interviewees in order to contextualise their narratives. I will then focus on three factors that emerged as being the most significant when it comes to illuminating their experience of teaching asylum seekers: their perceptions and values, their narratives about their relationship with learners, and their attitude towards understanding and concern for learners. I will discuss how these factors provide clues to the possible experience of intersubjective recognition in CPIA.

Participants' Portraits

As mentioned above, these portraits are a synthesis of the information I have about the three teachers and their position they took during the interview, both towards me and each other. This helps contextualise their answers during the interview and the meaning(s) they entail. I am aware that I am interpreting and selecting information here, not least due to my relationship with them.

Amara – The mother-figure

I first came in contact with Amara through an exchange of emails and, from our exchanges she appeared kind and willing to help. She contacted two other teachers and arranged the interview (time and place). She told me she contacted teachers who could speak English since I cannot speak Italian. The interviews were held during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic when most public places were closed. So, her school was closed and she did not have any reason to come to school but she ensured that the three of them came. Amara was 55 years old at the time of the interview. She came across as a self-assured woman with an air of authority. Though she kept an expressionless face most of the time, she was however inquisitive. She asked me questions about my PhD. She asked for the name of my supervisor and various other questions. During the interview, she seemed to answer the questions as best as she could. She hesitated to comment on things she was not sure about, telling me in a matter-of-fact manner that she was not sure.

She is the vice-principal of the centre. She also teaches English but at the time of the interview, she did more administrative duties than teaching. She studied foreign languages (English and German) at university. She had been at the centre for 7 years. Before coming to CPIA she had had only temporary employment but CPIA offered her permanent employment. A desire to teach adults also contributed to why she decided to work at CPIA. She has experience of teaching in Africa, specifically in Senegal, where she taught for a month. She claimed that the experience of living in Senegal, coupled with the fact that her son studied in South Africa, influenced her positive attitude towards foreigners. Amara was the oldest and the most senior, and the others deferred to her. She coordinated the others for the interview.

Lucia – The one who chose to teach foreigners

I met Lucia while waiting for Amara at the CPIA. She walked up to me where I was sitting and asked if I was the one who came to interview them. She told me she been asked to come for the interview by Amara. She seemed enthusiastic about the interview. She was 32 at the time of the interview. She had been teaching at the centre for 5 years.

Lucia's boyfriend was an asylum seeker from Nigeria. She told me she was looking forward to when she would be able to travel to Nigeria because her boyfriend was yet to be granted asylum status. She said her boyfriend's family members knew her as she always spoke to them on the phone. She told me she could speak Nigerian Pidgin English. She met her boyfriend at CPIA when he was a student. She was really enthusiastic and willing to talk about her experiences as a teacher at CPIA. She held the notion that asylum seekers were not treated well by the government of Italy nor by many Italians. She came across as someone who loved her job. She claimed that it was her choice to teach asylum seekers. This interest led her to specialise in Italian language and culture in her master's degree. Before working at CPIA, she had prior experiences of teaching Italian to non-Italians in a university. She also had the experience of teaching children of foreigners. Lucia was the most vocal of the three participants. She interjected the most. She never hesitated to express her thoughts and opinions about the issues raised.

Chiara – The one who grew into the role

Chiara was aged 30 and she no longer taught at CPIA at the time of the interview, but she had taught there for two years. She had a good knowledge of asylum seekers because she was working both in an asylum seekers' camp and at CPIA at the same time. She got the job at CPIA through the help of Lucia. As a worker in an asylum seekers' camp, she was involved in various aspects of their lives such as going with them for a doctor's appointment or working as an interpreter when asylum seekers went to the commission. She also slept in the camp and both worked alongside and supervised asylum seekers in maintaining the camp. She revealed that she did not find teaching asylum seekers easy at first, as her degree in arts and history did not prepare her for teaching asylum seekers but she later came to like the job. She noted that there was a difference between working in an asylum seekers' camp and teaching asylum seekers at CPIA. According to her, teachers in CPIA are seen as institutional figures and were thus respected, while the case was different in the camp. She had previous experiences of volunteering in Kenya on two occasions where she worked with homeless kids and orphans. She also had the experience of working with prostitutes in Milan. She expressed sympathy towards the plight of asylum seekers and was of the opinion that for many Italians, contact with

foreigners was a relatively new phenomenon in Italy and thus might explain the suspicion with which Blacks are viewed by many, especially the older generation.

Factors Contributing to Intersubjective Recognition

Teachers' Perceptions and Values

In general, teachers' perceptions and values can be revealed in the way they speak about their students. They can view students as needy, disadvantaged, persons who should be reformed or rehabilitated, or as morally responsible persons who have their own interests and desires, and possessing or deserving dignity as human beings. The teachers I interviewed emitted a positive perception of their students and did not seem to have any negative prejudice towards them. On the contrary, they enjoy teaching them and have informal relationships with them.

> They are exactly as all the other people in the sense that some are very good and some are very… they really want to improve… some of them not… There is not a stereotype of refugee students. (Amara)

Amara here is trying to show that she does not paint all asylum seekers with the same brush. She presents herself as a fair person who looks at the situation objectively. Being an asylum seeker does not make you bad or good.

Lucia claims that students are able to relate with her freely without the fear of being judged.

> Yeah, and I have in my class two students, women students, and I'm so happy because they say they have stopped but it's not simple to stop because they have to… Yeah, yeah, they come but it's different because the prostitution is different. In my opinion, it's not the problem of prostitution. If I want to be a prostitute, it's not a problem. The problem is that they are forced into it. (Lucia)

Here Lucia attempts to point out that she is not judgmental about her students' involvement in prostitution; she brings an explanation that justifies it: her students are victims. The fact that they came to tell her that they had stopped working as prostitutes is also a pointer to the fact that the students feel accepted by her.

From the two excerpts presented above, the teachers have striven to present themselves as devoid of bias and stereotyping. For example, Amara uses the word "stereotype," which is interesting because from my personal experience as a Black person in Italy, I have experienced discrimination due to stereotyping. I have noticed a pervading notion that Black people are either beggars or thieves. As an illustration, there were many occasions where I would approach someone to ask for directions, and they would refuse to respond or would instead increase their pace. The teachers apparently realise the existence of stereotyping in Italian society, and they tried as much as possible to show that they are not prejudiced.

Teachers' Relationships with Students

Another relevant factor in these narratives are teacher-student relationships. The teachers narrated that they had positive (and even loving) relationships with their students, which extended beyond the school.

> I'm not a teacher that wants to give my personal mobile number but with some students of mine I do and they are always very polite and very, very kind to me. One of these people, for example, a Senegalese, his mother died when he was only 17. He had a very difficult life here in Lecco. For example, he told me that I will be for him his Italian mum forever. So, we have this kind of relationship. (Amara)

From Amara's statement, she appears to be someone who does not want personal relationships with students, but this stance is not always practicable and therefore she sometimes has to make exceptions. Some questions also arise from her statement: What would make a student decide that his teacher is like a mother to him? What could be the link between a Black student and an Italian woman teacher? Honneth speaks of love as the basis for self-confidence.

> Today, just today, a student of mine, she is from Tunisia, she sent me a message. It was a very long time, almost one or two years that I haven't heard from her, and she told me "Where are you?" And I answered her, "I am always here in the centre." She wrote to me and I told her "Okay, give me some time, then I will be free so we can meet in the afternoon." Then she wrote to me "I'm working in Paris as a cashier in a supermarket but I will be back in the summer in Lecco so we can meet." And I was so happy to hear; she has a really complicated type of life. She has already a small son, not here. So very difficult and we got in touch quite well. And I was so happy because when she started here, she worked at night, she attended middle school, she wanted to attend university but she was not able and I was happy that she was in Paris because she can speak English, she can speak French, she is very intelligent, she can speak

> Italian, Arabic. So, I was very happy. Two or three days ago, another young boy, Senegalese, two of them, they called me, "Prof., where are you?" and so on. Now they are unemployed because of COVID but we want to organise to have a drink next week. When we go to Lecco, we meet students and we always… (Amara)

The participants reveal the empathetic feelings they have toward their students and also express their joy at their students' progress. There are two aspects, here. One is about the affective bond: Amara relates that her (former) students maintain contact with her; she mentions instances where they call and ask, "Where are you?", as we do with our dear ones and friends. The second aspect is their worth: she is able to tell what they have accomplished in their lives, what they are doing. This is a clue of Honneth's third level of recognition: esteem and self-esteem.

All the teachers talked about informal or social meetings with their students outside the school. These narratives of informal relationships can be seen as an attempt by the participants to show that the relationship is authentic and goes beyond the institutional role.

Teachers' Understanding and Concern

The teachers' narrations also reveal a sense of understanding of the challenges that their asylum seeker students face.

> Yes. It's not easy. Like she was telling before, when you teach to asylum seekers, you teach to a person that has a strange situation here in Italy because here in Italy for them is like a limbo, okay. Because you are here waiting for something, you don't know when it will arrive. If it will be positive or negative. How many months must you wait for? And after that what do I do? If it's positive, I can continue to do my project. If it's negative, I will restart again another type of life because when it's negative you must leave the camp. So, you must find an accommodation outside and if it's negative sometimes, you become a *clandestino*, without documents, and it's a problem because if the police… (Chiara)

> It's more difficult to live in the camp because they don't have… I don't want to say that they don't feel like persons because they feel like persons but sometimes they come and say, "In my camp, I am a number and the operator calls, '1, 3 or 25 come.'" They can't cook and sometimes I think okay it's not a big problem but if I think okay, I'm in Nigeria for two years, and I want to cook pizza but it's not possible. Or they have to come at 11 but for a man or woman, it is

> difficult. I am 32 and I want to go to the park with my friends, but then I have to say, "Oh, it's 11, I have to go." I'm not a child. (Lucia)

The teachers' statements reveal their knowledge of some of the challenges asylum seekers face, including accommodation problems, loss of identity, and uncertainty about their asylum application outcome. They show awareness and empathy towards their students. For example, Lucia knows the effects of being reduced to a number, or how being unsure of one's future can be disorienting and impacts negatively on many aspects of their lives, including education.

Amara also narrated extensively how some students' attendance in school is affected by the challenges they face to the extent that some eventually drop out.

> Sometimes, they drop out but it's not their fault because it's not that when you live in a camp that you will be there for the rest of your time that you are waiting for document. So, we ask students… they are really moved like things. The police say, "Okay, today you have to move because there is no more camp here" or "there are too many people and you have to go there." So, for example this camp, and classes were always full even if sometimes they also stayed home and they didn't want to come but it was very easy for them because they could walk. Another fact is how they can reach school because if school is costly, and associations don't always pay for the transport and so they don't always get money for transport because transport is costly. In this situation, for example, Lecco is a small city, we have some camps in the mountains. So, it can be beautiful in the summer but then nothing else because reaching school, you have no train, so you have to catch the bus. There are not so many buses. School is always open but if you finish school at 9pm, you can only catch the train, no buses. So, it's difficult. That's one of the reasons why they drop out, not because of their fault but because they are forced to move and so they are unable to attend anymore. But it depends because some of them they don't want because they are not interested or because there are really hard times because it's always not so... They come to Italy and life is hard and so also from a psychological point of view, it's not so easy. (Amara)

The teachers have made an effort to show that they are trying to understand their students' challenges, which influences school attendance, motivation, and their relationship with them. Showing understanding and concern, not least for their rights, has the potential to make the students feel a sense of recognition at the second level of Honneth's theory: rights and self-respect, that are utterly threatened in the asylum seekers' experience.

Intersubjective Recognition and Classroom Relationship

The aim of this study is to explore the potential of the classroom as a space for identity development and recognition, in other words as a transitional space (Formenti & West, 2018; Merrill & West, 2009; West, 2014; West et al., 2013). According to Formenti and West (2018, p. 95):

> Transitional space can make us feel like babies and infants all over again, including in universities. We may desperately want to feel welcomed, valued and loved. For someone to come alongside and recognise us and our struggles, and emotionally encourage us to become more fully ourselves. We need significant others to welcome who we are in diverse groups, and good enough cultural spaces, to experience feelings of self-respect and self-esteem.

Intersubjective recognition can help students, asylum seekers in this case, to take the opportunity to conduct self-negotiation in a new place, whether it is Italy in general or a CPIA classroom in particular. Clues of recognition can be seen in the teachers' narrations. Amara spoke about a student who said she would be his Italian mother forever. This is an example of recognition in the sphere of love, a sphere that encapsulates familial relationship or friendship (Honneth, 1995). "Love, of a good enough kind" (Formenti and West, 2018, p. 92) or "good enough relationships" (West et al., 2013) are foundational to the development of one's sense of self and enable one to negotiate one's entry into a new space and cope with anxieties associated with such entry. Loving relationships between teachers and asylum seeker students can therefore help such students feel a sense of recognition and build a positive relationship with themselves in the school on a meso level and in society on a macro level. This kind of relationship is possible where teachers' perceptions are based on knowing their students as real persons, and not on prejudices. Students feel a sense of freedom, of "playfulness" in the words of Donald Winnicott as cited in Formenti and West (2018, p.120). True relationships can help students feel accepted and free to be themselves. Amara's narration about a student who said she would be his Italian mother forever seems to indicate that the student recognises her (recognition is thus reciprocal) as someone who accepts him and plays a significant role in his life. Lucia also narrates that her students share secrets with her:

> Sometimes, in my experience, one of my students says to me, "This evening, I move." So, I say, "Okay". "I move, it's illegal, I don't want to… this and this night..." I say, "Okay, okay, my God, my God." I pray. I'm at home but I pray for this student and two days, they send me a message and they say, "Okay now I'm good" and I say, "Okay." (Lucia)

Having an understanding of their students' challenges has the potential to create a relationship of reciprocal recognition between the teachers and asylum seeker students. Whether this is the case, however, can only be confirmed through interviews with their students. The narrative below also reveals how the macro, meso and micro levels of social arrangements can be interwoven:

> There's the first commission where they say "Okay, you are an asylum seeker" and you become a refugee or "You are not an asylum seeker." If they say you are not an asylum seeker, you have another possibility. You have to go to a lawyer to tell your story. This is the second possibility. If the second possibility is not good, you have the third and this is the last but this was before. Now with Decreto Salvini, you have only two possibilities. So it's impossible for me to teach to asylum seekers without this part because this part is the life of my student. So if they say, "I'm so sad because now I don't know what's up with my life," I can't teach because the mind of my student is outside the school and it's normal. So we can speak about this. We can speak about the system. We can speak about the rights. (Lucia)

Lucia stresses the necessity of considering students' emotions when she teaches. If someone shows distress, she cannot go on with the topic she has prepared to teach but will encourage the student to talk about the situation. Honneth's second level is evoked again. Being aware that that the macro level (government, laws, rules) can influence the micro (psyche, feelings and emotions of a person, behaviour, choices), and the potential of the meso level (interactions with others, in this case, classroom interactions) is a way to help asylum seekers deal with emotional tensions or crises of identity, for example in a situation where their application for asylum was rejected. They can also learn how to manage relationships, how to build self-worth, and how to interpret the structures and context where they are living, in a way that is transformative.

There are other clues of recognition in the narratives:

> It's also very beautiful because I have the world in the class and I can compare the culture, the religion, the language, and the people. (Lucia)

> It's a very good experience because I learnt a lot from them about culture, about religion, about other subjects that I didn't know before. (Amara)

These statements suggest that the teachers show recognition to the asylum seeker students and see them as morally responsible persons (Honneth, 1995) from whom they can learn valuable things. Besides the teacher-student relationship, there seems to also be an awareness that asylum seekers are persons who come into the learning environment with a variety of previous experiences and knowledge, and thus should not be generalised/stereotyped. Barkoglou & Gravani (2020, p. 138) found "wide heterogeneity" among migrants "in terms of skills, competences and socio-cultural capital."

The participants' narratives suggest that they try to build relationships with their asylum seeker students so that they can feel accepted and recognised in the classroom. The significance of this should not be minimised considering that the host society may be hostile. Lucia comments:

> Another difficulty is when my students come and say "Prof., in the train, nobody wants to talk with me. There is a big problem of racism. I want to stay here but I feel that I can't stay here." (Lucia)

Being a Black African myself, I can relate to the foregoing statement by Lucia, and I understand what it means to feel recognised at the interpersonal level in an unwelcoming society.

By examining the biographies of these teachers, there might be pointers as to why they appear to be positive about their students. The influence of someone's biography on their attitude and actions is pointed out by Formenti and West (2018), who claim that perspectives are biographical. According to them, "previous experience structures the subject's systems of perception, classification, and management of meaning" (Formenti and West, 2018, p. 171-172). Relating this to the participants of my study, each of them has had some experiences in Africa or with Africans: Amara, for example lived and taught in Senegal for two months. According to her, this experience gave her "…the possibility to know other cultures, other ways of teaching, and also other colleagues and so on." She also narrated that she has a daughter who studied in the Caribbean and a son who studied in South Africa. Chiara had the opportunity to volunteer in Kenya on two occasions, while Lucia has a Nigerian boyfriend who lives with her. It is thus possible that these teachers' experiences have shaped their attitude towards asylum seekers. Formenti and West (2018) also point out that teachers usually have political

notions or agendas which they bring to the class. This is probably the case with Lucia, who revealed: *"I said, 'Okay, I want to be a teacher but not for Italians. I am interested in asylum seekers or refugees or foreigners.'"* There seems to be a hint of an agenda here but what it is specifically is not clear.

Conclusion

This is an exploratory study that I undertook to understand the context of adult asylum seekers' education and learning in Italy, which is the focus of my doctoral research. Therefore, this paper is the outcome of my early fieldwork. I am aware that the small number of participants is not enough to make general claims about the relationship between asylum seekers students and their teachers in educational institutions. Another limitation of this study is that it does not include the views of asylum seekers, which could have corroborated or refuted the narratives of the teachers. I am aware that the teachers might have tried their best to paint a positive picture of themselves and their relationships with asylum seekers, taking into consideration the fact that I am Black, and I come from the same country as some of the asylum seekers in Italy. So, the dynamics of a Black man interviewing White teachers of asylum seekers, many of whom are Black, might have contributed in certain ways to the interview relationship. I would like to add, though, that the participants came across as sincere and open. This is just my personal opinion, and of course might not be the case. Despite the limitations of the study, the interviews have given me a glimpse into the operations of CPIA, the context of asylum seekers' education and learning in government-established adult education centres, and even into the wider context of asylum seeking in Italy. I have also learned that the classroom can be a potential space for helping asylum seekers to develop a more positive sense of self through the willing efforts of teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rukevwe - "I Wanted a Better Me"[2]

Abstract

Scholars have recognised language learning as important and in fact as part and parcel of the settling down process of migrants. In this paper, the author presents the narrative of a refugee who started with language classes and was attending university at the time of the research. This article emanated from empirical research the author carried out with asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. Drawing on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to provide an understanding of how one female asylum seeker achieved a more positive relationship to herself, he shows how participation in language learning was a search for recognition by the participant as well as how it contributed to her self-esteem. He also demonstrates how intersubjective recognition between the participant and her language teacher was important to her learning progress.

Introduction

Many scholars have explored the role of adult education and learning in the integration or resettlement of migrants, not least asylum seekers and refugees (Bartram et al., 2014; Kansteiner, 2018; Slade & Dickson, 2020; Thunborg et al., 2021). Morrice (2021) highlights the potential for learning to serve as a bridge between the refugees' disrupted education and their aspirations to be self-reliant and participate in the host society. A major part of adult education and learning for migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, is language

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learning (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; M. Brown et al., 2020; Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018; Damiani, 2019; Fejes, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Souto-Otero & Villalba-Garcia, 2015).

The predominance of language learning and language proficiency in the adult learning provisions of migrant-receiving nations is a consequence of the notion that language proficiency provides the basis for integration/inclusion in society as well for employment (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Fejes, 2019; Gibb, 2015). However, policies and practices that have focused principally on language proficiency have been critiqued by scholars (Brown et al., 2020; Morrice et al., 2017, 2021). Certain criticism of this prominence given to language learning in the education provisions for migrants include the argument that it ignores adult migrants' cultural diversity and thus encourages a homogenising approach. In essence, the approach fails to consider the specific needs of adult migrants. Another implication of this approach is that it promotes an assimilative view of integration, and Heinemann (2017) asserts that it perpetuates hegemony and makes migrants submissive and compliant subjects. The approach is also based on an underlying assumption of deficit, that is, that adult migrants lack something and therefore need to be helped by the receiving society (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020). The notion that migrants should strive to attain proficiency in the language of the host society can lead to the exclusion or marginalisation of other language skills (Fejes, 2019).

Despite the criticism of the predominance of language acquisition in adult education provisions for migrants, this paper attempts to illustrate some potential benefits of language learning for migrants, not least asylum seekers, through a single story. I adopted a narrative inquiry to explore how adult learning and education, specifically language learning, improved the self-esteem of a refugee in Italy, drawing on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to provide an explanation of how the participant achieved a more positive relationship to herself.

