

Why Don't They Stay at Home? Prejudices Against Ethnic Minorities in Italy

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in Bologna, Italy, to analyse attitudes concerning ethnic minorities and emotions experienced in intergroup relations. Stereotypes of North African immigrants were investigated as a function of 'geographical' proximity with black people (living in the neighbourhood of black immigrants versus living in districts without immigrants) and origin (natives of Bologna versus residents who moved from Southern Italy to Bologna). It was predicted that the most positive stereotypes would be found among natives of Bologna living in the same neighbourhoods as North Africans, while the most negative prejudices would occur among the South Italians who do not live in the same districts as black people. Results indicate that neighbourhood has a central importance but effects of respondents' origins are more mixed.

Key words: Racial prejudice, intergroup relations, black immigrants in Italy, neighbourhood and ethnic relations.

INTRODUCTION

Mass media frequently paint a picture of a rich and opulent West Europe besieged on two sides by hordes of poor and destitute trying to get on board the 'train of prosperity'. Italy has become the object of growing interest on the part of the peoples of both a poor and over-populated North Africa and a famine-struck and war-torn Eastern Europe and Balkan. Faced with the emigration of its own national workforce until only recently, the country now finds itself in a situation of having to deal with the complex problems of immigration. In June 1991, the date of the research presented here, the total number of foreigners in Italy was between 1.5 and 2 million. A nation-wide survey showed that only a small minority admitted open hostility towards

We thank Daniela Vignoli and Paola Villano for having collected the data.

CCC 1063-3995/95/010059-07

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immigrants. A much more consistent proportion exhibited a sort of 'latent intolerance', defined by some sociologists as 'the area of possible racism' (Balbo and Mancini, 1990).

Racial prejudice is becoming more subtle and sophisticated: older forms persist, but new variants of racism have emerged, whose very essence is subtlety and indirectness. Pettigrew (1989) presents a description of modern racism among White Americans in the US, and suggests that similar forms appear to be emerging in western Europe. Modern racism is defined by the rejection of gross stereotypes and blatant discrimination, the opposition to racial changes for ostensibly non-racial reasons that is intensified by group-based self-interest and a sense of subjective threat from racial change as well as particular views of how opportunity and social stratification operate in the society. Behaviourally, modern racism involves compliance without complete internalization of the new norms of interracial acceptance that often finds expression in indirect 'micro-aggressions' against (black) people and the avoidance of face-to-face interaction. Ostensibly non-racial reasons are generally cited for the rejection of non-European guest workers as permanent settlers. Indeed racism is often explicitly denied. However, institutional change that would facilitate integration is frequently opposed in the name of preserving the immigrants' culture.

Many studies on changing intergroup behaviour are based upon the so called 'contact hypothesis'. As originally formulated by Allport in 1954, it suggested that contact between prejudiced individuals and the objects of their negative attitudes would reduce the erroneous perceptions thought to be responsible, increase positive attitudes, and elicit behavioural change. Actually, the contact hypothesis started as a set of conditions that had to be met in order for interracial attitude change to take place. Empirical evidence suggests that intergroup contact leads to a more favourable attitude of the prejudiced majority towards the minority, but only under certain conditions (Amir, 1976; Stephan, 1987; Hewstone and Brown, 1986): cooperation, common goals, experience of positive outcome, equal status of the members of the interacting groups. Nevertheless, as much research both within and outside the laboratory has demonstrated, the results have been disappointing, particularly in real life situations. Although some positive attitude change took place, it was often confined to changes in attitudes towards the specific group members with whom the interaction occurred, without transfer of positive effects to the larger minority group. In some instances increased contact has led to more negative attitudes (Amir, 1969; Weigel, Wiser and Cook, 1975; Wilder and Thompson, 1980).

Pettigrew (1986) has pointed out that one of the major weaknesses of current social-psychological theories is the focus on 'cold' cognition to the relative exclusion of affective considerations. Dijker (1987, 1989) has shown that contact with members of ethnic outgroups can evoke various emotions: in particular, it emerged from his study that four categories of emotions (anxiety, irritation, concern and positive mood) are strongly associated with attitudes of Dutch native people towards Surinamers and Turks/Moroccans. This suggests a conceptualization of ethnic attitude in terms of 'sentiments' or feeling dispositions.

The present study aims at analysing the role of contact, operationalized as 'geographical proximity' (living in mixed racial districts) on inter-ethnic relations, especially attitudes and emotions. Another aim is to understand whether particular life experiences (e.g. to have been a migrant) encourage subjects to reduce or increase their prejudices towards new waves of immigrants. The problem is not only theoretical, but