Learning Provisions for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy

In 2014, Italy expanded its structures for receiving, processing and accommodating asylum seekers by establishing new centres of extraordinary reception, centri di accoglienza straordinaria (CAS). By 2017, these centres were accommodating 80% of asylum seekers arriving in Italy (Paynter, 2020, 2022). During their stay in the reception centres, asylum seekers receive an education as well as legal, social and health assistance, although as of 2018, reception centres are no longer obligated to enrol asylum seekers in language classes. While some reception centres still enrol asylum seekers in language classes, asylum seekers who are not enrolled by their centre have to pay for them. In Italy, the provincial centres for adult education (Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti, CPIA) are the major public institutions for adult education (Daniele et al., 2018; Deiana & Spina, 2021; Loprieno et al., 2019; OECD, 2021). One of the duties of these centres is to provide educational offerings for immigrants, and adults seeking asylum in Italy mainly access formal education and vocational training through CPIA. CPIA also offer lower secondary school and upper secondary school qualification courses for migrants and for Italians interested in continuing education (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Longo, 2019). While CPIA are meant to serve both Italians and foreigners, the learners at CPIA are predominantly foreigners who come to learn Italian due to its importance in aiding integration and it being a requirement for obtaining long-term residency (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Longo, 2019). As a result, language classes for migrants are a major part of CPIA education provisions (Deiana & Spina, 2021).

Theory of Recognition

Honneth's theory of recognition arose from his attempt to rethink the potential of critical social theory as a tool for emancipation (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b; West et al., 2013; Zurn, 2017). He advanced the theory of recognition to show that self-realisation derives from the recognition received by others and that recognition is pivotal to both personal and social development (Boston, 2018; Fleming, 2016; Honneth, 1995, 2004; Huttunen, 2007; Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013). Thus, the theory of recognition is "fundamentally based on the notion of the intersubjective constitution of the subject" (Petherbridge 2013, p. 147). Intersubjective

recognition can be expressed in three forms: love, rights and esteem. Self-confidence is enhanced when one experiences acceptance by others. Self- respect is forged when one feels accepted as part of a community of rights. Self-esteem comes from being honoured through the acknowledgment of one's abilities (West et al. 2013). Self-confidence follows the experience of being loved and cared for by one's immediate family and friends, which imbues an individual with both a sense of being someone who has needs which deserve to be met and the freedom to express oneself without fear. Self-realisation begins in this sphere of recognition, the familial sphere. Self-respect develops in a sphere where there is mutual recognition of and respect for the rights of others under law with the assumption that each person is an autonomous moral agent. This gives the individual the sense of being a full member of the society in which he or she has the legal right to participate in social processes. Self-esteem is fostered in a sphere where individuals are recognised for their unique contributions to society. In this market-mediated sphere, individuals evaluate themselves based on other people's perceptions of their achievements. Solidarity and collaborative activities enhance self-esteem (Boston, 2018; O'Brien, 2013).

Research Context

This study adopted a narrative method in which narratives are seen as data to be systematically analysed and interpreted in order to arrive at an understanding (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). They are regarded as data to be made "amenable to conceptual analysis and theoretical explanation" (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020, p. 19). One important aspect of narratives to keep in mind is that participants have different reasons for what they choose to tell and what they choose to leave out (Formenti, 2014; West, 1996). These reasons include the emotions attached to such stories, for example, if they generate pleasant or sorrowful emotions (West 1996) and the role of the context of the narration in determining the story that is told (Galimberti 2014). It should also be noted that stories tell much more than what appears on their surface, and they do not explain themselves alone. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to interpret them (Merrill & West, 2009).

The interview with the participant lasted slightly more than one hour. It was transcribed in full and no attempt was made to ensure the grammatical correctness of the speech. Three dots indicate pauses while four dots indicate that a speech has been shortened. Italics were used when the participant was reporting someone else's speech. The questions I asked are indicated in bold. For the sake of anonymity, the participant's name has been changed to Rukevwe. She went through the transcript and confirmed that it represents her thoughts. In keeping with the tradition of qualitative research, this research did not aim at representativeness or generalisation but at resonance, plausibility, moral persuasiveness and explanatory power (West 1996). I read through the transcript thoroughly and considered the themes that emerged for analysis.

A Search for Recognition

Rukevwe came to Italy in 2015. She reported that her primary desire was to make money, so when she was enrolled in language classes, she did not attend the classes. Instead, she chose to work as a hairdresser. She later found out that she needed to attend language classes but when she eventually decided to start attending the classes, her boss would not allow her to go because there were customers to be dealt with. As a result, she decided to leave the job in order to concentrate on language classes at a CPIA: "*But end of the day, I finally dropped and I took the lessons serious for just one year."*

Rukevwe explained why she decided to take language classes seriously. Some of her experiences made her realise the importance of learning to speak Italian:

> …at the time whereby I was getting some opportunities of jobs, meeting some kinds of people, finding myself in some kind of gatherings that I couldn't even explain or express myself… because I met friends then. I really made lots of friends then and it sometimes, it was like a situation whereby I was in a place…in the midst of friends, I was the only person that spoke English. And some of them even didn't understand, and even when they did understood me, but they couldn't get what I was trying to say. So, I just knew that I had to learn the language.

Rukevwe foregrounded the importance of language learning for migrants, not least asylum seekers. Though she was not interested in learning Italian initially, she came to discover that language learning was necessary for employment and integration. The scholars mentioned above have pointed out the importance of language acquisition for employment (Andersson &

Fejes, 2010; Fejes, 2019; Fejes et al., 2020; Gibb, 2015; Morrice, 2021). It is therefore not surprising that Rukevwe's desire to get a job was a strong motivation for her to take language classes seriously. The reason she did not attend language classes at first was because she wanted to work and earn money; dissatisfaction with her first job due to the low pay and the realisation that her chances of getting a better job would improve if she could speak Italian was what spurred Rukevwe to start attending Italian language classes.

Personal aspirations and desires were another motivation for Rukevwe to learn Italian:

> …Because I wanted a better me. I don't…I don't… I'm not judging. I wanted a better me. I know it was just through school that I can get it. Just like you, anywhere you go to, you are going to get a good job.
>
> **I hope so. Hopefully.**
>
> So, you don't expect people that just sat down with a secondary school certificate that doesn't read apart from Nigeria, and you want to get a good job. No. Even now that I am studying, it's still better off than I just went to the course. You know? So, I just wanted a better me. I just knew that the…because then it was into three we were doing. Whatever we make, whatever hair I make, if should make 100 euros a day, she's going to split it into three and give me a part of it. So, I knew that wasn't enough for me. That wasn't what I wanted. Yeah…

Rukevwe's statement reveals her epistemic and agentive self (Schiffrin, 1996). She positioned herself as an agentic subject with a driving motivation for learning Italian. She repeated the statement, "I wanted a better me". Using me as an example, she contextualised this statement by disclosing her belief that an educated person had better chances of a good life than someone who was uneducated. Thus, her desire to improve her chances of having a good life in Italy was why she went to school. To her, education was the way to increase her social and economic standing in Italy. Merrill (2015) points out that non-traditional students – people who are underrepresented in educational institutions and who experience structural constraints in accessing learning – believe education is a way to change one's life. Morrice (2011) found that refugees in the UK saw higher education as a path to re-establish their professional identity. A similarity can be found in Rukevwe's story: she viewed education as a means for creating a positive identity for herself. This might hint at a search for recognition through education and learning; her identity was shaped by her educational and career accomplishments. Rukevwe also seemed to imply that one's level of education determines one's chances of finding a good

job. In the next section, we will see how Rukevwe constructed how proficiency in Italian contributed to her progress.

Language Learning and Personal Progress: The Connection

Rukevwe highlighted the significance of language learning to her personal progress. For instance, she traced her linguistic proficiency in Italian to her time in language classes *"…because in every building, you need a foundation. CPIA was my foundation… even though "I won't say when I was in terza media or CPIA, I spoke the language correctly but it was a foundation for me."* She underlined the importance of language classes to her academic progress:

> …These are my foundation, how I can speak because before you even go to the university, you have to have B1 or B2 of the Italian language, if you are studying in Italian language.

Her progress might have been difficult without the help of her supportive language teacher. Rukevwe expressed fond memories of Isabella, her teacher at the language school, and described her as patient and helpful. This implies that Isabella was a significant other for Rukevwe (West 2014). Rukevwe felt loved and valued by Isabella and she also loved Isabella, thereby underscoring the significance of a positive teacher-student relationship. On more than one occasion, Rukevwe mentioned that Isabella loved her job. She remembered how Isabella helped her design her first CV. To show how highly she held Isabella, Rukevwe told the story of how she saw Isabella one day after she graduated from the CPIA:

> ….My first curriculum, she was the one that did it for me.
>
> **That's CV?**
>
> Yeah, my first CV. It's called curriculum in Italian, sorry. So, she was the one that did it for me. I would remember…curriculum, it took…the CV took more than four or five hours to put together.
>
> **Why?**
>
> Because the language…to tell her what I wanted, it was so difficult. To tell her my experience, what I have done in Nigeria, what I know how to do, you know? It was so difficult because she spoke a lesser English, and these were the things that I have to tell her in English and she have to come up with her mind to put it together in Italian be- cause she has to make an Italian CV

> for me, and Isabella was really nice and I remember the day, we walked, we did a march around Milano. We met. The way I screamed her name. it was as someone…as though I saw a unicorn.
>
> **Who were the ones doing the march?**
>
> Different organisations, different asylum-seeking agency. I don't really know…I can't really re- member why we marched again but we were so many. Italians, Africans, I think the march was against Salvini or so. The one before this one that just passed. We did it around and she saw me. I jumped on her. I screamed and people were just like 'what's going on' and all that. So, that is one of the good memory for me….

Rukevwe's narration suggests that there was intersubjective recognition (Honneth 1995) between her and Isabella. Rukevwe felt valued that Isabella viewed her as a person worthy of her time and assistance, which made her hold Isabella in high esteem. This point is important for adult educators, including language teachers: finding ways to make learners feel valued is crucial, especially in language classes where learners have to feel confident in order to make progress (Formenti & West, 2018). Merrill (2015) mentioned how supportive teachers can inspire students to keep going with their studies. In his reflection on the implication of Honneth's theory of recognition for adult education, Huttunen (2007) states that the task of adult education is to promote a society where love, caring and reciprocal recognition exist, allowing each individual to develop a healthy self- relationship and work towards self-realisation and flourishing. Huttunen states that Honneth's theory of recognition is primarily about "people's respect, love, and caring for each other…" (Huttunen 2007, p. 432). West et al. (2013) argue that acceptance by teachers and significant others can enhance students' self-confidence, thus situating a loving and caring relationship in the sphere of love since Honneth states that recognition in the sphere of love leads to self-confidence (Honneth 1995). Moreover, Honneth (1995) identifies encouragement or affective approval as being important in the sphere of love.

Determination and Improved Self-Identity

In Rukevwe's narration, she constructs herself as an agentic person, *"…For myself, I will tell you that I have this zeal. When I…Except I'm not energised, motivated to do something. You can't motivate me. My motivation comes from within."* She explains further:

> I would remember a friend of mine asking me, "Are you a man? Why are you acting like a man? Whenever you see a man doing something, you want to do it. What do you have to prove?" I'm not proving anything. I just feel that there is no limit of what you can attain in life when you are really motivated and you want to do it.

By constructing an identity of a resilient and determined learner, Rukevwe alluded to how she was able to attain proficiency in the Italian language. Merrill (2015) points out that determination is a trait noticeable in non-traditional students. Despite the fact that she was mocked for leaving her job for language classes, Rukewve was not discouraged. She narrated that though it was not easy for her after leaving her job because she no longer had the means to earn any income, her resolve to keep attending language classes was buoyed by her fellow asylum seekers' acknowledgement of her proficiency in Italian:

> …When I knew that what I was doing was really good, apart from me, for myself, but for others – I don't really think to learn something is for myself. I think I do stuff if I know I can use it to help others also. It was when my friend was going for her last commission because they had given her negative before, and she said she doesn't know what to say, that she just said the story and she could remember less. You understand? So, I was like, "Okay, bring your story written in Italian." I read it for her and I explained to her what she had said already and what she needed to remember since it was her story but I just read it. I read it in Italian, and these were one of the people that mocked me when I was going to the school…

By asking for her help, Rukevwe's friends and acquaintances recognised her abilities and worth. According to Honneth (1995), this recognition is recognition in the sphere of social esteem. This feeling of being valued for her proficiency in Italian contributed to Rukevwe developing a healthy self-identity. She began to see herself as someone valuable within her social milieu. This recognition served as a motivation for Rukevwe to keep schooling: learning the Italian language placed her in a position where she could assist others.

Rukevwe underscored the link between language learning and self-development. Her proficiency in Italian had given her the opportunity to participate in some vocational courses, thus increasing her profile and chances of employment. The development of a self-assured identity is noticeable in her narration:

> …If you go through my certificate, you will see that I have gone for secretary school. I've gone to the course. I've gone for receptionist course, informatica course, which is computer training in their language here. I know the language and I've… I even have some kind of experience. So, sometimes when I ask for job, they want to know the level of your capacity, where they

should put you. So, if they have higher position, they can give you based on what you have already put in your curriculum. You understand? Sometimes, it's not really about what you put in your curriculum. you have to live it for them to see it that this is what is really…what you are really carrying with you, so, to say…

Rukevwe spoke of a time when she really needed a job and she saw a cleaning job advert. She sent her CV to the place but was told the job was not for her:

…So, I know how many proposal that has come and they will like *"No, maybe you need to look for…"* When they see my curriculum, my CV, *"Maybe you need to look for other jobs,"* because of the formation (training) and everything that I have done, you know? Okay, like there was a time I was just looking for a job. I just wanted to work. I think I went on for a period of time because of the books I had to buy, and I saw this cleaning place and I sent my curriculum. They said, "Signora, qua non e per te." They didn't give me the job because…

Sorry, could you say that again?

Yeah, Signora, this is not yours. Like, "I think you should look for other jobs because…"

This scenario narrated by Rukevwe reveals an instance of the recognition of her worth. The prospective employer recognised her worth and advised her to look for other jobs commensurate to her level of education. This kind of experience of recognition has the potential to contribute to a healthy sense of self.

To drive home her point about the necessity of learning Italian, Rukevwe contrasted the experience of those who acquire proficiency in Italian and those who lack proficiency in the language:

….for people that don't understand the language, they can't negotiate. They are just going to be given, what they want to be given. And some, they even work so many hours without contract. I heard of a girl the other day who told me the other day that she worked more than four, five months for a man that didn't want to pay her. He's paying her 250 a month. 250 a month. That girl wasn't staying in the house. She worked sometimes 9 hours a day, cleaning job.

How many hours?

9. Let me not exaggerate, 8 or 7 above but nothing less than 7. She was really fat when I met her but after she must have done cleaning job, she became so thin, Tonia. She was telling me, "Rukevwe, please if you know any lawyer, we should sue this man." How can you sue the man? You can't sue him. There was no written contract. The language does not help.

She doesn't speak Italian?

She doesn't know the language. She doesn't know the language.

Despite Rukevwe's position that an inability to speak Italian can make one susceptible to exploitation, research has found that migrants from the global South usually experience underemployment or precarious employment in the global North Andersson & Guo, 2009; Gogia & Slade, 2011; Morrice, 2011; Morrice et al., 2017; Shan & Guo, 2013; Slade, 2004, 2008). However, this does not imply that language acquisition has no advantages. For example, employers of labour will prefer a person who can speak Italian over someone who cannot. Proficiency in the language also helps a person to read and understand the terms in the job contract which someone without linguistic proficiency may not understand.

Conclusion

Rukevwe's story reveals a search for recognition through learning and education. This is a motivation that has been found among adult learners (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b; Sandberg, 2016; Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013; West, 1996; West et al., 2013). Her decision to learn Italian was about finding employment and forging relationships. This signals a search for recognition in the spheres of personal relationship and social esteem (Fleming, 2016; Honneth, 1995; West et al., 2013). According to her narration, learning Italian was the foundation for other things she has achieved. Already able to speak Italian, she was able to get into the university and also to negotiate employment terms with prospective employers. Morrice (2021) asserts that refugees can be motivated to take part in learning if there is a prospect to acquire higher education. She further states that the opportunity to acquire higher education is crucial for refugees to achieve self-reliance, lead a dignified life and have a sustainable future.

Rukevwe's story illustrates the role of agency in her academic progress in Italy. Once she was convinced that language acquisition was the gateway to a better life for her in Italy, she was determined to learn Italian and acquire any form of learning available in order to boost her chances of securing good employment. Following her educational achievement, she seemed to develop a self-assured identity and improved self-esteem.

The significance of having a supportive teacher was evident in Rukevwe's narration. She attributed her progress in the language class to the interest Isabella showed in her. Entigar (2022) encourages adult educators to be reflective enough to support the growth and self-determination of learners. The need for teachers to show support, understanding and care has been emphasised by different scholars (Fleming, 2016; Murphy & Brown, 2012; West, 2014; West et al., 2013).

CHAPTER SIX

Tamuno – Treated as an 'Other' in Italy[3]

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) 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 (West, 2016a). Squire (2008, 2013) and West (2016a) 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 Application 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, 2012b, 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, p. 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).

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 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.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Learning to Live with Discrimination[4]

Abstract

Otherness is one issue that comes up when discussing migration, and when it comes to asylum seeking in Europe, the topic of discrimination is a pivotal one also due to the rise of nationalistic political parties in the last few years. This paper therefore uses narrative interviews and Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to explore the experiences of one refugee and one asylum seeker with discrimination in Italy, and how they were responding to these experiences. The aim of the paper is to highlight how discrimination impacted differently on the participants' construction of self-identity and their different strategies when it comes to becoming part of the host society.

Keywords: Asylum seeking; discrimination; informal learning; misrecognition

Introduction

Italy is a popular destination for immigrants who attempt to enter Europe via the Mediterranean (Bencivenga, 2017; Dovigo, 2019; Nuzzolese & di Vella, 2008; Paynter, 2020) but this category of desperate migrants is portrayed as undesirable elements by the Italian media (Russo et al., 2016). This has made immigration a political challenge in Italy and in many other countries (Androvičová & Bolečeková, 2019; Bartram et al., 2014; Castles, 2000, 2018; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018) with governments at loss as to how to handle it. One of the reasons for this is the attempts by nationalists to make political gains from the issue of immigration. They do this by feeding on the suspicions and doubts of members of the host

[4] This chapter was presented at the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults' (ESREA) Life History Migration, Transnationalism and Racisms Network Preconference under the title **Life as a Black asylum seeker in Italy: Narratives of two Black asylum seekers in Italy**. The presentation was further developed into a journal article, and it is currently under review.

society by portraying immigration as a challenge to national identity and cultural traditions as well as a phenomenon that compounds the socio-economic challenges of the receiving nation (Androvičová & Bolečeková, 2019; Bartram et al., 2014; Bischoff, 2018; Čáky, 2019; de Coninck, 2020; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018; Lutz & Bitschnau, 2022).

There is no doubt that migration leads to some social transformations in the receiving society such as multilingualism and multiethnicity (Mecheril, 2018), and some of the concomitant challenges of immigration include the social inclusion or integration and participation of newcomers (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Formenti & Luraschi, 2020; Kurantowicz et al., 2014), and the desire to make them have a sense of belongingness because of the tendency by members of the receiving society to view immigrants as foreigners, or in some cases aliens. Bischoff notes that, "Migration is always associated with Otherness, which in turn is seen as cultural difference, and usually also as inferiority" (2018, p. 26). In order to tackle the challenge of othering, for many authors it seems important to acknowledge differences and celebrate diversity. However, this raises many questions and even paradoxes: Who is the 'other'? And how do we construct them. The other is that subject or person who is regarded as inferior based on certain characteristics. Such a person experiences barriers to their flourishing in the society. In essence, such a person's humanity is undermined and devalued. The definition of othering by Powell and Menendian as "a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities" (2016, p. 17) shows that the other is constructed through prejudice based on group identity. They point out that othering has many dimensions which include race, class, disability, sexual orientation, religion, among others.

The acknowledgment of differences and celebration of diversity might not always translate to positive experiences for migrants as it has been found out that in some societies, certain categories of immigrants (for example, those who are poor, those who lack legal permission to stay in the country, those who are under skilled, persons from certain countries or persons with different religious or ethnic backgrounds) are discriminated and live on the margins with poor opportunities for development if there are no intentional actions to counter discriminatory

practices (Androvičová & Bolečeková, 2019; Portes, 2009). The question is: How does discrimination work for these migrants, notably for asylum seekers and refugees, who typically belong to the most marginalised categories (maybe not always, like the Ukrainian refugees who were received warmly by the countries of Europe)? The understanding of personal experiences and strategies can highlight the dynamics of discrimination and their consequences in terms of inclusion and well-being of migrants, but also for the ecosystemic wellbeing of the host society. Interpretative narrative inquiry can be a way to gain knowledge about the processes at micro, meso and macro levels.

This paper therefore aims to explore in depth how two asylum seekers from Nigeria have learned to cope with life in Italy. The questions I seek to elaborate in this paper include: What experiences of othering did these Black asylum seekers encounter in Italy and what coping strategies were they employing to address their experiences? Answering these questions provides new insights about how asylum seekers and refugees deal with experiences in the host society that are not only "unpleasant" but threatening their sense of being human, their agency and their identity. In the remaining parts of this paper, I briefly discuss asylum seeking in Italy, the theory of recognition and analyse my interview materials followed by the discussion of findings.

Asylum Seeking and Integration in Italy

Italy is the number four country with the highest number of asylum seekers (European Commission, 2022b; European Council & Council of the European Union, 2022; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Eurostat, 2022). In 2021, Italy received about 45,000 applications for asylum (European Commission, 2022b). Asylum seekers are expected to make their application within 8 days of arrival in Italy. A decision is expected to be made on an asylum application within 30 days but in case of complicated circumstances, the whole process can take up to six months, and if the six months deadline is not met, there is a provision for a maximum of 18 months for each asylum application to be considered. If the application is accepted, asylum is granted and the asylum seeker becomes a refugee (Russo et al., 2016).

Although Caneva (2014) claims that integration in Italy is (narrowly) conceptualised in terms of economic insertion or participation in the labour market, Scardigno (2019) however contends that Italy complies with the European Union's integration policy through actions to prioritise the active inclusion and participation of asylum seekers and refugees into the economic and social system by recognising the importance of access to education and granting recognition to qualifications acquired outside of Italy.

The procedures for the "integration" of asylum seekers in Italy operate in three phases. The first phase entails rescue and identification. Identification is carried out by fingerprinting and photographing the new arrivals. This happens immediately at the places of disembarkation, and it is coordinated by national authorities. This process is obligatory and hasty, and its meaning can be very obscure for the newcomer; most of them, for example, do not know about the Dublin Regulation and the fact that their pilgrimage towards asylum starts from there.

The second phase involves the accommodation of the newly arrived persons, and it is coordinated by local authorities. Accommodation can mean a lot for someone who had no appropriate clothes, food, water and medicine, and who had risked their life. However, this experience is also very hard: camps are overcrowded, poorly handled. Initial disorientation can be extreme. Food and ways of doing things are totally new and often unpleasant. Distributed accommodation in small apartments and residential centres have been dismantled in many places due to the new regulations (Formenti & Luraschi, 2020).

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). At each step of the process, the person is actively involved: even when they are storied as vulnerable or victims, or passive, the newcomers are attentive, strategic, more or less aware of what is going on, more or less sympathetic, demanding or

dependent. Each has a story to tell, desires and hopes. So, beyond the procedure, we need to understand the process and the involved subjectivities.

The Italian situation appears overall very problematic when it comes to a real possibility for migrants' integration. I opine, based on my interviews, that while Italy has legal provisions to encourage the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into its society, these provisions do not seem to facilitate their sense of belonging. Dalziel & Piazzoli (2018) quote Catalano (2016) who paints a pessimistic picture of migrants' integration in Italy by declaring "the systematic negative representation of migrants in Italy as a burden to Italian society" (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2018, p. 9) that appears very reluctant to engage in any exchange or dialogue with immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. Paynter (2022) states that the widespread assumption that being economic migrants, Africans are not 'real' asylum seekers entails that that they use up resources and provisions for real asylum seekers. Russo et al. (2016) assert that the media often depicts refugees and asylum seekers in derogatory terms. Venturini and Villosio (2018) also point out that foreigners in the Italian labour market are mostly concentrated in poorly paid and low-skilled jobs, even when they possess high qualifications. This reality is described as the 'racialisation' of knowledge (Bencivenga, 2017) or 'ethnicisation' of jobs (Venturini & Villosio, 2018) with the consequence that migrants' full potentials are not valued.

Furthermore, with the enactment of the law, n. 113/2018, otherwise known as Decreto Salvini, which abolished the category of 'Humanitarian Protection', asylum seekers in Italy are no longer entitled "to receive integration support (e.g., work orientation services, legal and psychological support)" (Bianco & Cobo, 2019, p. 3; Formenti & Luraschi, 2020). This also means that there is no longer an obligation by reception centres to provide language classes to asylum seekers. However, the law, guarantees linguistic education to minors and those who have been granted asylum (Bianco & Cobo, 2019). Bianco and Cobo (2019) also describe Italy's integration practices as assimilative due to the emphasis on acquiring Italian language in order to obtain long-term residency and Italian citizenship. They however point out that this is a feature of the EU's integration policies. It implies that language teaching for migrants,

including asylum seekers and refugees, in Italy and other European countries does not consider the linguistic needs of specific persons but is focused on preparing them for the labour market.

Informal Learning and Migration

Adult education recognises formal, non-formal, and informal contexts of learning (Belanger, 2016) and with focus shifting to lifelong learning in adult education policies and practices (Belanger, 2016; Belete et al., 2022; Morrice, 2011; Oduaran, 2014; Preece, 2013), the roles of non-formal and informal learning in adults' lives have been receiving a lot of attention from adult education scholars. 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, 2012a, 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.

The European Commission provides a distinction among formal, non-formal and informal learning:

- Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications.
- Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations).
- Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and nonformal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills (Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 8).

Morrice notes that focusing on lifelong learning broadens the concept of learning to include non-formal and informal learning, hence recognising that "formal learning is only a small part of the totality of significant learning and that the informal learning which occurs through transient social interactions may be of much greater significance" (Morrice, 2011, pp. 34–35). She also notes that some people use the terms non-formal and informal learning interchangeably. Furthermore, according to Morrice, the focus on lifelong learning in adult education policies has not been without criticism, and one of the criticisms against this shift in focus is that lifelong learning places a burden on people to keep updating their skills in order to meet the rapidly changing demands of the global economy.

In the context of migration, informal learning may take place when people make sense of what they need and how to act in their new socio-cultural contexts. Most times, informal learning takes place as "social learning, distributed throughout the lifeworld; it proceeds through social interaction"(Rogers, 2014, p. 41). Kurantowicz et al. view "migration as a process of education and learning" (2014, p. 146). Morrice states that "Becoming a refugee involves significant learning" (2013, p. 267) because the individual has to learn new values, rules and behaviours.

Morrice (2011), drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991), posits that learning is a fundamental part of social interaction. Thus, as newcomers interact with members of their host society, they gain understanding of social practices, positions and roles. This explicates the connection between informal learning and identity. The understanding that a newcomer develops about social practices, positions and roles will contribute to how they position themselves in the host society and will determine how much they participate in it the new society.

Thunborg et al. (2021) used biographical interviews with five asylum seekers to explore 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 to us to the fact that a lot of learning that is not organised or conscious, or not desirable at all, is taking place in 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. We can therefore conceptualise that self and identity are constructed through informal learning. This learning usually occurs during social encounters and interactions even in formal learning situations, and when it is integrated into a person's biography, it can lead to a transformation in the person's identity (Morrice, 2011), and as mentioned above concerning the study by Thunborg et al. (2021), learning is not always positive, as their study result shows that some asylum seekers learned to be marginalised or disconnected.

In the latter part of this paper, I will show how my participants learned to cope with discrimination and racism, and how their strategies affected the construction of a migrant's identity.

The Contribution of the Theory of Recognition to Self-Identity

Axel Honneth's theory (Honneth, 1995) explains that intersubjective recognition shapes how people build their self-identity. When a person receives recognition from other people, the person develops a healthy sense of self. Intersubjective recognition is manifested in three spheres (Fleming, 1995, 2011a; Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b; Honneth, 1995; West, 2014; West et al., 2013).

The first sphere, love, is characterised by subjects' dependence on each other; 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) because it is in this sphere of recognition that individuals develop basic self-confidence.

The second sphere of recognition 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). People should be seen as morally responsible persons with rights and capability to participate in societal affairs. 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).

The third sphere of recognition, social esteem, concerns the full manifestation of a person's traits and abilities. When an individual's uniqueness and contribution to society are recognised, Honneth points out that such recognition helps the individual to develop their self-esteem.

When a person is denied recognition, their self-identity is injured (Honneth, 1995). This underscores how humans need recognition from others in order to develop healthy self-identity. Honneth locates misrecognition or disrespect in the three spheres of recognition. He argues that social or structural exclusion of persons is misrecognition (disrespect) in the sphere of rights, and damages a person's self-respect. Experiences of misrecognition can lead to a struggle for recognition whereby individuals seek redress for their situation. Honneth's attempt in developing the theory of recognition is to advance the concept of the 'ethical life'. This concept of ethical life, according to him, refers to all the conditions that are necessary for an individual to develop a good self-identity. The ethical life can be identified in "a society in which the universalistic achievements of equality and individualism would be so embedded in patterns of interaction that all subjects would be recognized as both autonomous and individuated, equal and particular persons" (Honneth, 1995, p. 175). So, the ethical society is the society where conditions for self-realisation for everyone are present.

Some adult education scholars have written about the place of recognition in adult learning. In his theoretical reflection on the Fraser-Honneth debate, Huttunen (2007) states that the task of adult education is to promote a society where love, caring and reciprocal recognition exist,

allowing everyone to be able to develop a healthy relation to self and work towards self-realisation and flourishing. He thus advocates for spaces where people can experience love, care and respect in order to develop a healthy self-esteem. West (2014) shows how care and concern shown by significant others can contribute to an individual's self-development. He demonstrated how the feeling of being seen and valued by others, through the forging of caring relationships can help a person to overcome self-doubts, gain self-confidence and become more agentic. West, Fleming and Finnegan (2013) also argue that acceptance by others can enhance students' self-confidence while the feeling of being granted the status of a student with the same rights as other students can improve a person's self-respect. Sandberg and Kubiak (2013) explored the place of Honneth's recognition theory in the processes and practices of *recognition of prior learning* (RPL) by studying the experiences of paraprofessional workers in health and social care in the UK and Sweden. They claim that by making all learning experiences (including non-formal and informal) visible and recognised, RPL can improve self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, RPL has the potential to contribute to a person's healthy self-identity (Sandberg and Kubiak, 2013).

Methodology, Context and Participants

In this study, I adopted a narrative method in which narratives were provoked, then analysed and interpreted in order to arrive at a deep and critical understanding (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). The narrative interview provides rich materials about the experiences of participants, or better put, their narrative construction of experience, because they are able to talk about what is most important to them without being stopped. Throughout the study, I tried to take into account that when telling their stories, participants choose what to reveal and what to omit due to some reasons (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020; Formenti, 2014; West, 1996). Part of the reasons include: the sentiments attached to the story being told, for instance, if the story brings back pleasant or painful memories (West, 1996); besides, the interview context shapes the interviewee's narrative (Galimberti, 2014). That is, the interviews I held were co-constructions of reality between the participants and myself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2003, 2013). Another important point to take into consideration is that stories tell much more than what appears at their surface, and they do not explain themselves

alone. This is why the interpretation of participants' narratives is crucial (Merrill & West, 2009). The interpretation was subjective since I interpreted the narratives through my experiences – not least, my own status as a Nigerian PhD student in Italy – and what I thought the participants were communicating (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I transcribed the interviews in full and I made no attempt to make the participants' expressions grammatically correct. Three dots indicate pauses while shortened speech are indicated by four dots. Italics were used when the participant was reporting someone else's speech. Words in parentheses are my explanations. Participants' names have been anonymised for confidentiality. Being a qualitative study, this research does not aim at representativeness or generalisation but at "resonance, plausibility, moral persuasiveness and explanatory power" (West, 1996).

Participants

The narratives of two asylum seekers are presented in this paper because their interviews revealed instances of discrimination and their different responses to these experiences. The participants were asylum seekers from Nigeria. They were both living in the Lombardy region of Italy. My interviews with the participants took place in Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin English. Nigerian Pidgin English is a blend of English words and local words from Nigerian languages, so most people in Nigeria, regardless of their educational status, can speak Pidgin English. The participants and I switched between Standard English and Pidgin English throughout the interviews. It is important to point out that while speaking standard English, their statements were most times not grammatically correct but they are presented verbatim in order to preserve their voice. Below are short portraits of the participants.

Steve

Steve came to Italy in May 2017. He arrived in the South of Italy and was later transferred to Lombardy. His immediate goals after arriving in Italy were to get a job by the end of 2017 and learn the language. His motivation to learn Italian was fuelled by the need to get a job and to

communicate with people. He got a job before the end of 2017 and since then he had been combining schooling and working. While in middle school, he and one of his teachers, a White Italian lady, started a romantic relationship. He was working as a security guard at the time of the interview. Apart from his regular job as a security guard, he also worked as a mediator/interpreter for other Nigerians because of his ability to speak Italian. I interviewed Steve in a public park in company of his girlfriend. The interview lasted for almost two hours. Steve felt that while life for a Black person in Italy was difficult, things were more difficult for asylum seekers from Nigeria.

Charles

Charles came to Italy in 2016. After the success of his asylum application, he went to Belgium. He came back to Italy because of a particular document he needed, and planned to return to Belgium as soon as he got the document. He had found it difficult to get a satisfactory job since he returned to Italy. At the time of the interview, he was working with a food delivery company, where he delivered food using his bicycle. I interviewed Charles in his house. The interview lasted for one hour. Throughout the interview, he was critical about life in Italy. He alleged that Italy was the most racist country in Europe. He expressed the view that Italy was a difficult place for Black people to live.

Encounters with discrimination

Both Steve and Charles recounted experiences of discrimination in Italy. Their accounts reveal that discrimination exists in different segments of the society in Lombardy, Italy. For example, formal learning environments, workplace and government institutions. Steve narrated some experiences of discrimination he had in language class and in middle school. He remembered a particular teacher in middle school who used racial slurs when students argued with her. He also recalled that he was stereotyped by a particular teacher in language class:

> …And then when I got there… I got into class the very first day, what the teacher… the first thing the teacher asked me was "*Where are you from*?" and I said Nigeria, and she said, "Okay. Y*ou can sit in the very last seat in the class.*"

Because you were a Nigerian?

> Yeah, because, "*I know after a few months you will run away like every other Nigerian*." I said, "*Okay*" and I stayed there for… from October till January. In January, I had the exam, the final exams and I scored 92/97. I came out as the best student in the class and she was like "*No, no, I didn't expect this from you, above all you are a Nigerian*." And I said, "*Yes, that reminds me of what you said to me the very first day, and that's part of my determination*." She said, "*No, no, I never said anything like that*." I said "*Okay, maybe there was a little bit of misunderstanding but this is what I understood at first*" and she said "*No, no, I'm sorry if you understood tha*t." And that was it. So, she asked me to continue studying, like she sees that I'm a very bright person. So, I should go forward and she helped me fill the entrance form for the scuola media (middle school).

Steve stated that such an experience could be discouraging for students. His narration shows discrimination in a place where migrants should find hope. Formenti & West (2018) suggest that educators should create environments where learners feel valued. The territorial centres of adult education have immigrants as the majority of their students, and one would expect persons who work with migrants to be circumspect in relating with this category of people. The language teacher's action reported by Steve is a typical example of othering: a categorisation of the other based on his origin. It is racist. Eschenbacher (2020) suggests that educators who work with migrants should adopt a supportive attitude and Wildemeersch (2017) urges educators to show respect for migrant learners. However, we must understand that these processes are not rationally implemented or chosen, and most teachers in these centres do not perceive themselves as racist (Oshodi, 2021).

Steve also narrated that he had experienced and witnessed discrimination on the street and in the workplace. He said Italians would hold their bags and wallets tight when they saw him. He also narrated that in the supermarket where he worked as a security guard, his boss would tell him to keep an eye on Black people who came to shop and that despite expressing his displeasure at what he considered racism, the situation persisted. He found himself in a quandary: if he refused to follow his boss' orders, it would appear that he was slacking in his duties, and to focus his gaze on Black shoppers was psychologically disturbing for him:

> …Where I dey now wok, we dey use am get problem well well for there. Bikos I dey tell my capo go say, "If na so una tek dey wok here, me I no fit dey do am bikos dis one dey affect me personally and psychologically. How you go see guys, bikos sey dem be Africans, dey just enta here una begin follow dem up and down? Then you now as a capo, you dey call me sey mek I dey follow dem up and down. By di time I no do dat

Dem dey call too?

Yes now. By di time I no do dat one wey you dey tell me, e go kon be like sey I no know how to do my job. Whereas na you dey impose your racism put for my bodi

To do it against my fellow people

Yeah, against my will. Na hin I kon tel sey, "If me I no dey wok for here, by di time I enta here, na di same tin. So, me, personally, I no fit do dis kain wok. E say, no, no, no mek I no worry sey dem go resolve am, dem go resolve am. Little, little, maybe a day or two, e go still change but di third day, di same tin go still happen.

In the extract above, Charles recounted how his boss' order was making him act against his will, and despite his protestations, the situation did not change. He narrated that he was always at loggerheads with his boss because of his opposition to be asked to monitor Black shoppers.

While Charles commented that he had not experienced discrimination in language class, he however claimed that racism was rife in Italy. Charles argued that racism was a systemic issue in Italy:

Italy is a country whereby, definitely, the way they treat Black are not the same way they treat White. Italy… I can say some of part… let me not use this word. Some part of Italy… maybe… I've never seen a Black man driving a public bus in Italy. I've never seen a Black man driving train in Italy. So… but in other country where I have step my foot, I've seen a Black man working but they discriminate a lot. Italy is the most racist country in Europe.

***

But about racism, yeah, I could say Italy is the most racist country. I'm not saying it because… because… I'm not saying it because I'm in Italy. Errr… I said it because I have travelled. I have the experience. If I've not travelled, I've travel almost getting to four to five countries in Europe. I got the experience. I have it. I see it. I see it. Let me use an example of this now: In Italy, in Italy, in Milano here, you find… find it difficult to give a Black man a house, to rent. I've went for a place to look for a house, and the woman told me wholeheartedly… I cannot remember the place again, somewhere in Monza. Ooh (hisses). I told my commercialista the day he came to register me about this thing, emergency something. I told him the woman told me, *"As far as you are a Black man, I can't give you my house to rent. I can't give you.*" But few… some of them are good o. some of Italians are good. Some of Italians are good. You can't say bad of everybody. As far… even some Blacks are bad. Some Whites are bad… some Whites are bad too. You cannot just say everybodies are good, no. You cannot say everybodies are good, no. Some of them are good. Some of them are bad. But when you meet the bad person, that's your bad experience. So, when you meet a good person, that's your good experience, a good part of it. So, that is it. That is it.

Charles contended that Black persons experienced a lot of suffering and discrimination in Italy. He also suggested that there was a stereotyping of Blacks.

> …I went to questura (the immigration desk at the police station) here in Lecco one day. I saw many Black crying, frustrating. I went to interpret one… for one guy. They are crying. All their requirement they need is there but what is the problem? Why did they not give them what they need? That's the question. Because a Black man. A White man can see you, you are standing with a White man… errr… as a Black man, a White man can see you are standing with a White man, they will first of all choose a White man before you. It happened to me when I went to interpret something for this boy here. They will choose a White man. You came before him o. They say no discrimination. A controller will see you inside train. A controller will see you inside train. He will leave the White man and come and control you as a Black ma because you are sitting there. "*Bolieto, bolieto*" (train ticket) (laughs loudly). My God! Yeee! Black man don suffer. "*Bolieto*." I'm not saying this because I want to… That is my experience. I have experienced it severally. He will leave the White guys there and come and control you as a Black man.

Charles described how Black persons are stereotyped as wanting to avoid paying for transportation and are thus subjected to extra scrutiny on the train. The experience of stereotyping is evident in the narratives of both Steve and Charles. The tendency to stereotype immigrants has been pointed out by Bischoff (2018) and Karagiannis & Randeria (2018). For example, in some European countries, there are attempts by anti-immigration campaigners to establish links between Islam and terrorism on one hand, and Islam and the erosion of the culture of the host society on the other hand (Čáky, 2019). Some people also associate Black immigrants with dangerous and criminal behaviour (Paynter, 2022), and Kansteiner points out that despite the fact there is no sufficient evidence to support the stereotyping of immigrants, changing negative public opinion about migration and immigrants is difficult because, "Collective memories are not based in fact; they are based in stories, images, and feelings" (2018, p. 142).

Charles also described how discrimination affects Black people's employment chances and prospects. He spoke about how some of his friends experienced downward mobility because they had to take jobs below their qualification. It is difficult to understand his friends' level of education as he could not differentiate among a medical degree, PhD and bachelor's degree. This is probably due to the fact that Charles had little education and did not understand the different types or levels of university qualifications. He seemed convinced though that these

friends were underemployed because their educational certificates were from Africa. The literature on migration has identified that migrants from developing countries face difficulties transferring their education and skills to developed countries (Morrice et al., 2017; Slade, 2008):

> I have a doctor… I have a friend, he is a doctor, a doctor degree in Nigeria. He graduated. I saw it. I saw him. What's he doing here? Is it not a fabbrica (factory) work? But he went there to apply (Sneers again)
>
> **He has a PhD or he is a medical doctor?**
>
> A medical doctor. BXC
>
> **Okay, he has B.Sc.?**
>
> He has B.Sc. in Nigeria.
>
> **Oh, B.Sc.? Okay**
>
> B.Sc. but he doesn't use it here
>
> **Oh, okay**
>
> So that is it now. That is it. You know…
>
> **Medical doctor?**
>
> He's a medical doctor. Should I call him now?
>
> **Why didn't he go to another country to do something else?**
>
> You ask me, who I'm going to ask, bro? Let's move forward. Let's move forward, bro. Let's move forward. I have a friend… I still have a friend in Ancona. He's a graduate, B.Sc. graduate but I don't know what he read. He's a B.Sc. graduate. I know him right from childhood. I don't know what he's doing in Ancona right now.