has also a social relevance in a context, like Italy, where the migration from Southern underdeveloped regions to the industrialized Northern cities involved a considerable number of persons some decades ago. Even if these people were undoubtedly Italians, they could often only speak dialect, had different traditions and different ways of life: they thus experienced the real conditions of all under-deprived groups (the Southerners) and were treated as such by the majority (the Northerners). Their situation was similar under certain respects to what Lewin (1948) described as the position of 'marginal men': they are people who belong neither here nor there, standing 'between' the groups ('on the fence'), with psychological difficulties—uncertainty about the ground on which they stand and the group to which they belong, instability, tending to go to extremes, overcritical of others and themselves. Once assimilated, they tend to defend the values of the privileged group, becoming excessively sensitive to everything that does not conform to those values. Following this suggestion, the role of the past personal experience of migration on the prejudices towards the newcomers (the North Africans) will be analysed.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 222 residents from Bologna, Italy, who either were born in Bologna or moved from Southern Italy to Bologna and resided there since several years ($M = 19.36$ years). Half of the subjects (49.5 per cent) were males; half (50.5 per cent) were females in the age between 20 and 70 years ($M = 27.16$; standard deviation = 15.30). Overall, 45.5 per cent were single; the remaining 54.5 per cent were either married or cohabiting; 45.0 per cent had no children, 55.0 per cent had one or more children. Educational level ranged from compulsory school (43.2 per cent) to professional school (8.1 per cent), college (33.8 per cent) and university (14.9 per cent). No statistical differences between sub-samples of (a) native people living in the neighbourhood of black immigrants, (b) living in the neighbourhood without black immigrants, (c) southern Italians residing in Bologna in the neighbourhood of black immigrants, and (d) in districts without black immigrants were found on demographic characteristics.

Materials and procedure

Subjects were approached in Bologna during Winter and Spring 1991 and given a questionnaire which took approximately 20 minutes.

- (a) First, ethnic attitudes towards black immigrants were measured on a 10 item scale. Subjects indicated whether the presence of black immigrants presents a bigger problem than unemployment, delinquency etc., the image of the city of Bologna suffers from the presence of black immigrants, black immigrants should have the same rights as Italians, black immigrants should be given houses and money etc. All response scales, ranging from 1 to 7, are presented in a way to indicate a high value if judgements are in favour of immigrants and low values in negative cases. Factor analysis of the items led to one factor explaining 47.8 per cent of the variance. Reliability of the scale amounted to Cronbach's alpha = 0.87. In the following analyses the arithmetic mean of answers to the items was considered.

- (b) Second, attitudes towards black immigrants were measured by a thermometer scale which was previously used by Dijker (1987). The wording of the scale was as follows: 'Use the feeling thermometer to give your general impression of black immigrants. You may use any number between 0 and 100 degrees. Numbers between 0 and 50 means that you feel unfavourable towards black immigrants; numbers between 50 and 100 mean that you feel favourable towards these people.'
- (c) Six emotional terms were selected from Dijker's (1987) study. Subjects indicated whether they experienced the respective emotions when confronted with black immigrants: sympathy, curiosity, attractiveness, and fear, contempt, annoyance (1 = experiencing an emotion not at all; 5 = very often). A factor analysis revealed two factors explaining 45.5 per cent and 22.6 per cent of the variance. On the first factor negative emotions were loading highly. The second factor encompassed positive terms. Cronbach's alpha amounted to 0.77 and 0.71, respectively.
- (d) Finally, eight questions on contact with black immigrants were presented. Factor analysis led to three principal components which explain 38.1 per cent, 19.2 per cent and 15.0 per cent, respectively, of the variance. Items on the frequency (1 = never, 5 = often) of meetings, chats and undertakings with black immigrants loaded highly on the first factor which can be labelled 'direct contact'. Items on the desire to defend immigrants and the wish to support them define the second factor, labelled 'behaviour intentions'. Items on the frequency of visits in other countries and interest in culture and folklore of foreigners have high loadings on the third factor, 'cultural interests'. Cronbach's alpha for the three sub-scales amounted to 0.83, 0.67 and 0.64, respectively. For the following analyses average responses were calculated separately for each sub-scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was expected that origin of people and neighbourhood with black immigrants affected ethnic stereotypes. Ethnic stereotypes were operationalized by attitudes towards black immigrants (10-item-scale, feeling thermometer), emotional reactions towards them (positive and negative feelings) and contact with them (cultural interest, direct contact, behaviour intentions). A multivariate two-way analysis of variance with origin and neighbourhood as independent variables and seven aspects of ethnic stereotypes yielded an interaction effect which did not reach significance ($F(7,211) = 0.99; p = 0.44$) and no main effect of origin ($F(7,221) = 1.34; p = 0.23$). The effect of neighbourhood was significant ($F(7,211) = 7.28; p < 0.001$).