Charles' inability to clarify his friend's qualification notwithstanding, he was convinced that his friend was working in a job below his qualification. He even offered to call him so I could confirm the truth of his claim from this friend. Guo (2014) has written that some immigrants from the global South in Canada experience downward social mobility because they have to make major shifts from the jobs they were doing in their home countries to entirely different sectors in the host country. Some highly skilled immigrants even have to take casual and part-time jobs making them unemployed and underutilised.

Charles also mentioned a shocking experience he had while looking for a job:

> I went to look for work in a restaurant. The man look at me, say, *"Oh, ciao*." Say, "*Parla Italiano bene. Eh! Eh!*" He say, "*You speak good Italian.*" When I gave her my curriculum, I turn back, he throw my curriculum into a dustbin. I turn my back. I went to the dustbin where he took… where he kept my curriculum. I pick up my curriculum and I left the… the hotel. You neva see anytin. You've not seen anything in Italy. We have so many things to say. We have so many things to say but Africans are not like this. In Africa, they can't treat a White man like this. They will give you escort. They will carry police. They will give you police. They will be guarding you. But here, they will treat you like trash, according to Donald Trump. He call Africa shithole. They call you shithole here but we are struggling. We will survive (laughs). We are trying our best, you know. That's it. we will survive. That's it.
>
> ***
>
> Common restaurant work, they are discriminating you, looking down on you that you can't work there as a Black man. Okay, if an example… just use your leg, start walking in errr… in Milan. Start walking… Just walk with your foot. Go to restaurant by restaurant. You can only see few Black people working in a bar. Few. It could be only one person you will see in a big restaurant. Only one person. The rest will be in the kitchen so that White men will not stop coming to the restaurant. Your capo will tell you to be in the kitchen, "Don't come outside o." So that he will not lose his client.

Charles highlights how it can be difficult for a Black person to get jobs in Italy, particularly jobs that require workers to interact with customers. He argues that business owners are afraid that employing Black workers may lead to loss of customers. Charles is not only showing how difficult it is to get a decent job, but the disrespect and racism that are experienced regularly by Black persons. The fear of losing customers is another demonstration that racism is systemic, otherwise, there would be no problem.

Learning to Cope with Discrimination: Reactions and Strategies

In their narrations, Steve and Charles talked about how they dealt or were dealing with experiences of discrimination in Italy. Steve spoke about using those experiences as motivation or impetus to succeed in formal education and as a way to prove those who had written him off wrong. In describing his experience with the teacher who asked him to go and sit at the back of the class, Steve used the metaphor of football. He likened the teacher's words to a ball which was passed to him, and that he as a good player took the ball and made it his own. In other words, the teacher's words served as motivation for him to do well and prove her wrong. He stated that he reminded the teacher of her prediction on his first day of class. Steve also

expressed hope that his success could contribute to changing the perception of Italians about Nigerians in Italy:

> ….Practically, let me tell you one secret. This is a secret: if you are in Italy and you're Black, you're French. Other countries don't exist. Other languages don't exist unless you tell them "No, I'm Nigerian, I speak English." You speak "English?" Quindi, and then when you tell them I speak English, they will ask you again, "*You studied in English?" "Yes, I studied in English. Why does it sound so strange?"* "No, b*ecause a lot of Africans don't speak English. And then a lot of Nigerians here too… Because we know Nigerians that take Libya to come into Italy are many times, most of the times are the cultists, armed robbers, those ones that, 'Hmm, Nigeria. I can't make a way. I can't make a living anymore for myself here. So let me go somewhere where it's a little bit easier.'"* But what we are trying to like… personally, what I am trying to change is to make these people understand that in every 100 of these people that come to Italy after creating trouble in Africa, there are also about 10, 20 good ones that are ready to learn the language, bring their head down, create a future for themselves here. So that's it.

It seemed this strategy was already working out for Steve. He had been able to establish relationships with Italians. He did extremely well in the language class which caught the attention of one of the teachers, and they started a romantic relationship. He also started a friendship with an Italian classmate:

> The relationship between Africans and Italians is that, these people, the Italians, they kind of see how good you are like in studying, they tend to… because they tend to like people that tend to study a lot. They see you that you have a lot of… you want to… you have many goals that you like to achieve and you are working towards it… Even, there is one of this… the man has… he is 52 years old, we are still friends till today. Like we are friends till today. We… He sends me… At Christmas, he sends me gifts, all that. We were really close, we were really friends, but there was this other Italian, that in Italian, 'Cosi, cosi" ….

Formal education was important to Steve. It was his strategy for dealing with the negativities and difficulties he was experiencing in Italy. Steve revealed that his desire to make his father proud was one of the reasons he was determined to make a success of himself.

> I've always done this. I don't know how I even cope. I don't know how I cope but I've always… it has always been this way. That's why I was talking about determination. If you think money is important to you… When I… money is important to me too, yeah because my family is not the family of Buhari. I'm not from a wealthy family but my dad has always done everything possible to send us to school. Okay, and when I came to Italy, money is important for me too but why don't I just make my father proud because he has always done everything to send me to school. And since I have the opportunity to work and school because in Nigeria, practically you don't have the opportunity to work and school unless you are in the university. Here I can do the high school, even middle school with work at the same time. That's what I have been doing since 2018. So, it depends on your determination. If you are determined that you want to do this, it works out without you even stressing. Believe me, there are going to be times of

> stress. There are going to be times when you say, "*Right now, I'm going to give up. I'm not going to do this anymore*" but at the end of everything you find out that life just goes on. That's what I think. So, life just goes on. Working and schooling…

Before my interview with Charles started, he had told me that he wanted to get a particular document in Italy and would return to Belgium where he had lived for some time after his asylum application was approved. While still living in Italy, Charles's narrative revealed his response to his experiences in Italy. He mentioned the acceptance of the reality of discrimination but then he also mentioned that he could be combative on some occasions:

> We don't get angry. We are used to it (laughs loudly). We are used to it. And anyone that confront you, you give him a dirty slap, then police will come.
>
> ***
>
> Lo so. Lo so. I know all these thing. Me, I don't take it from them. Anyone that confront me, I beat him.
>
> ***
>
> No. I beat him. When I beat him, the police will come. It's in the law. You don't have anyone… You don't have no right to harass me. Don't trek on my fundamental human right. Don't try it.

Charles seemed to have different responses than Steve to experiences of discrimination based on the circumstance. He seemed not to be bothered about subtle racism – which Paynter (2022) agrees is present in Italy – as he had come to terms with it, but he stated that he could be confrontational if he experienced glaring racism like being singled out for checks by a ticket controller on the train.

Discussion

The narratives of Steve and Charles reveal experiences of othering in the form of stereotyping and discrimination. They both narrated personal experiences as well as general observations of discrimination that Black persons experience in Italy. It seemed because of their experiences, the participants had built their identities as outsiders in Italy and are finding it difficult to have a sense of belonging. Morrice (2013) calls this learning to be who and what they are not. From their experiences, both participants discovered that they did not have the same rights as citizens of the host community, though their responses to their experiences differ. While Steve seemed intent on integrating into the society, and develops a theory of what Italians expect, Charles seems angrier, not interested in integration, and in fact would appreciate finding his way out of

Italy. In the words of Thunborg et al. (2021), Steve was learning to be a co-participant in the Italian society while Charles was learning to be disconnected. The participants' narrations of experiences offer several clues of misrecognition, disrespect and social injustice.

Honneth argues that "the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate' (2004, p. 352). The participants' narratives reveal discrimination of Black persons taking place in almost every aspect of the society. It is instructive to note that except for Steve's experiences of discrimination in formal learning situations, where his status as an asylum seeker was obvious, the participants' other experiences of discrimination were not because of their residency status in Italy but because of the colour of their skin. One could argue that because of their status as asylum seeker and refugee they did not have enough social capital to seek redress where possible, and this might be why Charles felt physical confrontation was a last resort.

Steve's strategy of coping with discrimination was to do well academically and endear himself to Italians. His view was that if Italians saw someone who was serious with their academics, they would show acceptance to such a person. Paynter (2022) describes this attitude as proving one's deservingness of social belonging. While Paynter studied how asylum seekers in Italy conduct and comport themselves in order to gain favour with Italians with the hope of receiving a positive consideration of their asylum application, her study shows that asylum seekers adopt strategies to earn the approval of Italians. One of such strategies is the demonstration of their willingness and commitment to be integrated into the Italian culture or "performing a kind of model citizenship" (Paynter, 2022, p. 9). Steve constructed an identity of an eager individual who wanted to feel a sense of belonging in the host society. Eschenbacher (2020) states that in the bid to fit into the host society, migrants develop a self or an identity to meet the expectations of the receiving society. Steve's statements also reveal his epistemic self which is that he believed that Italians would look favourably on an outsider, not least a Black person, who appeared serious about acquiring education and making a success of themselves. All this gives us an insight into how Steve was learning how to cope with life in Italy.

There seems to be a glimpse of recognition in Steve's narration. He stated that he struck a friendship with an Italian classmate, and he also mentioned that his girlfriend was one of his Italian teachers in middle school. On the surface, this seems like recognition in the first sphere of recognition identified by Honneth but a more critical look at Steve's relationship with his girlfriend can throw up some interesting considerations. One could wonder about the dynamics of power and intersubjective recognition in their relationship. One can also ask: Is interracial marriage a demonstration of integration?

While Steve's coping strategy was to prove his deservingness (Paynter, 2022), Charles seems to have different strategies: acceptance, escape or confrontation. His acceptance of the reality of discrimination in Italy informed his decision to leave Italy as soon as he could. Anna Tuckett cited in Formenti and Luraschi (2020) asserts that the discrimination migrants face in Italy shapes and fuels their decision to leave the country. Charles also did not rule out confrontation in some situations. Honneth argues that experiences of misrecognition can lead to resistance and even societal conflicts. According to him, when individuals' experiences of misrecognition become typical for a whole group, then the group begins a collective struggle for recognition. This is usually in the form of restitution or correction for the disrespect they are experiencing. Thus, according to Honneth, the theory of recognition "suggests the view that motives for social resistance and rebellion are formed in the context of moral experiences stemming from the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition" (Honneth, 1995, p. 163). Charles constructed an identity of a 'nonconformist' who though accepted the reality of discrimination in Italy but refused to submit to it.

Conclusion

In this paper I explored how two asylum seekers from Nigeria learned to live with discrimination in Italy. I have shown their strategies for coping with discrimination through rich data obtained from using a narrative approach. The participants' stories reveal mainly experiences of misrecognition in encounters between Black asylum seekers and Italians in Italy. There are however glimpses of recognition. Most of the instances of misrecognition seem

to be located in the second sphere of recognition identified by Axel Honneth; the sphere of rights. Recognition in the sphere of rights, according to Honneth, means every individual deserves to be regarded as a morally responsible person who is equal to others and have the same rights as others. The participants' narrations revealed that the two participants had learned to respond to experiences of discrimination in different ways. While the participants' experiences were not solely because of their status as asylum seekers but because of their racial background, I argue that their residency status might not give them the leverage or social capital to resist discrimination legally. As a Black student in Italy, I have had course to make formal complaints about discrimination and this was expeditiously dealt with by the authorities. This appears not to be the case from my interactions with asylum seekers. Thus, making me feel that despite my racial background, I am more privileged than asylum seekers with the same racial background. Therefore, while race might play greater role in the experiences of discrimination that asylum seekers encounter, their social standing may contribute to making their situation more precarious.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lifelong Learning Provisions for Asylum Seekers in Italy: What is Missing?[5]

Abstract

In this paper, drawing on narrative methodologies, I present the narratives of three asylum seekers who were participating in adult learning in two adult learning centres in the Lombardy region of Italy. I drew on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to provide an understanding of the participant's experiences might impact their self-identity. I highlighted some shortcomings I identified in the lifelong learning provisions for asylum seekers. Using interpretative analysis, I discussed the experiences of the participants under these categories: valorisation of certificates, appropriateness of teaching methods and recognition of prior learning. I conclude that there is a need for more efforts to be put into recognising the previous experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, and that adult educators who work with asylum seekers should be trained in adult learning principles.

Keywords: migration; asylum seeking; recognition of prior learning; recognition theory

Introduction

In this research paper, I examine the learning provisions available to asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. I analysed three interviews with asylum seekers who were attending the Centri Provinciali per l'Istrutzione degli Adulti (CPIA), government-run adult education institutions in Italy. The participants were from two centres in the Lombardy region of Italy. This research paper emanated from my doctoral research. My principal aim in the study is to explore those factors that can contribute to richer learning experiences for asylum seekers in Italy. I discuss

[5] This chapter was presented under the same title at the 10th Triennial Conference of ESREA. It was developed further into a journal article which has been submitted and is currently under review.

the learning provisions for asylum seekers and refugees under three categories that emerged from the narratives of the participants of the study. These are: valorisation of certificates, appropriateness of teaching methods and recognition of prior learning. My position is that if these factors are considered and worked upon, it will contribute to the improvement of the current provisions for asylum seekers' learning. I also posit that non-recognition of prior learning is a form of misrecognition.

Immigration and Asylum Seeking in Italy

Italy is one of the European countries with many transnational migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. Italy's proximity to the Mediterranean Sea makes it a popular destination for immigrants (Dovigo, 2019; Nuzzolese & di Vella, 2008; Paynter, 2022). In 2013, immigrants accounted for around 7% of the Italian population (Caneva, 2014). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported that 83% of migrants and refugees who entered Europe in 2017 arrived in Italy (Bencivenga, 2017). The number of foreigners living in Italy for humanitarian reasons amounts to 1.8% of foreign-born migrants in the country, which is 0.13% of the Italian population (Russo et al., 2016). Russo et al. (2016) point out that the popular press and public discourse portray immigrants who arrive by sea in negative terms.

According to Caneva (2014), a major cause of concern for the Italian authorities is the issue of irregular migration, especially from African countries. Italy is not alone in this situation. In many countries, immigration has become a political challenge (Androvičová & Bolečeková, 2019; Bartram et al., 2014; Castles, 2000, 2018; Karagiannis & Randeria, 2018) with governments at loss as to how to handle it. Russo et al. (2016) distinguishes between an asylum seeker and refugee in Italy: an asylum seeker is a person who has submitted application for asylum while a refugee is the individual whose application for asylum has been granted. Italian law makes provision for asylum seekers to be housed in reception centres or Asylum Seekers Centres (Russo et al., 2016; Duso & Marigo, 2018). In 2015, the Italian Ministry of Interior estimated that about 100,000 asylum seekers were living in Italian reception centres (Borsari et al., 2018).

The European Union (EU) in its policy document on adult learning, *Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning,* recognises the role of adult education and learning in strengthening social inclusion and active participation of migrants and other disadvantaged groups in EU countries and therefore encourages member states to improve access to adult learning for migrants and other disadvantaged groups (EU, 2011). Member states of the United Nations are also obliged to provide access and ensure participation in adult learning and education for disadvantaged groups (Slade & Dickson, 2020). However, Slade and Dickson report that the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education III released in 2016 "indicates that 56% of countries who responded to the survey did not report on the participation of migrants and refugees" in adult learning and education (2020, p. 2). Thus, while the importance of learning for refugees and asylum seekers is established, it seems not enough is being done by countries and scholars about learning provisions for migrants in general, and asylum seekers and refugees in particular. This paper, therefore, seeks to highlight shortcomings observed in the learning provision for asylum seekers in Italy from the narratives of some asylum seekers about their experiences.

Learning Provisions for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy

In 2014, Italy expanded its structures for receiving, processing and accommodating asylum seekers by establishing new centres of extraordinary reception, "centri di accoglienza straordinaria" CAS, and by 2017, these centres were accommodating 80% of asylum seekers arriving in Italy (Paynter, 2020, 2022). During their stay in the reception centres, asylum seekers receive education as well as education, legal, social and health assistance, although since 2018, reception centers are no longer obligated to enrol asylum seekers in language classes. While some reception centres still enrol asylum seekers in language centres, asylum seekers who are not enrolled by their centre have to pay for their language classes. In Italy, Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA), the Provincial Centres for Adult Education are the major public institutions for adult education (Daniele et al., 2018; Deiana & Spina, 2021; Loprieno et al., 2019; OECD, 2021). 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 CPIA. 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 CPIA is meant to serve both Italians and foreigners, the learners at 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 CPIA's educational provisions is language classes for migrants (Deiana & Spina, 2021).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

According to Fejes & Andersson (2009), RPL is about "finding ways to recognise and document a person's prior learning" (p.37). RPL also provides individuals with educational opportunities. In South Africa, RPL is "a comparison of previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specific qualification and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements" (SAQA 2004, p.16 in de Graaff, 2014, p. 2).Writing from the experience of RPL in South Africa, Castle & Attwood (2001) state that RPL provides individuals the opportunity to get recognition for their prior learning by a higher education institution. This recognition may either afford the individual to take part in an academic programme if the individual does not have the required qualifications for the programme (access). Recognition can also be in the form of assigning credit to an individual's prior learning, in which case, the individual may be exempted from some parts of the academic programme. While the authors agree that that assigning credit to individual's prior learning allows the students to determine their pathways, they argue that "it may deprive them of certain forms of learning, including self-affirmation; process learning; depth of understanding; relational and critical perspectives" as well as "remove them from sites of learning which develop a deeper sense of empowerment and collective responsibility" (Castle & Attwood, 2001, p. 67). They question the thinking that equivalency can be established between the learning gained from experience and learning gained from formal contexts. They pitch their support with RPL for access which they believe "can be an enabling process, involving individuals in generalising, drawing analogies, identifying differences,

reflecting on performance, and attempting to abstract from one context to another" (Castle & Attwood, 2001, p. 69).

Some authors argue that RPL benefits both the individual and the society, which include educational institutions and workplaces (Castle & Attwood, 2001; Cretchley & Castle, 2001; Harris, 1999; Osman & Castle, 2002; Radovan, 2011; Singh, 2009; Smith & Clayton, 2009; J. Yang, 2015). At the individual level, RPL offers individuals a variety of options: career progression, acquisition of certificates/diplomas (Bjornavold & le Mouillour, 2008) and personal fulfilment. Writing on findings from an experiment carried out in France, Ford states that RPL makes provisions for "individualised learning paths, personal empowerment and shorter training times" (1997, p. 323). Empirical results from a study conducted by Andersson & Hellberg (2009) reveals that the RPL process can boost participants' perception of self; a view also shared by Werquin (2007). In Sweden, one of the purposes that RPL serves is the integration of immigrants into the society. It is also used to match immigrants' training to individual needs as part of labour market training (Andersson & Osman, 2008, p. 44). At the institutional level, RPL contributes to "designing flexible curricula and for offering flexible routes into and through higher education" (Brown, 2017, p. 60). "Around the world RPL is increasingly used as an alternative access route into higher education, particularly in fields with a professional base, such as law, engineering, teaching, nursing and management" (Osman & Castle, 2002, p. 63). At the workplace, RPL can help workers update their skills and enhance employability, which has positive impacts on the organisation (García-Peñalvo et al., 2013). The next section of this paper presents a theory of recognition which provides a holistic view of the concept of recognition.

Theory of Recognition

This research draws on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition as expounded in his book, *The Struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts* (Honneth, 1995), in which he outlined and explicated the conditions for self-realisation. He argued that social relations are regulated by intersubjective recognition, and when an individual receives the recognition they feel they deserve, it can help them to develop a positive relation to self. Honneth's overall aim

in the work was to provide a critical framework to explain how societies develop. Honneth's criticality was however "grounded in love and processes of recognition' (Formenti and West, 2018, p. 21). His idea is that justice is present in the society to the degree that every member of the society receives social recognition that makes them a full citizen (Honneth, 2004). For Honneth, social equality and opportunity for everyone in the society to form their identity are important to the discourse of social justice. So, he advocates for equal treatment of all members of the society where the enablement of each person's self-realisation is guaranteed. Axel Honneth thought "feeling recognised and legitimate in groups and whole society was essential" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 18). Honneth argued that "the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate' (Honneth, 2004, p. 352). His focus is on the dynamics of self-other recognition at different levels. Self-other recognition or intersubjective recognition is expressed in three forms: love, rights and esteem (Boston, 2018; Honneth, 1995) with the resultant effect of: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Self-confidence is enhanced when one experiences acceptance from others. Self-respect is forged when one feels accepted as being part of a community of rights. Self-esteem comes from being honoured through the acknowledgment of one's abilities (Honneth, 1995; West et al., 2013, Formenti & West, 2018).

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, these are usually physical injuries or abuse such as torture or rape. This kind of injury causes both physical and psychological injury to the victim. They 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 they do not enjoy the privilege of being seen as a full member of the society who has 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. They are deprived of the ability to see themselves as legally equal to other members of the society.

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. They develop the sense that they do not have anything of positive significance to contribute to their society: "In order to acquire a successful relation-to-self, one is dependent on the intersubjective recognition of one's abilities and accomplishments" (Honneth, 1995, p. 136). 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. The next section presents the methodology and context of the research.

Methodology and Context

This study adopted a narrative inquiry as it provides rich insights into the dynamic interplay of individual and society. Three participants from two adult education centres were interviewed. The two participants from the same centre voluntarily offered to take part in the interviews after they were informed by their teachers about my research. The third participant was suggested to me by the staff of the charity organisation in charge of his accommodation centre. I conducted narrative interviews with the participants and the interviews were systematically analysed in order to arrive at an understanding and interpretation (Bochner & Herrmann, 2020). These interpretive practices are subjective since I interpreted the narratives through my experiences and what I thought the participants were communicating (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Categories were created for emerging themes and three major categories were identified. Throughout the analysis, at the back of my mind was the fact that the interview was a co-construction of reality between the participants and myself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2003, 2013). I was conscious that the narratives were shaped by the relationship that existed between the participants and myself and that the relationship determined the stories that were told to me and the ones left out (Formenti, 2014; Galimberti, 2014; Merrill & West, 2009).

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. Bold font was used to indicate the questions I asked. For the sake of anonymity, the participants' names have been changed. The transcripts were read carefully and themes that emerged were analysed.

Participants

Three participants were selected for this study; two Nigerians and one Cameroonian. The interviews with the Nigerians took place in Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin English. Nigerian Pidgin English is a combination of English words and words from Nigerian

languages, so a majority of Nigerian population regardless of their educational status are able to communicate in Pidgin English. The participants and I switched between the two varieties of English throughout the interviews. The interview with the Cameroonian was in English, and though his English was not perfect, it was understandable. Below are short portraits of the participants I selected for this study.

Barth

At the time of interview, Barth was a 44-year-old man from Nigeria. He arrived in Italy in March 2017. He had only primary school education in Nigeria and was working as a car mechanic in Nigeria for almost twenty years where he had a workshop and many apprentices. Due to his level of education, he could not speak fluent English. So, his words were a mixture of standard English and Nigerian Pidgin English. He was in middle school, called terza media in Italy. He did not have a stable job and was hoping to finish middle school and find a driving job.

Clement

Clement was in his early 40s at the time of the interview. He arrived in Italy on his third attempt. The first two attempts were unsuccessful. He made the first attempt in 2007 but he and others were arrested by Libyan police in 2007. He was released after paying 350 dollars. He made the second attempt in 2009 and spent five days on the sea where they were arrested and put in prison in Libya. He was in prison till 2010 when he was released. He converted to Christianity while in prison in 2010. In 2011, he went back to Nigeria. During this period, he met and proposed to his wife, after which he returned to Libya. He went back to Nigeria in 2013 to marry his wife and brought her to Libya with him. They had two children in Libya. Overall, he spent thirteen years in Libya where he learned to speak Arabic. Clement arrived in Italy with his wife and two kids in 2017. He and his wife had another kid after arriving in Italy. Though he was trained as a welder, he did not have the legal permission to practice his vocation in Italy because he did not have any training in Italy. However, his workplace allowed him to work as a welder. He was combining working with classes.

Elias

Elias was 37 years old at the time of the interview. He said he completed secondary education in Cameroon and worked as a trader. He later went to Qatar for two years where he worked as a bowling mechanic. He returned to Cameroon after spending two years in Qatar. After some months, he left Cameroon again, this time, for Germany. He said he left Cameroon because he had some problems. He did not explain what the problems were. Having arrived in Germany, he requested for asylum and lived in Germany for two years. During his time in Germany, he worked in a factory. His asylum application in Germany was unsuccessful, so he came to Italy. Elias came to Italy in January 2020 and attended language classes online due to the COVID pandemic. He was currently in middle school, terza media, at the time of the interview. He was frustrated because he had not found a job yet but he was participating in various trainings in the hope of boosting his chances of getting a job after completing middle school. He claimed that one could not find a good job in Italy without at least a middle school certificate.

Analysis

Valorisation of Formal Certificates

The three participants spoke about the necessity of formal learning to flourish in Italy. While Barth and Clement emphasised the importance of language classes, Elias emphasised the importance of middle school (terza media). Barth's position was that learning Italian language was necessary to have a good life in Italy but it was not only about learning Italian, it was about the possession of a formal certificate indicating that one had completed a language course. He asserted that having the language certificate was crucial for getting a job. So, despite the fact that his camp operators told him they could not afford to send him to language school, he sponsored himself:

> I tell dem I want to go school, dem say for now I would need to dey study at home. I say, no. Me don already pass dat level to dey school for house. Me don already start school for outside…. When you talk to dem, dem go tell you sey dis cooperative no dey send immigrant dey go school. If you want to go school, then you go by yourself. You pay everything by yourself. You understand? I dey come here every day. I pay the ticket, pay for train, everything, moni for school fees, everything, I pay by myself.

Clement expressed a strong desire to learn Italian language because he had learned that it was important to attend language classes in order to participate in vocational training:

> Yeah, even when I come to here now, I want to learn again, to learn it, to know more so that I can use this work… this welding to be working but due to the situation of Italy, they say you must go to school, you do here, do here… well I thank God that I try my best but God now gave me a job, and these people, they are very nice. I do welding there. I help them to weld… to do everything that in that working place

Elias narrated that he was attending middle school (terza media) because it was the basic requirement for starting a career path in Italy:

> When you have terza media, now you can look every work. You can have orientation. You understand what I'm saying?
>
> ***
>
> Everybody can do terza media. When you have terza media…. Dopo terza media now… after terza media, you can say, "Okay now, you do mechanic, go there." Before you do that mechanic, you need to have the basic, terza media. It's like that.

All the three participants constructed formal certificates as essential to make personal and career progress in Italy. This valorisation of formal certificates makes uncertificated learning unattractive. For example, Barth mentioned that learning Italian in language classes in camp would not be recognised because no certificates would be awarded, and this was why he made every effort to attend a certificate-awarding institution like CPIA even though it was not easy for him. Carlsen points out the implication of overreliance on formal certificates: "many societies still focus exclusively on the outcomes of formal learning in educational institutions" and "a great deal of learning remains unrecognised" (2015, p. 6).

(In)Appropriateness of Teaching Styles, Subjects and Lessons

Clement recounted some experiences in CPIA which he did not enjoy. There was a particular teacher whose teaching method he did not appreciate. One of the reasons for this was that the teacher did not fit Clement's expectation of how a teacher should teach. He also found some of the topics and discussions irrelevant:

> You know… Let's put it like this now. Sometimes, you meet me today now, you ask me how is my family? I say fine. The next day again, you are still talking about family, family, family. You don't even bring the notes, they bring… or book to open it the book. Sometimes we ask him say, "We don't use the book to teach? This book?" He will say leave it. Write… Draw your finger down. Draw this one. That's manoa. This one, this one….

Clement said the teacher also asked unnecessary questions about their personal lives which made the students uncomfortable:

> Not only me, all of us. Not only me, all of us. We were complaining… All of us. He go say, "Nigeria. Where do you come from in Nigeria?" (Participant laughs) O my God. ….People come to come and learn. You have been asking them, "Which food do you eat in Nigeria?" (Participant laughs loudly) Is it…? That one is not concern him. The food we eat in Nigeria… How many house? Look at your house in Nigeria, non piccolo abi grande? Asking people, all that… (Participant hisses) you know? You come to school, you have to teach the children, eh the teacher, eh the student what they need.

The issue of teaching methods resonates in Clement's narrative. He felt his teacher asked students unnecessary questions instead of focusing on his duty of teaching. These questions bothered on lifestyle and ways of doing things in the students' cultures but such intercultural experience was not of interest to Clement. His aim was to learn the language and he expected the teacher to teach him just that. This gives us a hint that Clement, and maybe the other students, did not understand the teacher's method and that the teacher did not explain the connection between the tasks she gave the students and language learning. Maybe it would have been better for the teacher to explain how her method was related to language learning. This might have made someone like Clement to appreciate the teaching method. The particular teacher whose methods he disapproved of seemed not to understand adult learning principles and methods which advocate that adult educators should focus on the needs, desires, motivations and experiences of adult learners rather than on predetermined content, and also a shift from the teacher as an authority figure to a teacher as someone who facilitates learning (Jarvis, 2004; Merriam, 2004). A sensitive and reflexive instructor would try to find out what learners' interests, and then reach an agreement on how the lesson will be organised. Sensitivity is especially important for those who work with asylum seekers and refugees because some of them do not want to remember some past traumatic experiences which might be triggered by insensitive questions, and some are wary about talking about their past lives in order not to contradict the claims they made in their asylum application. Thus, a sensitive teacher or adult

educator will find out if learners, particularly vulnerable learners like asylum seekers, are comfortable to talk about certain aspects of their lives.

Elias' narration also touched on teaching method. He claimed that some asylum seekers found middle school (terza media) difficult due to the fact that they did not have any education in their home countries. So, they could not understand the relevance of the topics they were being taught:

> ….Many guys there, they don't go to school. They cross by boat, they came. They never go to school in their country. For them, they say, *"Go to school*." He say, "*Okay*." When he reach to school, they say, "*This is geography*." He don't understand. This is storia, the name of president in Italia. You need to give… You need to know about the name the president, the prime minister, different power, power legislative, democracy. "*See. What is this? No work, nothing. Why I cames you told me about president in Italian?*"

Elias' narration gives a clue about how lessons are organised in his school. There are indications that the lessons were teacher-centred instead of being learner-centred. As mentioned already, where classes are learner-centred, teachers teach what is learner-appropriate and what is of interest and relevance to learners, and not what is predetermined by a curriculum. Elias also mentioned that many of the students found exams difficult, *"For me, exam is exam because for me, it's very easy for me because I go to school, I tell you. But for another guys, it is strong."* One can understand that Elias' adult education centre thought it was important to teach the same subjects taught in regular middle school if learners were to be awarded middle school certificate but there is a need to take into consideration the composition of learners in the classroom and organise lessons according to their level or find a way to make regular subjects and topics relevant to the needs of adults. This is not easy as it requires innovativeness, enthusiasm and commitment from programme planners and teachers.

(Non)Recognition of Prior Learning

Barth's plan was to obtain his driver's licence as soon as he finished terza media (middle school), so he could get a job as a driver. Though he worked as a mechanic in Nigeria for over twenty years and even owned his own mechanic workshop, he was unable to work as a

mechanic in Italy because for him to work as a mechanic in Italy, he had to be re-trained and obtain a certificate in Italy. His means of livelihood was working as an agricultural worker, and even that work had stopped for some months when we met. He narrated that he would start again in the month following our interview. When I asked if he would not like to work as a mechanic, he replied that he still harboured hopes of working as a mechanic in Italy, especially after obtaining the terza media certificate. He felt that whenever he was ready to obtain the certificate, it would not be difficult since he already had twenty years' experience of working as a mechanic.

Barth was more interested in getting his driving licence so he could get a job quickly. Getting a means of livelihood was more important to him than working as a mechanic and it appeared that his over twenty years' experience as a mechanic in Nigeria might eventually go to waste. Barth's story suggests that recognition of prior learning, which is about the acknowledgment and recognition of a person's knowledge and competence irrespective of where it was acquired (Stenlund, 2010) is still not properly implemented for asylum seekers in Italy. Barth however spoke that there were opportunities for him to learn various vocations. He said companies and vocational schools asked CPIA for students who were interested in being trained and his teacher would inform them whenever there were such requests. He added that he had already told his teacher that he was interested in training as a motor mechanic but he wanted to pass the terza media exam to be able to attend the course.

Clement's story also indicates the non-recognition of his previous experience as a welder. His desire to learn Italian was motivated by his wish to have the freedom to practice his vocation as a welder. He mentioned that because he was not trained as a welder in Italy, he did not have the permission to work as a welder though his current workplace allowed him to work as a welder in contravention of the law. This was only between him and his employers. He expressed his desire to go to a vocational school to obtain a certificate so he could freely work as a welder in Italy. And in order to attend vocational school, he had to first obtain the language school certificate. Clement's story shows that he wanted to attend vocational school for the

sake of complying with the requirements of obtaining a certificate. He did not feel he was going to learn anything new.

> There is a time I try to meet him. He say no. He say I am not hearing Italy. I cannot go to a school of welding. He said he want me to learn… That Valeria is very good. I love that woman so much. He teach people well. He say, I am not speaking Italy, how can me go to, errr, go… went to… I will go to class? Errr, this one is saldatore. I can't… I don't write it, I… He say this one, they will just teach me, I will be writing it, I will be doing everything. I say yes but I want to go because just to learn the practical to get my certificate. I do the work. I build the hanger, door, window…

In his case, Elias narrated that CPIA administered a placement test on him in order to place him in the appropriate class in middle not whether he needed to attend middle school. What is interesting about his case is that he finished secondary education in his country, Cameroon, but he had to start middle school again in Italy. There seems to be an implicit assumption in the operations of CPIA that asylum seekers have to start their education or training all over again in Italy. Elias narrated that he found terza media easy because he already had secondary education from his country:

> For me, it's easy. But they cannot change the exam because I know, you understand what I'm saying. So, they make exam for all people. The same level and everything. Now, I know all that thing. It's very easy for me. But for that other guys, they don't know mathematic. They don't know fraction. They don't know… For them, it's errr… you understand

Elias repeated again and again that the subjects, except for Italian, were easy for him because he had finished secondary education in his country as a way of constructing himself as an educated person who went to terza media just to obtain the certificate. One can surmise that apart from Italian language class, terza media was almost a waste of time for Elias.

There seems to be no information or orientation from camp operators, CPIA or other government agencies about the rights of a person to have their previous knowledge recognised and validated. Elias was not aware of the opportunity to have his previous educational experience evaluated and validated, despite not bringing his certificate with him to Italy. He insisted that it was necessary to start all over again in order to get the certificate. This unawareness seems to be the same with the other participants in this research:

> For them, you need to do it to have a diplom. You cannot… you cannot say I have a diplom, they come give you… no, no. You need to… if you are doing it before, yes, you need to do it again.

Discussion

The stories of the three participants highlight the topic of recognition in different aspects. As I have already mentioned, from the narratives of the participants there appears to be no process of carrying out RPL for asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. I view this non-recognition of the participants' prior knowledge and experience as a form of misrecognition. Their worth and abilities have not been recognised in Italy. Sandberg and Kubiak (2013) examined the place of Honneth's recognition theory in the recognition of prior learning (RPL). They asserted that recognising people's previous knowledge can improve their self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem. A notable point is that Barth and Clement did not seem to be bothered about the misrecognition they were experiencing. Honneth claims misrecognition injures a person's sense of self, but Barth and Clement seemed to have accepted the fact that because they were in another country, they could not question or challenge unfavourable practices. Thus, how the non-recognition of their previous work experience affected their self-identity is not really clear. Despite his many years of working as a motor mechanic, what was of paramount importance to Barth was to obtain the language certificate and get a job. Thus, the immediate recognition he seemed to be seeking was to be employed and earn money.

For Elias, making him to attend middle school all over again can be described as a form of subtle misrecognition perpetuated by academic institutions. He seemed to think attending middle school again was a waste of time but he felt had no option but to do it all over again. Carrying out RPL to evaluate Elias' experience and asking him what he career or educational path he wanted to pursue might have saved time for both Elias and CPIA. If the RPL process confirmed his competence as equal to a secondary school leaver, he could have been counselled and guided about vocational or further educational pathways even if that means not attending classes in CPIA. It important to point out that the non-recognition of immigrants' prior learning is not particular to Italy. Scholars have found that immigrants who migrate from the global South to the global North are likely to have their previous experiences, competences, education

and learning not recognised and thus have to take up jobs below their qualification level because their experiences and qualifications are considered to be inferior or not compatible to what obtains in their host country (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Fejes, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Gogia & Slade, 2011; Guo, 2014; Morrice et al., 2017; Slade, 2004, 2008; Venturini & Villosio, 2018). Scardigno (2019) however claims that Italy promotes the active inclusion and participation of asylum seekers and refugees into the economic and social system by recognising the importance of access to education and granting of recognition to qualifications acquired outside of Italy, but the experiences of Barth, Clement and Elias indicate otherwise.

Clement's and Elias' narratives illustrate the significance of adopting appropriate instructional methods in facilitating asylum seekers' learning. Their descriptions of their experiences in class are instructive for educators of asylum seekers to be sensitive to their students' feelings and needs. Scholars have noted the heterogeneity of asylum seekers in the learning situation in terms of linguistic proficiency, educational and cultural backgrounds (Barkoglou & Gravani, 2020). This is why Wildemeersch posits that instructional practices for asylum seekers should not be one-directional but "a multi-directional experience creating opportunities for both participants and facilitators to articulate their own, unique voices" (2017, p. 124).

One of the reasons lessons may be organised in the way described by Clement and Elias is because the educators' approach is informed by a deficit model of learning which is based on the assumption that learners lack important knowledge that will make them useful to their host society (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020). The deficit approach fails to take the specific needs of adult migrants into consideration but presumes to help immigrants overcome their deficiencies. Thus, educators provide immigrants with learning that they assume is relevant for the host society. This implies an assimilative view of integration in which immigrants jettison their cultural backgrounds and take on the values and ethos of the host society. Thus, the aim of assimilation is to make the immigrant similar in culture, values and character to members of the host society (Bartram et al., 2014). It is for this reason that Heinemann (2017) contends that the assimilatory approach perpetuates hegemony and aspires to make immigrants submissive

and compliant subjects. Guo and Maitra (2019) argue that this hegemonic philosophy currently shapes lifelong learning policies and practices in many developed countries. They therefore call for a decolonisation of lifelong practices in receiving nations. A call supported by Morrice (2021).

Furthermore, the subject of teaching method raises the issue of infantilisation. Heinemann (2017), citing the example of Germany, notes that there is a tendency for teachers of adult migrants and refugees to infantilise them, which the adult learners may find humiliating. Clement's narration above suggests a feeling of infantilisation by his teacher. He regarded some of the exercises given to them by their teacher as unnecessary, eliciting complaints from learners. According to Malcolm Knowles, adults are interested in learning that can help them solve real-life problems quickly (Jarvis, 2004; Merriam, 2004). It is important to point out that the infantilisation by teachers of adult asylum seekers and refugees may not always be deliberate. Sometimes, it may be borne out of compassion and the desire to help students learn the virtues and norms of the receiving society (Heinemann, 2017). Whatever the motive behind infantilising adult learners may be, it is a form of misrecognition in which full-grown persons are not regarded as morally responsible or mature persons.

Conclusion

This study identifies some important factors to be considered in learning provisions for asylum seekers in Italy. These are: valorisation of certificates, appropriateness of teaching methods and recognition of prior learning. My position is that if these factors are considered and worked upon, it will contribute to the improvement of the current provisions for asylum seekers' learning. I suggest that there is a need for adult learning and education centres or a separate agency in Italy to provide services to help learners create learning portfolios and seek how their previous knowledge and experiences can be recognised and validated instead of having to start learning what they already know all over again. Currently, an asylum seeker or refugee has to obtain a certificate in Italy before they can put their knowledge and skills to use. Through RPL, the period of certification for asylum seekers and refugees who already have experience in particular vocations might be reduced and they will not have to spend the same number of years or length of time as persons just learning a vocation. To implement RPL successfully, there

will be the need to train persons or adult educators on how to carry out RPL because carrying out effective RPL requires thoroughness in the assessment process (Werquin, 2009). Italy can also draw on the experiences of other nation states, for example, Canada and Thailand, that have developed strategies for implementing RPL.

Furthermore, after creating a portfolio for each asylum seeker student and identifying their previous knowledge, adult education and learning centres can prepare such students to learn Italian and at the same time prepare them for qualification tests/assessments validate their competence instead of making them go to middle school and then vocational training. If there are companies that offer vocational trainings, adult education centres can also send students who already have experiential knowledge or skills to such companies, probably based on existing agreements, so that students can work and make a living and also attend language classes. This will require concerted coordination among various stakeholders such as the government, camp operators, companies, adult learning and vocational centres. Fejes & Andersson (2009) demand changes in mindset - cultural changes - in workplaces, so that credits and certificates awarded through RPL can be valued.

In regard to instructional methods, educators who work with adult asylum seekers need to be trained in adult learning principles. For instance, Deiana & Spina (2021) found out that the majority of language teachers in the provincial centres of adult education in Italy, CPIA, were primary school teachers and they recommended that qualified and well-trained teachers should be employed in adult education centres. Moreover, lessons need to be organised to incorporate asylum seekers wealth of experience and not have, according to Wildemeersch, as its "sole aim… to accommodate the newcomers to our principal values and norms" (2017, p. 124). These instructors will also need to be trained to understand the sensitivities associated with relating with asylum seekers in order to get them to participate actively in the learning activities. Acknowledging asylum seekers and refugees as persons with significant prior experience and learning can contribute to their feelings of recognition and the development of a more confident identity.

CHAPTER NINE

Dilemmas and Identity Transformations: An Overall Discussion

Before closing my thesis, and in order to overcome a possible feeling of fragmentation due to its shape (a collection of diverse case studies), but also to allow for a deeper understanding of the whole, I will offer in these pages an overall discussion of my results based on what I consider as major emerging topics from my study, that is disorienting dilemmas and identity transformation. Before entering in my reflections, I need to create a new theoretical opening on the theory of transformative learning by Jack Mezirow (Mezirow, 1981, 1993, 2000; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). I see this theory now as a useful integration of Honneth's theory, as also suggested by Fleming (2022). I will also make reference to other theoretical concepts, such as Bruner's distinction of epistemic and agentive identity, and the role of narratives in shaping them.