Univariate analyses of variance showed that the main effect of neighbourhood was due to differences in attitude (10-items scale; $F(1,217) = 9.79; p = 0.002$; feeling thermometer; $F(1,217) = 7.58; p = 0.006$); positive emotions ($F(1,217) = 12.63; p < 0.001$); direct contact ($F(1,217) = 47.64; p < 0.001$) and behaviour intentions ($F(1,217) = 10.24; p = 0.002$). No differences in negative emotions ($F(1,217) = 0.13; p = 0.720$) and cultural interests ($F(1,217) = 2.15; p = 0.144$) were found. Separate analyses for the six qualities of emotions yielded to the following results. For all three

Table 1. Ethnic stereotypes towards black immigrants by origin and neighbourhood

	Native people		Southern Italians in Bologna	
	With black neighbourhood	Without black neighbourhood	With black neighbourhood	Without black neighbourhood
No. of subjects	61	59	52	50
Attitudes				
10-items scale	4.82	4.20	4.56	4.03
Thermometer	58.77	46.95	53.63	49.20
Indirect measurement	0.29	-0.39	-0.33	-0.87
Emotions				
Positive emotions	2.90	2.25	2.63	2.41
Sympathy	3.64	2.97	3.20	3.06
Curiosity	2.87	2.41	2.86	2.50
Attractiveness	2.20	1.40	1.82	1.70
Negative emotions	1.68	1.72	2.05	1.92
Annoyance	2.00	2.05	2.47	2.14
Contempt	1.41	1.24	1.69	1.49
Fear	1.64	1.88	1.98	2.08
Contact				
Cultural interest	3.05	3.01	3.03	2.72
Direct contact	2.95	2.06	3.02	2.25
Behaviour intentions	2.48	2.34	2.56	2.33

positive emotions the neighbourhood proved to be important (sympathy: $F(1,216) = 8.43$; $p = 0.004$; curiosity: $F(1,216) = 5.44$; $p = 0.021$; attractiveness: $F(1,216) = 12.51$; $p < 0.001$). Table 1 represents mean responses of the four subjects groups.

The results indicate that people living in the neighbourhood of black immigrants have more favourable attitudes towards them than those living in districts without black immigrants (size effects of attitude measured on 10-items scale: $\beta = 0.20$; feeling thermometer: $\beta = 0.18$). They also experience more positive emotions when confronted with black immigrants ($\beta = 0.24$) and seem to be more willing to behave in favour of them ($\beta = 0.21$). Living in the neighbourhood of black immigrants of course also led to more direct contact with them ($\beta = 0.43$).

These results confirm our hypothesis only in part. We predicted an interaction effect between origin and neighbourhood of the following type: native people living in the neighbourhood of black immigrants should hold the most favourably stereotypes, whereas people from the South living in districts without black immigrants were expected to have the most negative prejudices. Results in Table 1 show that, in fact, average ratings of many dependent variables follow the predicted pattern closely: native people living close to black immigrants hold more favourable stereotypes than all other groups of subjects. Southerners living in districts without black immigrants do not hold the most negative attitudes, but the differences between them and the two remaining groups are small. In order to test differences between native people living close to black immigrants and the three remaining groups of subjects we calculated t-tests separately for each dependent variable. The results indicate that native people living close to black immigrants have more favourable attitudes than all others

(10-items scale: $t(220) = 2.73$; $p = 0.004$; feeling thermometer: $t(220) = 2.76$; $p = 0.003$; have more positive emotional reactions than all others (positive emotions: $t(219) = 3.51$;

$p < 0.001$; negative emotions: $t(220) = 1.47$; $p = 0.071$) and more contact with them (direct contact: $t(220) = 3.59$; $p < 0.001$; behaviour intentions: $t(220) = 2.28$; $p = 0.12$) but are not more interested in foreign culture than others ($t(220) = 0.93$; $p = 0.177$).

In sum, the neighbourhood variable emerged as the most significant variable: to live in the same neighbourhood as the immigrants fosters more favourable attitudes towards black immigrants, encourages more direct contact (e.g., doing something together, having a chat, knowing some of them personally), and promotes more positive action tendencies (such as the desire to defend them or not to wish they leave the city).

As regards emotions, the neighbourhood has an impact only on positive emotions, considered both in general (e.g., a positive mood) and the specific emotional reactions, namely sympathy, curiosity and attractiveness. All these emotions are experienced more intensely by people living in black immigrant neighbourhoods than in districts without black immigrants. This is not the case, however, with negative emotions. Independently of the areas, everybody affirms that he feels fear and contempt only rarely or not at all; sometimes a degree of annoyance is present (more irritation than anxiety, in Dijker's, 1987, categories).

As regards the origin variables of the population from Bologna (to be native or to come from South Italy), our hypothesis has not been confirmed. To be a Southerner, and thus to have experienced migration as family or personally, even if it was an internal migration from one area to another of Italy, did not affect the attitudes towards the new comers.

A close inspection of the data suggests that average ratings of many variables follow the predicted pattern closely; natives of Bologna living in the neighbourhood of black immigrants have the most positive stereotypes, while Southerners living in areas without black immigrants have the most negative. No statistical interaction effect was found. A possible interpretation of this result might be due to the length of residence in Bologna of our sample of Southerners. The long stay in the city has certainly erased from their memory the experience of their own migration, contributing to a complete integration in the local social context. While it is true that some areas within Bologna are inhabited prevalently by Southerners, this is a matter of internal migration. Such migration no longer has today those characteristics that were typical of the phenomenon in the 1960's. We believe that, given the characteristics of this sample, the geographical origins variable has not been fully examined in the present study and that it deserves further investigation.

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