From the literature on adult learning and migration, and from my own experience, asylum seekers and refugees often experience disruptions in their lives and loss of identity when they move to a new society (Morrice, 2013). These disruptions and loss of identity can be described as disorienting dilemmas, using Jack Mezirow's terms. What disorienting dilemma or disjuncture connotes is that asylum seekers and refugees find themselves in an unfamiliar situation in the new society. This dilemma or disjuncture can be an impetus for asylum seekers and refugees, albeit migrants generally, to learn how to adapt and thrive in their new society, and maybe to find ways to transform their identities in less oppressive ways.

In using this theory to discuss my data, my question is: can we define as "transformative" the kind of learning that asylum seekers and refugees narrate in their interviews? What kind of dilemmas do they meet and narrate? How do they represent their experience of change, adaptation, or learning? I will use the theory of transformative learning to question the capacity of

my participants to critically examine previously held beliefs that limited their flourishing and to emancipate themselves from such limiting beliefs (Formenti & West, 2018; Mezirow, 1981, 1993; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978).

The last four chapters described and documented the experiences of my research participants in Italy as asylum seekers and refugees. In this concluding chapter, I bring a new perspective to reflect on my data and interpretations and highlight how the experiences narrated by my participants' have shaped their identities. I will explore how the experience of disorienting dilemmas, and more specifically identity dilemmas, by my research participants was a trigger for learning and if and how their identity was transformed by this.

Transformative Learning and Mezirow's Model

The concept of transformative learning has been developed over decades and by many scholars. It started from a study carried out by Jack Mezirow in the United States (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). The study investigated the experiences of some adult women who returned to college and experienced a major shift in their worldview or meaning perspective. Transformative learning is therefore about perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1981, 1993), "a process of transforming our ways of interpreting experience, and of making new meaning" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 65). Transformative learning results in emancipation from restricting perspectives and moving to a more integrative and permeable perspective for interpreting experiences. There is a possibility for the learner - expected or not, intentional or not - to free themselves from reductive and/or oppressive social practices or narratives.

Mezirow argues that adults have many assumptions that were internalised uncritically through socialisation while growing up and some of these assumptions are limiting and oppressive. The socialisation process or the cultural milieu in which a person grows shapes the way a person interprets experiences and the criteria used to establish what is true or not. That is, the social-cultural background of a person offers them the tools and actions needed to ascribe meaning to an event, an experience and more generally to reality. Mezirow distinguishes "frames of meaning" (that are accessible through reflection, provoking a reflective learning) and "perspectives of meaning"; they may be epistemological, sociolinguistic and psychological, and form "the

structure of psycho-cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's experience" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7). Meaning perspectives can entail and contain different frames of reference, belief systems, perceptual filters, ideologies, paradigms, personal constructs etc. They circumscribe how a person interprets or makes meaning of their world. An individual cannot interpret outside of the social-cultural resources they have. Every experience they have is incorporated into their belief system, and it is through this belief system that they make sense of that experience. A belief system can be ideas or assumptions about what is good or bad, moral or immoral, honourable or dishonourable, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, love, beauty, bravery, etc.

When a person realises that their meaning perspective has imposed a limitation on their personal flourishing, Mezirow asserts that there is a need for perspective transformation, that is the process of becoming critically aware or being able to recognise how and why a person's meaning perspective – the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7) – is shaping the way they perceive themselves and social relations and adopting a meaning perspective that is more inclusive, and taking actions based on this new perspective. Mezirow explains that "Perspective transformation is the learning process by which adults recognise their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them to take action to overcome them" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7). He points out that perspective transformation can be sudden or gradual.

How does this transformation start? Mezirow claims it is usually precipitated by a disorienting dilemma. Disorienting dilemmas are "unexpected, magical, even amazing moments in life […] when […] we become aware of our […] myopic predictability" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 82). This definition of disorienting dilemma by Formenti and West shows that a disorienting dilemma does not have to be a negative experience, rather it is an experience that challenges a person's previous assumptions and causes them to become more critical of their belief system. A person begins to question their identity when they experience a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). A disorienting dilemma is a conflict; it challenges certainties and previous frames of meaning, hence provoking an individual to question their meaning perspective because it makes it impossible for them to act as previously. This conflict may bring them

to reflect and discover the presence of 'flaws' – that is epistemological, sociolinguistic or psychological distortions - with their meaning perspectives. To resolve this conflict, and free themselves from the dilemma, they need to become critically aware or conscious of how their meaning perspective has shaped their beliefs and assumptions. Formenti and West point out that,

> […] it is also helpful to note that the idea of disorientating dilemmas, far from being merely a psychological and individual phenomenon, can be applied to broad economic, social and cultural dynamics, like the 2008 financial crash (Brookfield and Holst 2011); or to the presupposition that capital can be endlessly and ignorantly expanded, without regulation. Dilemmas arrive too in the form of wars, mass migration, or wider political crisis (2018, p. 83).

How does transformation take place? Mezirow (1981, 1993) suggests that perspective transformation appears to follow this process (see figure 1): a disorienting dilemma; self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; a critical assessment of presuppositions; recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation is shared; exploring options for new roles, relationships and actions; planning as course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan; provisional efforts to try new roles; building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and a reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

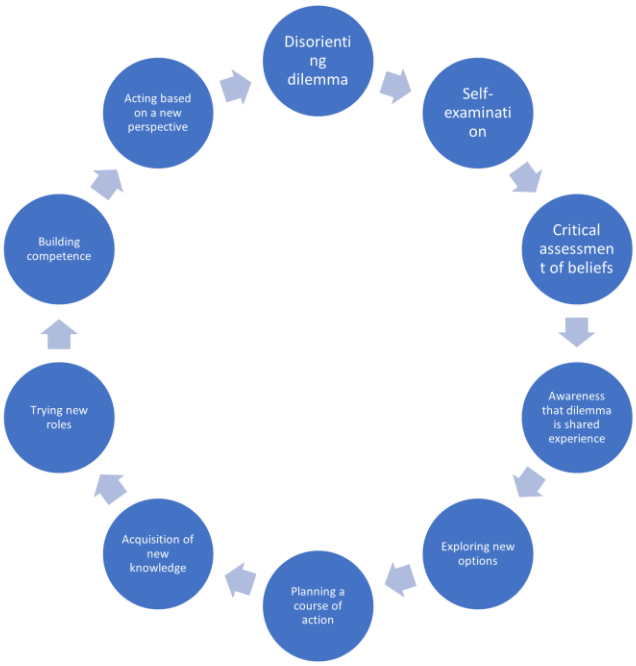

Figure 1: Model of the transformation process (Source: Author)

The theory of transformative learning is much more than this conception of Mezirow because his initial postulations were only a seed that has germinated into a large community of

researchers and scholars on transformative theory, but it is not my aim to go deeper into the theory. I am only interested in the capacity of the theory to illuminate the experience of migration.

How Transformative Learning Theory Can Highlight Migrants' Learning Experience

Mezirow & Marsick (1978) also identify migration as a probable cause of disorienting dilemma. For asylum seekers and refugees, the disruptions they face and possible loss of identity – disorienting dilemma – can be an impetus for learning (Morrice, 2013). They find themselves in the situation where they have to learn new behaviours and rules in their new society. They have to learn how to adapt and thrive in their new society. In short, they learn to develop cultural competence or cultural intelligence (Taylor, 1994a, 1994b). This critical transition period, as with other transitions that precipitate a disorienting dilemma, may be resolved through perspective transformation. For this reason, "Adult educators can no longer limit their response to felt needs articulated in educational terms by the learners themselves. We must help them to look at the sources of these needs as well as assist them to follow their current priorities" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 55).

There is, then, a possibility for adult educators working with asylum seekers and refugees; they can re-interpret their role to go beyond the mere provision of language classes and/or other formal education to this group of persons (even when they – asylum seekers and refugees – themselves think that their major need is to get a job, and language learning is a part of it) but instead, they could try to facilitate a critical appraisal of their situation through the naming of their dilemmas and perspectives. This would be a potentially empowering process for these persons who come as learners into adult education spaces. As suggested by Freire, anti-oppressive education starts by naming the world; educators can encourage asylum seekers and refugees to challenge their own perspectives and take steps towards experiencing perspective transformation, by asking them to identify those personal beliefs that are limiting their flourishing in the new society and to consider alternative beliefs that can aid their flourishing. There is a limit to this: every step of Mezirow's model is only a possibility: gaining insights from critical awareness does not necessarily bring one to transformation or to emancipated or empowered action (Mezirow, 1981).

We can say that transformative learning has happened if an individual acts differently based on their new perspective: "Transformative learning requires that one act upon new insights gained […] Such action may involve effecting interpersonal, organisational or systemic changes" (Mezirow, 1993, p. 146). If adult education organisations, like CPIA in Italy, choose to implement transformative learning theory in their practice, they would need to start by reassessing their educational goals and objectives and revise how they carry out instructional practices and evaluation, with a view to assisting adults to "understand the meaning of their experience by participating more fully and freely in rational discourse to validate expressed ideas. The adult educator's task is to foster critical self -reflection and participation in rational discourse and action" (Mezirow, 1993, p. 146).

Fostering Transformation through Recognition?

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning has been criticised for placing emphasis on cognition, rationality and individuality while downplaying emotions and social relationships as well as not sufficiently explaining the role of power relations in the transformation process (Formenti & West, 2018; Hoggan et al., 2017; Mälkki, 2010; Morrice, 2013). While Hoggan et al (2017) do not completely agree that Mezirow ignores the role of emotion in his theory of transformative learning, they submit that the criticism that the theory places too much emphasis on cognition is justifiable. They argue that Mezirow underestimates the social nature of learning, making the theory of transformative learning insufficient to explain the dynamics of social power.

This observed gap of disregard for the sociological aspects of learning in the theory of transformative learning can be where the theory of recognition may be useful since it emphasises the effect of intersubjective relationships on a person's identity. The theory of recognition is a "potential bridge between intersubjective, unconscious as well as social dynamics in the cultivation of critical perspectives" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 85). To illustrate the importance of intersubjective recognition to transformation or how transformative relationships can facilitate perspective transformation, Formenti and West (2018) present the story of a refugee who experienced transformations through the quality of relationships that he was fortunate to forge and the recognition he experienced. Writing about the same story, West (2014) mentioned that

experiences of recognition contributed to the refugee, Mathew, developing the capacity to challenge oppression and discrimination. He also became more agentic and critical. The story of how this refugee, Mathew, was able to find "a critical voice and new ways of seeing in a world of displacement" (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 90) resonates with my work since my research participants are grappling with similar experiences of displacement and uncertainties.

Drawing inspiration from the case study of Mathew, I attempt to explore, through my data, if and how relationships and intersubjective recognition helped my research participants to develop the ability for critical reflection and experience a transformed identity or if and how a lack of recognition impeded their ability to become more critical of oppressive structures. I also looked out for what Morrice (2013) calls "the darker side of learning" (p. 252). Examples of such type of learning are when refugees and asylum seekers have to unlearn many of the things they already knew or change their meaning perspective in order to adapt to their new society. This can involve accepting that their cultural and social capital was not recognised in the new society. Thus, experiencing the deconstruction of their identity whereby they learned what and who they were not in their new social context and having no opportunity to build on their existing qualifications and experiences. This kind of learning, according to Morrice (2013) is not captured by transformative learning.

Identity

The concept of identity adopted in this study recognises that context and relationships shape how the self is constantly being constructed. This implies that identity is contextually, temporally and socially constructed. Thus, a person has no single or fixed identity, but their identity is always shifting since it is a "product of specific historical, cultural and institutional sites within specific discursive formations" (Morrice, 2011, p. 11).

Morrice (2011) discusses how migration affects identity. She underlines the changes that take place during the process of migration: an individual gets out of a familiar environment and predictable practices and moves into a new environment with new practices and in the process, abandons their old social positions and takes on new social roles and identities. Morrice (2011) adds that through their narratives, migrants, not the least asylum seekers, reveal how they are

negotiating new identities in the new society. Singer (1965, p. 162 cited in Mezirow, 1981) explains that identity is developed through paying attention to and cultivating one's experience. Schiffrin (1996) expounds how identities are negotiated and expressed through narratives drawing on Bruner's (1986) idea that self is constructed and transformed through narratives, according to the context people find themselves in.

Thus, a person's narrative can give us glimpses into their sense of self (Schiffrin, 1996), that is, the narrative self. It is also important to note that the discourse context shapes the self that is constructed. Schiffrin states that people define themselves through what they say, how they say it and whom they are saying it to. By narratively constructing our own experiences we position ourselves in relation to social-cultural expectations, and in doing this, our identity emerges. Accordingly, our sense of self changes when our socio-cultural expectations change. Furthermore, the stories we tell reveal how we see ourselves in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social class and social roles. Drawing on Bruner's distinction between epistemic self and the agentive self, Shiffrin (1996) indicates two ways by which a person's sense of self can be understood.

The epistemic self is revealed when a person states their feelings, wants and beliefs. That is what a person states that they know, believe, desire and feel can be a pointer to how they see themself. My research participants' epistemic selves, therefore, might have been shaped in some way about what they have learned from their experiences in Italy. The agentive self is revealed when a person talks about actions (including verbal actions) they take toward others or towards achieving a goal. Schiffrin (1996) points out that in constructing one's identity through narrative, one also reveals what she terms one's position. That is, one's feelings and thoughts about other participants or characters in one's narrative. Thus, self-positioning in the context of identity construction is one's perception of one's relationships to other characters mentioned in the story told. Therefore, what I think about (the) other person(s) in my narrative and how I act towards them reveals my relationship with them or my position towards them. For instance, one's position can be that of solidarity, cooperation, defiance, scorn, power, control, etc.

Pointing out the role of intersubjectivity in the formation of identity, Schiffrin states that "Who we are is sustained by our ongoing interactions with others, and the way we position ourselves in relation to those others" (1996, p. 197). This statement explains how one's self-identity is shaped by one's relationship with others. When the learning that takes place during social encounters and interactions (even in formal learning situations) is integrated into a person's biography, it can lead to a transformation in the person's identity (Morrice, 2011).

Honneth's work on recognition suggests that individuals build a healthy self-identity when they experience recognition from others. In the case of refugees and asylum seekers, as noticed in their narratives (see chapters 5 to 8), the Italian society constructs them as lacking some qualities such as language proficiency and Italian education or training that can accord them recognition in the society. Misrecognition manifesting through racism and discrimination played some roles in the way some of the participants constructed their identity (see Chapter 7). The public discourse about asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa who come into Italy via the Mediterranean as undesirable elements (Formenti & Luraschi, 2020; Russo et al., 2016) shape the perception of Italians about persons from Black Africa. Morrice (2011) argues that negative public discourse can establish and sustain the perception that asylum seekers and refugees are inferior; cause the marginalisation of this category of people through othering; and create a climate where discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers is not recognised as discrimination and thus experiences of discrimination can go unchallenged.

While I have established that through the stories that people tell, we can infer what their view of themselves in their social world is, it is important to note that this view or perception of self is not fixed; it is locally situated (Schiffrin, 1996). That is, when we narrate our experience, the aspects of our identity that we reveal depends on who we are talking to and why we are saying what we are saying. Therefore, one can argue that identity is co-constructed during narrative. Thus, even constructs such as 'blackness' and 'whiteness' might be shifting constructs. For example, that my research participants were Black Africans does not mean that they maintained that identity in their stories. It is possible that in their narratives, depending on what they were trying to make me understand, they attempted to distance themselves from some aspects of

their Blackness and tried to construct an identity of a White Italian. For instance, in order to show that they were integrating into the society or to show to me that they were now 'civilised'.

Dilemmas and Identity Transformation

After articulating the relationships between Honneth's recognition (my main theoretical frame) and concepts of transformative learning, dilemmas and identity, I can now go back to my case studies and interrogate my results with these new, more integrated theoretical lenses.

A major dilemma that my research participants experienced was a perceived disjuncture between their expectations and realities. Most asylum seekers come to Italy with high expectations of securing employment and earning money but when they arrive, they are faced with the realisation that they need to learn Italian and obtain formal certification notwithstanding their needs and hopes or the previous learning and job experiences they had before arriving in Italy. They discover that some practices in their home countries are not existent in Italy. For example, in Nigeria, there is no need to obtain formal certification to practice a vocation. The usual practice is the apprenticeship system where a person can learn a vocation or trade without having any formal education. So, these persons begin to examine their unquestioned assumption of coming to Europe/Italy and making money easily. The dilemma of getting a job and earning money was resonant in the narratives of the participants. Steve revealed that getting a job was his priority, *"I came to Italy in 2017 and my very first goal in 2017 was to get a job before the end of the year."* Charles asserted that it was difficult for a Black man to find a decent job in Italy, "*Common restaurant work, they are discriminating you, looking down on you that you can't work there as a Black man."* He also contended that, *"Your certificate in Nigeria is not valuable here in Italy. Anything you have to do, you will do it here."* The experiences of Barth, Clement and Elias, as we have seen in Chapter 8 seem to back up Steve's claim. In order to overcome the challenge of getting a job, the participants were made to understand that they needed to learn Italian and obtain Italian certification regardless of whatever educational or work experience they had. Thus, all my research participants accepted (uncritically) to learn Italian and obtain Italian certification.

The responses of asylum seekers to this dilemma vary. Some decide to look for any job they can get without learning Italian or obtaining formal certification because they feel they cannot wait to finish learning before getting a job. They believe schooling will stand in the way of making money. Rukevwe (See Chapter 5) expressed this view as the reason she initially refused to learn Italian. Some others resort to begging for alms. From my findings, begging can be seen as a better use of time than attending classes because it allows them to send money back home. Some other asylum seekers and refugees, like my participants, either combine schooling with working or commit fully to learning. These ones believe they need to be patient to learn Italian and obtain the necessary formal certifications in order to have better prospects of securing employment and making a living. This shows a deconstruction of previous values and construction of new values. It is a change in the frames of meaning, not necessarily a transformation of previous perspectives. If they take the new values (or refuse them) unquestioningly, there is no dilemma. The real disorienting dilemma is when the old and the new are both unsustainable, you cannot choose, so you go into a deep crisis and start to ask yourself questions about the validity of your knowledge or even who you are. Elias seemed to be experiencing this kind of crisis. He was unable to get a job in order to fend for his family back home because he had no Italian certification and at the same time, he found it disrespectful to have to obtain middle school certificate again. He said it was a school for young men who had dropped out of initial education. He also called it a waste of time for him because he already possessed high school certificate in his country.

The taking on or relearning of new values does not necessarily mean the new values they learned are superior to the old ones – as suggested by Mezirow for transformation to take place – but it is part of their strategies for negotiating the dilemma of conflict of values and beliefs about how to survive and belong in their new society. The learning, therefore, that brings about transformation is not the planned learning that takes place in the classroom but the learning about what it takes to lead a good life in Italy. This learning takes place everywhere in the society from interactions and observations including in formal spaces. The stories of Elias, Steve, Clement and Barth exemplify this position. They decided to go back to language classes and middle school not because they actually agreed that it was necessary to acquire formal certification in order to be able to practice their vocations but they felt that if they had to secure

good employment in Italy, they had no choice but to acquire formal certification. Elias expressed this clearly. In fact, almost all the participants said the reason they wanted to obtain formal certification was to get a good job in Italy. They did not talk about formal education as necessary to have a good life.

Another dilemma faced by my participants was how to respond to discrimination and racism. According to Fleming (2022), misrecognitions (of which discrimination and racism are examples) precipitate disorienting dilemma. While Mezirow argues that the process of transformative learning begins with the experience of a disorienting dilemma, the narratives of my research participants do not show how they successfully resolved these dilemmas. Instead, they seemed to find means to accommodate the dilemmas they experienced. They seemed to have learned how to live with discrimination and racism. There are no observable critical transformations in their worldviews. For example, Barth and Clement seemed to have accepted the loss of their intellectual capital without challenging or questioning the system that does not recognise their prior learning. Mezirow acknowledges that not all dilemmas lead to transformation because people can find the process difficult (Mezirow, 1981). Mälkki (2010, 2012; 2014) corroborates Mezirow and suggests that the kind of reflection needed for transformation to take place can be accompanied by painful emotions, thereby causing the transformation process to be aborted. Mezirow (2000) also claims that unquestioningly accepting reasons given by authority figures can obstruct transformation and leading to a person taking on a new meaning perspective. This seems to be the case with my research participants. They seemed to have accepted that their previous learning and experiences have to be updated or upgraded if they must practice their vocation in Italy.

My participants also experienced was loss of their social and cultural capital which entailed their work experience, linguistic competence and educational achievements. This loss of capital made it difficult or almost impossible for them to enter the labour market which was their major reason for migrating to Europe. All of my research participants were economic migrants who had migrated to Europe with the hope of having a better life. Their major goal had been to go to Europe and make money. Associated with their loss of capital is the deconstruction of

their identity. By being placed in reception centres, "camps", where they experienced restricted liberty, their identity as independent individuals changed to that of helpless, and at times, hopeless persons. Tamuno expressed how he felt a sense of frustration:

> There was a day like I feel pain in this country, like someone deciding for you; tell you, *"As far as you are in my country, I decide what will happen to you not you deciding for me." So I was like "I'm still under slave. So, I need to work hard on myself."* So, they decide what I will do. They decide what I will not do. So, but… even to an extent they stop paying me money because that first time, they told me that they will be giving me 40 euro every month. So, there was a period… I receive that money, let's say two times but I did not receive it with my hand. They said that they will give me the money; whatever I want to buy, I should tell them. So, they will be keeping the money for me in the office. I said *"Okay, no problem."* So, after two months, I see that the money is no more again. So…

This sense of frustration led him to think of a plan of action to become independent. He mentioned that he told himself that he needed to work on himself, so he could get out of a position of dependence on other people. He saw schooling as his way of overcoming the dilemma he was faced with:

> So that's how I began to push my life. So, I said, "*As far sey I am opportune to go to school, let me continue school*

Elias also vented his frustration at his inability to find a job. This was negatively affecting his identity as someone who was supposed to provide for his family.

> ….I make one year and four months now in Italia. I pass like six months in the house because coronavirus. So, my own experience here is no work. I'm not young man. I have family. I need to work…. You need to work. You need to have money. It's not easy. It's not easy to come and stay in a home, no work, nothing. So, for me, when you look work, first of all, you need to talk… you need to speak Italian. So, for now, it's difficult….
>
> ***
>
> So, I'm still doing terza media. I will make it in July.
>
> ***
>
> **And after terza media what is next?**
> I am doing some training with some company.
> **Okay. And do you think terza media has… going to terza media has been helpful for you?**
> Yes. Because all these company, when you look… want to… when you want to do training, they write there, dopo, after terza media. So, you need terza media to do anything. They don't care about you speak, you don't speak. They write there, you want to do this training, you need to have terza media. It's like that.
>
> ***
>
> That's why we are doing terza media now to make everything. That one is AMC, how to make mechanic, everything

Elias was in high school because he had learned that without the certificate he could not find a job. Thus, the dilemma of how to get a job was a motivation for him to go back to school despite the fact that he had completed high school in his country.

Some of the other participants spoke about the difficulty of living in camp. Steve and Barth mentioned that they had to abide by curfews in their camps, failure of which might lead to being expelled from the camp and becoming homeless. Steve and Elias also expressed frustration at having to eat the same food every day:

> (Steve): I stayed there from November 2017 till February this year. That's three years, more or less. We eat rice and pasta every day. You can't prepare your own food where I lived. There are some other centres where they allow them cook. They give them money. They buy their foodstuffs and cook but in my centre, you can't cook. You can't bring food from outside. If you bring food from outside, you have to let them know you bring food from outside.
>
> ***
>
> You have the dining hall where you eat. You can't even take food upstairs, maybe you are not hungry right now, you want to eat later. You can't take food upstairs. We have one hour. Dinnertime na one hour. Lunchtime na one hour. Breakfast na one hour.
>
> (Elias): Hmm, the camp… the camp is like that. I know that they are doing his best. Rice, pasta… In the morning, the give you breakfast, milk and bread. One o'clock, they give food, pasta and some apple, banana, and sometime, mandarin, orange. Night, they bring rice. It's like that. So, everyday the same thing. For you to eat rice every day, pasta… You know Africa, you don't eat that thing every day. We have many, many food but we are not allowed to cook. We are not allowed to cook. So, you need that food.

The participants' narratives reveal a loss of identity as autonomous and self-reliant individuals. Tamuno recounted another painful experience where he had to ask for a bottle of water from the officials in charge of his accommodation centre, "*I said okay, if I can get a bottle of water from the office. He said, 'No'*". These experiences impacted adversely on the identity of these participants, and it is not surprising that Steve eventually left the camp and moved in with his girlfriend while Tamuno was looking forward to when he would be able to afford to rent his own accommodation.

The dilemmas asylum seekers face in their new society has been documented (Morrice, 2011, 2013). With the knowledge that the theory of transformative learning can provide insight into how disorienting dilemmas can play a role in their strategies for coping with their new situation,

I started to question my data to identify if and how disorienting dilemmas experienced by my participants eventually led them to develop transformative learning.

(Uncritical) Transformation and Identities

While there is no doubt that my research participants experienced loss of identity and social and cultural capital, when they arrived in Italy, what is not evident is how they developed criticality or experienced perspective change. Some of them seemed to experience transformations, for example, Rukevwe, Tamuno, Steve and Barth, but these do not appear to be critical transformations as it seems they only devised strategies that would make them fit into the expectations of the Italian society. Though as we have seen in previous chapters, there were moments that some of the participants challenged their teachers and accommodation centres' administrators. The lack of systemic recognition appears to have played a big part in shaping the identities of the participants as compliant individuals with the exception of Charles who appeared to be defiant and confrontational. The role of recognition in shaping the identities of the participants can also be observed from their narratives but these transformations, while positive, are not as a result of perspective change or the development of criticality. In the following paragraphs, I explore the narrative construction of identity by each participant. This is a way to celebrate the uniqueness of each story and voice, and grasp the universal themes at the same time.

Tamuno – The Determined Learner

Tamuno's agentive selves were revealed in his narratives. He constructed the identity of a motivated and determined person. His motivation and determination were shaped by some painful experiences he had, particularly in Libya. According to him, if he overcame terrible circumstances in Libya, he would overcome the challenges he faced in Italy. His plan was to keep learning until he would get a good job and start living the life he desired, and thereby serve as a good example for other asylum seekers:

> What I'm praying for…. let me start my school and start work. Those are the two thing…. I will use my work, rent house, be living fine.
> ***

> The only way I can encourage is them is like… like me doing something great. Like them seeing me working. Like now, I read my driving school. Like I read driving books at home now. Like them seeing me like I'm working; I'm living on my own; get my document. That's the only thing that will motivate them….

Tamuno also constructed himself as a combatant who spoke against experiences of discrimination. While he might have felt powerless at some point, particularly during his initial experiences in Italy, he did not take experiences of misrecognition lying low. He protested against treatments of discrimination but he revealed that he was afraid of the police because he had witnessed them maltreat a fellow Nigerian. Tamuno's narratives also revealed his epistemic self. He narrated attending language classes was vital to asylum seekers and refugees' success in Italy. Tamuno also expressed the view that Italy is a racist country. He seemed to have accepted that he was an 'other' in Italy (Chapter 6).

Tamuno's transformation from a clueless and frustrated individual as we saw in Chapter 6 to a motivated and determined individual is observable, and experiences of recognition from teachers and a camp worker (mentioned in Chapter 6) seemed to have contributed to this transformation. But his capacity to confront and challenge discriminatory practices seem to come from the confidence he gained from his ability to speak Italian and not because of his relationships. One can argue though that Tamuno's ability to speak Italian is probably an offshoot of the supportive relationships he had with his teachers and the camp worker mentioned above.

Elias – The Frustrated Figure

Elias' agentive self is revealed through his narratives about his steps and plans to obtain various non-formal trainings and certifications in order to increase his chances of getting a job. He also revealed that despite the lockdown imposed by the government in Italy which restricted movement, he paid for and participated in language classes online so he could learn Italian. Elias also revealed his epistemic self. He constructed the identity of someone who was frustrated and anxious. His frustration and anxiety came from being unable to work yet (Chapter 8). He expressed that he was an adult who was supposed to be financially supporting his family in Cameroon but which had been difficult because he lacked the means to earn an income. He also felt that attending middle school again was a waste of time because of his previous education. He

believed though that he had no option but to attend middle school all over again in Italy if he wanted to get a job, he was however impatient because he believed that as an adult he did not have the luxury of time to attend school that young persons have. He believed he was supposed to be working. He therefore expressed a position of resignation and acceptance of the circumstances in which he had found himself.

There are no observable transformations in Elias' identity. He seemed to have accepted the fact that he had to complete middle school before he could find a job despite having completed high school in Cameroon. While he was of the opinion that attending middle school was a waste of time, he appeared powerless to change his circumstance. It also does not appear that CPIA adopts transformative or critical pedagogy or methodology that could make him challenge the oppressive system of going through high school all over again. Instead, the systemic non-recognition of his previous educational achievements seemed to have dented his identity as grown and morally responsible individual. In fact, his teachers and friends encouraged him to be patient:

> Our Italian prof, when I was P2, he was ask… sometime he was bring… give me some clothes. That prof he was… like me when he see me. He give me clothes two time. Seven and seven clothes…. He put it in plastic. When school finished, "Elias, take." I take. He give me two times. Plus tell us, "It's good. Calm down, calm down, calm down. It's not easy, I know but continue to learn and go and…" He was nice.

Steve – The Strategist

Steve projected the identity of determination, focus and activism. His agentive self is revealed when he told stories of how he set some goals for himself when he got to Italy. His first goals were to get a job and be able to speak Italian before the end of his first year in Italy. His narration also showed that he was intent on acquiring education at all costs. This was why he did not allow the pursuit of money to distract him from attending classes. He also found a way to combine schooling and working. Steve's narration also revealed his strategy for ingratiating himself with Italians (Chapter 7). Despite his desire to receive approval and acceptance from Italians, Steve disclosed that there were occasions he expressed his displeasure at being treated with disrespect. So, he was not absolutely compliant in order to gain favour with Italians. Steve's epistemic self is also revealed in his narration. His perspective was that doing well

academically was important to succeeding in Italy. His view was also that doing well for himself would prove to Italians that he was not an undesirable element – which many Black asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa are considered to be. Doing well for himself was also a way to make his father proud.

There are noticeable transformations in Steve's identity. From someone who could not speak the language, *"…. I came to Italy in 2017 and my very first goal in 2017 was to get a job before the end of the year. So, I didn't… I couldn't speak any word of Italian. I was practically zero, a foreigner…..,"* he became a confident user of the language:

> I work as a security guard – I'm also a mediator, interpreter…. So, most of the Nigerians, they pay me. They call me on the phone and tell me, *"Could you go with me to the court, to school and interpret for me?*

Steve seemed to have worked out a better way for asylum seekers to be treated in Italy. His argument is that the way they are treated predisposes them to crime and antisocial activities. The translations of the following two extracts are given immediately under them:

> …. And your moni na how much o? 35 euros a day, nah in e suppose be o for both accommodation, feeding, evri tin we you need, school. 35 euros a day. Then pocket money. Inside dat pocket moni, dem go kon give us 2 euros 50 cents a day. For inside di 35 euros, dem go giv us 2 euros, 50 cents a day. Na hin e tek dey make up 75 euros at di end of di month. At times, 77 euros, 50 cents di month wey month be 31 days. Na so e tek dey reach dat amount. But inside dat 35 euros now, when dem giv you 2 euros, 50 cents, di oda tins sef you no dey see am bikos most of di time, many of di guys no dey for house. Most of di time, many of di guys dey buy dia own cream, dia own bathing soap and all those stuffs. Most of di times, many of dis guys dey pay for dia skul by demsefs. So, why not just giv dis… create… once dis guys kom, you register am as asylum seeker, maybe you put like 4, 5 of dem togeda, rent an apartment for dem, give dem dis… dey pay dem dis 35 euros evri day for one month. At di end month, tell dem sey 5 of una, una go put una moni togeda tek pay for di house rent. Then buy foodstuff and oda tins. I think it will be a better way to make these guys feel responsible for themselves. Bikos you no fit bring adults kom, kon make dem feel laik babies. Then at the end of di day, you kon tell dem sey, "One day you'll go out of this place." Mek you expect mek dem just integrate once for di society. No. Definitely, they will be criminals.
>
> ***
>
> Di state dey push did piputo go do all dis kain tin. By di time you no giv me any means to tek integrate myself for di society, wetin I go resort to? Either crime or begging? These are the easiest things to do…. Like I just said, the first thing that I talked about is when you enta dis kontri, di state don already take your name, surname, date of birth and evritin, create your own special codice fiscale for, your fiscal code for you. Why not use that fiscal code, create a bank account for these persons? Tell them, "Guys, I'm going to rent…" Many houses dey for Italy

here wey be sey… unrented apartment, nobody dey stay…. Exactly. So, that you won't be afraid that they won't pay, okay the state will pay but we are leaving the rest things. Let them take care of themselves. They go out in the morning, "Guys, you have to go to school." Give them ultimatum say, "One year compulsory, you have to go to school. If you no go to skul for one year, you can't stay here. You will leave. You would have to go out. Then, who no wan go skul for one year? I no believe sey e get pesin wey be sey e brain block, block wey be sey for one year

(Translation)

And how much is your money? 35 euros per day. That is what you have for accommodation, feeding, everything you need, schooling. 35 euros a day. Then you are entitled to pocket money. They give you 2 euros, 50 cents a day from the pocket money, making 75 euros at the end of the month, or 77 euros, 50 cents for months with 31 days. That's how it sums up to that amount. But apart from the 2 euros, 50 cents they give you, you don't get the other things because most of the time many of the guys are not in the house. Most of the time, many of the guys buy their own cream, their own bathing soap and other stuffs. Most of the time, many of the guys pay their school fee by themselves. So why not just create a system where when these guys come and you register them as asylum seekers, you put about 4 or 5 of them together, rent an apartment for them and give them the 35 euros a day for one month. At the end of the month, tell them that, "*The 5 of you will put your money together and pay the house rent, buy foodstuffs and other things."* I think it will be a better way to make these guys feel responsible for themselves because you can't make adults feel like babies and then keep telling them, "*One day, you will leave this place*" and you expect them to integrate quickly into the society. No. Definitely, they will become criminals.

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The government is the one pushing people into these things. When you don't give me the chance to integrate myself into the society, what will I resort to? Either crime or begging. These are the easiest things to do…. Like I just said, when someone enters this country, the first thing the country does is to take your name, surname, date of birth, everything, and they create your fiscal code for you. Why not use the fiscal code to create a bank account for these persons? Tell them, *"Guys, I'm going to rent…*" There are many unoccupied apartments in Italy. Nobody is staying in them. In order to ensure that rent is paid, "Okay, the state will pay the rent but we will leave you to take care of the rest." Let them take care of themselves. When they go out in the morning, "*Guys, you have to go to school."* Give them an ultimatum and say, "*It is compulsory to go to school for one year. If you don't go to school for one year, you can't stay in this country. You have to leave."* Who will not want to go to school for one year? I don't believe there anyone who is that dull that for one year…

It appears that Steve had thought of the structures that inhibit the flourishing of asylum seekers in Italy and he had theorised how to overcome these inhibitions. This is a glimpse that Steve was developing criticality. However, how did this come about? How was he able to develop criticality? A probable answer could be that recognition from his teachers and from his Italian girlfriend might have helped him develop a more confident identity so much so that he seemed not to be ashamed of his identity as an asylum seeker:

I'm still an asylum seeker till tomorrow. I don't think anything is going to change from now till tomorrow
You don't have faith?
No till tomorrow by 10th of June
I believe in miracles
Nothing is going to change. Nothing is going to change

Charles – Angry and Feisty

Charles projected a combative identity. He cut the figure of a frustrated and angry individual due to being racialised and having limited opportunities in Italy. His agentive self is revealed in his description of how he reacted or would react to experiences of discrimination. Charles identity was formed by his experiences of structural misrecognition. His internal anger at the Italian society, however, his reaction to being misrecognised is to be confrontational wherever or whenever he can and to leave Italy eventually (See Chapter 7). His material does not give enough clues about any form of transformation. In fact, he was in language school at the time of the interview so he could increase his chances of getting a job in Italy. Charles' story shows that knowledge or anger about one's limiting circumstances is not enough. There is a need to have a strategy to overcome these limitations, which might require the guidance of a significant other such as a teacher, instructor, mentor or friend who can help such an individual develop their criticality. If one does not have the capacity to overcome identified limitations, one might succumb to the limiting or oppressive system.

Barth – Unruffled and Ready to Bide His Time

Barth constructed the identity of an acquiescent person who regarded schooling as highly important and a non-negotiable path for an asylum seeker to flourish in Italy (Chapter 8). His agentive self is revealed in his description of his resoluteness to ensure he obtained formal certification. He sponsored himself to school when those in charge of his welfare would not. Barth's story reveals that he experienced systemic misrecognition because he could not transfer his 20 years' experience as a mechanic to the Italian context. He was not made aware of any provision for his previous experience to be recognised. In fact, what the misrecognition did to him was that he lost the identity of a skilled worker and took on the identity of a school student, which he seemed to have no problem with. An observable transformation which looks positive

is that he came into Italy with only elementary school education but he had turned out to be an enthusiastic and committed student. He was uncritical of the fact that his many years' experience as a vocational worker was not recognised. He did not question this situation but rather he accepted it as normal.

Clement – Grateful to Italy for Accepting Him and His Family

Clement's narration mainly revealed his epistemic self. He constructed an identity of satisfaction, gratitude, and like Barth, acquiescence. In fact, he experienced systemic non-recognition of his previous experience while his workplace seemed to be considerate enough to allow him to use his skill (Chapter 8). He seemed undisturbed by the fact that his previous experience as a welder was not duly recognised. His disposition of complaisance is revealed in his desire to finish language classes so he could go to a welding school. There are no visible transformations in Clement's identity from his story. While he experienced recognition from his teachers, this recognition (Chapter 8) seemed to only make him want to conform to their expectation of him – to learn Italian and go to vocational school despite already possessing the skill and working as a welder. There are no indications that the asylum system as well as adult education provided spaces for him to be critical about the limitations he was experiencing.

Rukevwe – An Epitome of Resilience

Rukevwe is the only woman in my sample; she constructed the identity of a resilient and determined learner. Her narration revealed her agentive self. She was unwavering in her quest to attain academic achievements, and her progress seemed to have contributed to a sense of esteem in her. Her transformation from a cynical and unsure individual to a confident individual and an enthusiastic learner is noticeable. This transformation can be traced to the experience of recognition she received from her teachers. There seems to be a change of perspective in Rukevwe's perspective. She had initially balked at the idea of learning Italian because she was more concerned about earning money. But a disorienting dilemma caused her to have a rethink:

> About the language school or whatever because some people have this mentality that they ain't going to stay. So even if you want to learn the language consciously, subconsciously, you won't

> want to learn it no matter how you try it when you are awake because you've already programmed yourself that you don't need this language; just for a period of time. So that was it but at the time whereby I was getting some opportunities of jobs, meeting some kinds of people, finding myself in some kind of gatherings that I couldn't even explain or express myself…. So, I just knew that I had to learn the language.

She eventually learned the language and was able to make academic progress. Rukevwe's story is interesting, as she did not attend language classes because she was encouraged to do so by those in charge of her welfare – she actually did not heed to their advice - but she came to the realisation herself that she needed to learn the language because she was dissatisfied with her situation.

Cross-cutting Observations

The participants' identities and coping strategies are diverse while there are similarities in their narratives. It seems that each participant's identity has been informed by their experiences in Italy. Almost all of them construct the identity of determined learners because of what they have learned about the significance of formal certification in Italy. Their interpretation of their experiences seemed to have shaped their identity to be complaisant, submissive, aggressive, determined and/or frustrated. From their narratives, the identity of an asylum seeker or refugee was not one they tried to distance themselves from but instead they owned it and identified with it. In her study of asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom, Morrice (2011) found that the majority of the participants in her study concealed their identity as asylum seekers or refugees because of the negative stereotype about asylum seekers as persons who were living off government benefits and not contributing to the society.

What could be the reason for the difference in the disposition of the participants in my study and those in Morrice's? One interpretation is that the asylum seekers in Morrice's study were highly educated and professionals, so the loss of their professional identity and socio-cultural capital was not easy for them to accept while the participants in my study were able to quickly adjust to losing their socio-cultural capital and eager to be accepted by the Italian society. Another idea is that the participants in my study seemed very aware that the negative experiences they had were because of their colour and nationality, so they foregrounded these experiences during the interview much more than in Morrice's study. Why is it so? Notwithstanding the

seeming acceptance of the identity of asylum seeker or refugee by my research participants, the experiences narrated by some of them revealed discrimination, racism, frustration and hardship. I wonder if it was easier for them to tell these negative feelings to a Nigerian, a person who could be perceived as similar to them. Their narratives also contained clues of agency, determination, resilience and hope. While the identity of an asylum seeker or refugee might have been constructed by my research participants as unproblematic, the identity of a Black person seemed to connote difficulties for some of them.

Lastly, from the stories of the participants, their experiences of recognition and misrecognition seemed to have shaped their identities, albeit unconsciously in some cases, as in the case of non-recognition of their prior learning. While experiences of recognition led to some observable transformations in some of the participants (Rukevwe's and Tamuno's stories), whether the participants became critical of the limiting and oppressive experiences they had is not evident from the materials. A reason for this might be that the asylum system and adult education centres do not provide spaces for critical dialogue, reflection and action for asylum seekers and refugees but instead they seem to encourage a disposition of compliance without question, with asylum seekers afraid to challenge the system for fear that their asylum application might be adversely affected. Asylum seekers thus learn to accept the status quo; they learn to conform to the expectations of the system. While learning is taking place within them, this learning does not appear transformative in this study. One can conclude then – and Mezirow (1981) and Formenti & West (2018) agree – that not all dilemmas lead to a change of perspective. For change to happen, there is a need for favourable conditions, such as proper space, time and relationships. This is why I argue that transformative relationships and intentional education can be very important to facilitating a favourable transformation.

In summary, in order to enhance human freedom, meaning, and emancipation, adult education should promote critical reflexivity. It is a must for adult learning. This is how transformation can come about. However, Formenti and West identify a limit in Mezirow's work, since for the North American scholar "criticality means conscious reflection on our mind sets that must be changed, voluntarily and radically [...] But a rational criticality is only one ingredient and landmark in journeys of transformation" (Formenti & West, 2018, pp. 94-95). Critical

reflexivity involves becoming aware of how we think and interrogating the meanings we attach to our relationships and social roles. It is the attempt to re-consider the things we have always held to be true or the things we have accepted without questioning, and while doing that we become aware of our personal epistemology, frameworks and perspectives. Thus, it may bring one to not only change personal ideas, attitudes, or positionings, but to question the very taken-for-granted assumptions behind them, which have been limiting one's worldview and action, and consider alternative perspectives.

In Mezirow's theory, new perspectives are valued if they can withstand critical scrutiny, then leading the subject to adopt a better perspective; the one that appears the most accommodating or inclusive for personal progress and better identity. But Formenti and West (2018) insist that nobody can say if a new perspective is better than the previous one, or establish the success of the rational scrutiny, if entailed at all. There is a debate about whether in adhering to the theory of transformative learning, there should be an intentional effort by adult educators to foster perspective transformation, guiding learners to identify reified relationships and ideologies that they have internalised. This normative view carries risks of manipulation, mystification, and cultural colonisation, since it would mean the educator "knows better". It may become unethical and disrespectful. It might then be better for the educator to encourage adult learners to be more questioning and critical of their perspectives always but while my position is that adult educators should never tell the learners what perspective to adopt, they can consider different alternative viewpoints with learners and leave the learners to make their own decision about whether to change their perspective or not. And where a learner decides to keep their current perspective, they should be supported to the best of the adult educator's ability.

In my research, I focused on experiences of transformative learning that are not planned or managed by an educator. They were unexpected and unintentional, and I looked for clues, in my participants' stories [of events, relationships, concepts] following the hypothesis that recognition can be a way to foster transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

Recognition and Misrecognition

In this dissertation, I have explored the learning experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. In doing so, I have provided the perspectives of seven asylum seekers and refugees as well as three Italian language teachers who teach refugees. The narratives of my research participants have shown that asylum seekers and refugees encounter enormous social and personal challenges in Italy. My aim was to consider the role recognition can play in helping asylum seekers and refugees navigate these challenges. I drew on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to identify clues of the different forms of recognition in my participants' narratives and I found evident instances of recognition and misrecognition. I also argued that these experiences impact on the construction of their identity, offering a way to take the theory of recognition by Honneth further.

The experiences of recognition and misrecognition I found can be interpreted both on a social (macro) level and institutional/situational (meso) level with noticeable effects on the personal (micro) level. It is worth noting that the biographical interview is literally based on the voice of the subject, it is subjective and personal. So, the micro level is immediately evident; here both recognition and misrecognition appear as feelings and symbolic words. Rukevwe (in Chapter 5) and Clement (in Chapter 8) conveyed feelings of excitement and appreciation for the relationship they had with their teachers in language class. Whenever they spoke about these significant teachers, they used glowing terms. Their feelings of excitement and joy in remembering those moments were palpable. Some of the participants who spoke about their experiences also expressed negative feelings. For example, Charles' (Chapter 7) anger was unrestrained while Elias (Chapter 8) expressed feelings of despondency. Steve (Chapter 7) and Tamuno (Chapter 6) also expressed feelings of pain at being misrecognised.

Misrecognition at the macro level manifested in the participants' narratives in the form of unfavourable policies and practices, and denial of rights and privileges. Some of the participants recounted the difficulties they had in accessing formal education. This is because the law regulating asylum seeking in Italy was changed to make it optional for reception centres to provide asylum seekers with access to education. Thus, education is no longer an assured right for asylum seekers in Italy. Furthermore, my participants' narratives show that asylum seekers in Italy experience a loss of their knowledge capital due to the non-recognition of their previous knowledge and/or experience. What is however interesting is that most of the participants do not seem bothered by the non-recognition of their prior learning or experience. Elias seemed to be the only one. My explanation for these findings is that they are not even aware of this possibility and if they were, maybe they would not consider it important. I did not ask them about it; this leaves space for further inquiry.

On the meso level, I have reported and discussed how the participants experienced recognition or misrecognition in their interactions with Italians in different sectors of the society such as reception centres (usually called "camps"), adult education centres and other public spaces. Two major (institutional) spaces named in our interviews were adult education centres (CPIA) and reception centres. My participants experienced misrecognition in both, albeit more in the reception centres than at CPIA. My interpretation of these findings is that these organisations are very different in terms of their explicit and implicit mission. CPIAs are adult education centres with the mission to guarantee formal education to adults. In order to achieve their goals, especially with vulnerable adults, they have to help individuals learn and become useful members of the society; thus, they provide a social service, even if it is not part of their official mission. The reception centres, on the other hand, are increasingly an emergency measure to contain problems related to guaranteeing a temporary place for living to many people. The administrators receive subventions from the government to run these reception centres. In some cases, they are run by public administration. Recent regulations and budgetary restrictions in the Italian system (see Chapter 3) resulted in lower standards and provisions such as educational, legal and social services. These centres, then, are using very low resources just to answer (sometimes badly) to very basic needs. So, their social mission is not accomplished.

Sometimes, only the actions of volunteers and external NGOs can guarantee the basic needs of people.

There is a lack of specific skills for working with adults in both places. In fact, while some of the staff of CPIA (a minority) are trained to teach adults, the employees of reception centres do not need to have any training on working with adults. At CPIA, while there were instances of misrecognition, there were also significant relationships with positive impacts on identity, as shown in the stories of Rukevwe, Steve and Clement. These participants narrated how the support of teachers was a major encouragement to continue learning with observable positive changes in their self-confidence. The major types of misrecognitions identified in the narratives of my participants were discrimination – in the form of racism and stereotyping – and infantilisation by teachers. While discrimination is about constructing the other as inferior by personal attitude and disposition, infantilisation is probably more about perceiving the others as lacking competence and full understanding of the situation. It is a form of substitution that misrecognises the status of a person as an adult. The main effect of misrecognition on participants' identity seems the pronounced feeling of being an outsider. Steve, Tamuno and Charles particularly highlighted this feeling in their narratives, showing how misrecognition can leave an asylum seeker feeling unwanted in the Italian society.

These findings highlight the need for transformative education for asylum seekers and refugees. By transformative education, I mean democratic spaces where adult educators and adult learners (asylum seekers and refugees) engage in dialogical conversations in which learners are encouraged to express and defend their views, exercise their imaginations and take actions to change the conditions that are limiting their flourishing. Spaces where attempts are made to minimise the effect of power relations between adult educators and asylum seekers and refugees, and where very importantly, asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged and shown how to develop critical thinking and the predisposition to challenge unfavourable practices. Spaces where asylum seekers and refugees feel a sense of empowerment.

It is known in adult education that such spaces are likely to evoke feelings of recognition in adults; so, they could be proposed to asylum seekers to encourage them to engage in difficult conversations and interactions where their perspectives are respected and valued. This would make them to feel seen. The feeling of being seen, respected and valued contributes to building a healthy self-esteem (Honneth, 1995; West, 2014; West et al., 2013), developing the ability for critical reflection (Fleming, 2022), making meaningful contributions during discussions and forging solidarities (West, 2016b). This kind of context could be implemented in CPIA classes, and elsewhere as well but teachers would need proper training in adult education, since many of them come from primary school or middle school, and have no training in teaching adults.

Implications for Policy and Practice

I mentioned in Chapter 2 that with the enactment of the law, DL n.113/2018, there is no longer an obligation for reception centres to provide language classes to asylum seekers (Bianco & Cobo, 2019). The implication of this is that education is on the shoulders of the individual, who has to bear costs associated with attending classes. In fact, while the courses in CPIA are free, the seemingly small amount of the enrolment fee might not be easily affordable for some asylum seekers who do not have a source of income; besides, transportation may be another challenge.

The government of Italy does not seem open, for the moment, to reconsider this law and make language classes and other forms of education fully accessible to asylum seekers, notwithstanding the importance of language learning for migrants that led the Council of Europe (CoE) to come up with a Language Policy Programme[6] which outlines linguistic integration actions for adult migrants. Linguistic integration recognises that migrants have different learning needs: since they are not a homogeneous group, differentiated approaches are needed to address their learning needs (Beacco et al., 2014). Asylum seekers and refugees are part of the disadvantaged population and, as stated by Slade & Dickson (2020), member

[6] https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/officials-texts-and-guidelines

states of the United Nations have an obligation to provide access to and ensure participation in adult learning and education for disadvantaged groups.

I also mentioned in Chapter 2 that a majority of CPIA teachers are not trained to teach adults and foreigners (Deiana & Spina, 2021; Longo, 2019; Loprieno et al., 2019). It is therefore imperative for policymakers to put in place provisions for CPIA teachers to be trained and/or retrained on adult learning principles and intercultural relationships in order to understand the reality of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) and thus become sensitive to the peculiarities and needs of asylum seekers and refugees as adult migrants, and not fall into the error of categorising the other which Formenti & Luraschi (2020) warn against. They argue that integration is a complex relational process between newcomers and hosts.

A specific training for these educators would be devoted to enhancing their capacity for meeting the other and enacting spaces for good enough relationships that can sustain learning and harmonious coexistence. Curriculum designers for CPIA programs may want to consider designing topics in a way that engages and celebrates student voices and encourages relationships among the students and with citizens. The curriculum should recognise the diverse needs of migrant populations in general and asylum seekers in particular. It should pay attention to the holistic development of learners, and not just learning in preparation for the marketplace. Formenti highlights a danger of such a neoliberal approach to learning: When the intention of learning activities is solely focused on employability, it poses a risk of neglecting or forgetting "the complexity of a person's life, especially when it is 'fragile' or 'vulnerable'" (Formenti, 2016a, p. 236). Furthermore, the curriculum should be designed in a way that requires teachers to build on the previous knowledge of students. Emphasis should be placed on methods that take their point of departure from the experience of learners. Moreover, intersectoral coordination (networking) among the different agencies in charge of asylum seekers and refugees' welfare would promote the implementation of workable procedures for recognising asylum seekers and refugees' prior learning and experiences.

Hence, this research also has implications for teaching method. The research has highlighted the need for competence and awareness by adult educators about practices that foster the co-construction of knowledge, dialogue, democracy and critical thinking in the classroom. For example, Formenti has suggested life-based and art-based methods (Formenti, 2016a), cooperative inquiry (Formenti, 2018), narrative methods (Formenti & Jorio, 2019) and reflexive and transformative practices (Formenti, 2016b) as practices that can provide the space to challenge, extend or develop a critical, dialogical and democratic attitude. Formenti (2018) argues for adult educators to adopt methods that support the fundamental role of adult education to highlight issues of social justice and peaceful co-existence; two issues that are important for the wellbeing of migrants, not the least asylum seekers. The methods above are just examples that I am suggesting. There are many other methods that are available to adult educators to choose from. What is important is for adult educators who work with asylum seekers to understand the principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1970, 1972) and how teaching adults is different from teaching children as well as the need to be discrete in their interactions with asylum seekers. In this way, adult educators will learn to listen to learners' voice, seek to understand their needs, appreciate their questions, accord them recognition, read the learning context and understand the structures that impact on learning. Thus, becoming able to "foster sensitivity in relation to the context and complexity" (Formenti & Jorio, 2019, p. 210) of asylum seekers and refugees' reality.

My Positioning as a Researcher: Risks and Insights

In closing my work, I would also like to discuss my relationship with my research participants and its contribution to the knowledge co-created between them and me, to the uniqueness of this study, and to the insights it provides for educational and social research on migration. More specifically, I want to address issues of insiderness, power relations, transference and counter transference. Since some of the participants were already known to me, I had already developed a relationship beyond a research relationship with them, and the significance of this for our interview relationship was that the disproportionate power relationship that usually exists between a researcher and participants from marginalised communities (West, 2016) was most

likely non-existent. However, there is another risk when the participant and the researcher know each other: there will be many implicit concepts, since the other "already knows me".

For the participants who were previously unknown to me, my nationality as a Nigerian played a role in securing their agreement to partake in my interviews, however this was after explaining my research to them. While some of them were sceptical at the beginning because they were trying to process being interviewed by a Black person like them, after my explanation that I was just a PhD student and (in some cases) that I was not a government spy or journalist, they usually relaxed. Usually, before starting an interview, I would spend a considerable time to get to know them and develop a trusting relationship with them, and usually the interview would be like two Nigerian or African migrants having a conversation. In this way, it was like two migrants talking. How much of an impact our different residency status had on their disposition was not easy to determine, but I somehow gained the status of "insider" – someone who can share their experience, at least partially.

I am aware that my insiderness is problematic, since I came into Milan with a visa and by airplane, and not through Lampedusa by boat but it seemed to me that being someone they felt they could partially identify with made them speak freely. I am of the opinion that they probably would have been more guarded if they were interviewed by a White researcher and some of the things they told me might not have been expressed, particularly regarding how they feel about their experiences in Italy. Besides, being interviewed by a White person is quite common for migrants and could reinforce or re-enact a sense of being in front of a government representative, and that is a context where every single word needs to be checked and weighed; thus making it difficult to have authentic conversations.

The fact that we codeswitched between standard English and Pidgin English is a specific feature of this study that probably shaped how our discussions went. Pidgin English is regarded as the most widely spoken language in Nigeria and it is the first language for some (Edionhon, 2018). Thus, speaking Pidgin English may have allowed my research participants express

themselves better than if they were to speak Italian or standard English. Being able to speak Pidgin with them also helped close the linguistic distance that might have been created if we had spoken Standard English because standard English is an elitist language in Nigeria (Akande, 2021) which only those who are well educated are able to speak fluently. This is an important point if one considers the fact that most of my research participants had little formal education in Nigeria. Thus, speaking Standard English with them would have posed difficulties to them in composing their thoughts and words. The interview process was also probably an experience of recognition for the participants, as it was an open non-judgmental space for free conversation that could evoke feelings of being heard and valued. I tried to show that I was genuinely interested in their stories. However, how much they believed me can be answered by them only.

West (1996), citing Cameron et al. (1992) and Stanley (1992) talked about alienation of knowledge and the problem of interpretation. This concerns challenges that all researchers using qualitative methods, like biographical methods, are likely to face when interpreting their interview materials. Alienation of knowledge refers to narrating a story or reaching conclusions about an interview that the interviewee or members of their group or class would disagree with. Such problems of interpretation could arise because the researcher is from a different ethnic or social group as the interviewee and has his own biases and perspectives. Citing bell hooks, West (1996) states that misrepresentation of a group to which a researcher does not belong to can raise the ethical issues of reinforcing or perpetuating domination. Thus, it is worth pointing out that coming from the same country as most of my research participants and being migrants together in Italy, albeit with different residency statuses, might not connote that the problems of interpretation and misrepresentation are not present in this study. At best, I can only claim that I partially know the contexts and backgrounds of my research participants. Thus, there is a possibility that they disagree with some of my interpretations.

Final Reflections on the Research Process

I mentioned in the introduction that the qualitative researcher includes themselves in the research context (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Leavy, 2020). That is, the researcher's self, subjectivity and emotions cannot be separated from the whole research process. Qualitative researchers are thus encouraged to be reflexive about these issues and their impact on the research. I have thoroughly reflected on how some of the stories I heard affected and changed me. Steve was the first person I interviewed. Tamuno was the second. After listening to their stories, I was filled with a range of emotions. This is what West (2016) calls counter-transference, that is the emotional effect that my research participants had on me. The emotions I felt included resonance, shock, empathy and anger. Empathy for the feelings of the participants and anger at the treatment they had endured, particularly experiences of racism and discrimination. While some of their experiences resonated with me, I was shocked by other things I heard. These two interviews shaped how my other interviews went as I would always ask the participants about specific examples of racism and discrimination. This was because I had concluded that racism and discrimination were typical experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. However, I found out that not all the participants mentioned experiences of racism and discrimination, albeit they mentioned other instances of misrecognition. I then came to the realisation that while my participants had similar experiences, each person's story was unique, which is one of the strengths of qualitative research; it allows for the appreciation and celebration of the uniqueness or particularity of each story while observing patterns that run through different stories.

I have no doubt been personally impacted by this research. Some of my perspectives have changed, and I have gained new ones. For example, before this research, I used to feel resentful towards some Black persons who begged at supermarkets or on the streets because I felt they were giving a wrong impression about Black people. But after listening to the stories of my participants, I could understand, even though I do not excuse, the reasons why some Black people resort to begging. Some of them have been constrained by the asylum system to beg in order to make money. Also listening to the stories of Tamuno and Clement, for example, gave me insight into the horrendous experiences asylum seekers had while making the perilous

journey from Africa to Europe, and how this can have psychological consequences on them. An Italian social worker who I interviewed confirmed to me that many asylum seekers come into Italy with psychological trauma and physical injuries. The story of Elias, and even Steve, struck me about the feelings of despair and uncertainty that asylum seekers experience in Italy. These new insights and understandings that I have gained have helped me to be more empathic towards the plight of asylum seekers and refugees. The story of Rukevwe also demonstrated to me that with the right relationships, encouragement and support, asylum seekers and refugees can turn their situations around for the better. Overall, their stories are examples of determination and hope by persons who seem to have every odd stacked against them, and it would be a great injustice to categorise asylum seekers and refugees as lazy, criminal and unwanted in Italy

APPENDIX

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INFORMED CONSENT TO THE STUDY

(adults)

STUDY TITLE

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear Sir/Madam,

We would like to ask you to take part in a study. It is your right to be informed about the purpose and characteristics of the study so that you can decide in an informed and free way whether to take part or not. We invite you to carefully read what is reported below. The investigators involved in this project are willing to answer any questions you may have:

Professor Laura Formenti (Study Manager)	
(name)	(telephone no.)

Darasimi Oshodi (Investigator)	
(name)	(telephone no.)

What is the purpose of this study?

This study aims to explore the experiences of adult asylum seekers through their self-account of their feelings about the educational and learning provisions at adult education centres

How will the study be conducted?

The study will be conducted by asking participants about their experiences. Participants will be allowed to speak freely with as minimal interruptions as possible. Participants might be prompted to say more or give more narrative details if it seems necessary. There is a possibility that more than one interview will be carried out with each participant

Why are we asking you to take part?

We are interested in you because of your experience and knowledge about asylum seekers from Africa. The fact that you are also African means you are in a position to understand them better than Italians.

Are you obliged to take part in the study?

Your participation is completely voluntary. Moreover, if you should change your mind and wish to withdraw, you are free to do so at any time without having to provide any explanation.

What are the steps required to take part in the study?

Participation in the study involves the provision of detailed information about its characteristics, risks and benefits. At the end of the information phase, you can agree to take part in the study by signing the informed consent form. Only after you have expressed your consent in writing can you actively take part in the proposed study.

What will you be asked to do?

The study involves a tape-recorded interview which may last for about an hour or more. There may also be need for subsequent interviews to shed more light on issues that may arise from a previous interview

What are the possible risks and disadvantages of the study?

There are no known risks

What are the possible benefits that could be derived from the study?

The study does not bring direct benefits for the participants. Moreover, the study will enable knowledge to be increased in the field of migration. The study will also provide insightful perspectives to administrators of adult education and training centres on enhancing inclusive learning environments.

How is the confidentiality of the information guaranteed?

The investigator will ask you to provide some personal data such as your initials, age, nationality and sex during the interview. This information, as with the data that emerge during the study, are important for the proper conduct of the study. The confidentiality of all the information will be guaranteed by giving you a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy, and that whatever you do not want published will not be published.

How will your personal data be used?

The data collected will be used in an anonymous and aggregate form, in such a way as to make it impossible to trace the data of single individuals, for thesis work and/or scientific publications, in accordance with what is laid down in the "Authorisation for the processing of personal data for scientific purposes", which you will sign separately if you decide to take part in the study.

Other important information

We inform you that the study will be conducted in compliance with the ethical principles laid down in the "Helsinki Declaration" and in the "Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine" (Oviedo Convention).

We also inform you that this study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Milano-Bicocca.

The original of the Informed consent form signed by you will be retained by the manager of this study, while you have the right to receive a copy of it.

During the study, you can contact the investigator or the study manager for any information.

We thank you for your availability

DECLARATION OF THE INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I have provided the participant with complete information and detailed explanations about the nature, purposes, procedures and duration of this research project. I also declare that I have provided the participant with the information sheet.

SIGNATURE OF THE INVESTIGATOR Date

Name of the investigator (*in capital letters)*

INFORMATION SHEET SIGNATURE

I declare that I have received information that has made it possible for me to understand the research project, including in the light of the additional clarifications requested by me.I confirm that I have been given a copy of this information document.

SIGNATURE Date

EXPRESSION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Participant's initials _____

I, the undersigned _____

- Declare that I have received exhaustive explanations regarding the request to take part in the experimental study in question and enough information regarding the inherent risks and benefits of the study, in accordance with what is reported in the information sheet attached herewith.
- Declare that I have been able to discuss these explanations, asking all the questions that I deemed necessary and receiving satisfactory answers in that regard.
- I have also been informed of my right to withdraw from the research at any time and to have free access to the documentation regarding the trial and the assessment expressed by the Ethics Committee.

Therefore, in the light of the information with which I have been provided:

I, the undersigned _____

☐	AGREE	☐	DO NOT AGREE	To take part in the study
☐	AGREE	☐	DO NOT AGREE	To audio recording

PLACE, DATE SIGNATURE OF THE PARTICIPANT

PLACE, DATE SIGNATURE OF THE INVESTIGATOR

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