Performing the nation between us: urban photographic sets with young migrants

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First developed during the 1990s, the transnational paradigm in the study of migration has been associated with the notions of displacement, deterritorialisation and frictionless-ness. In more recent times, there has been a growing tendency to spatially ground transnational studies by locating and emplacing transnational practices. The emergence of the so-called transnational urbanism has led to a prolific urban stream within transnational research. With respect to the growing diversity of Western societies, this literature has tended to emphasise the potentialities of the *city* as the location of lived diversity, sharing, dynamism, vibrancy and encounter, in contrast to the deficiencies of the *nation*, identified with formal politics, discourse and ideology, singular belonging, fixity and constraint. Against this narrative of the city/nation divide, this article draws attention to the alternative conceptualisations of the nation that have emerged in recent debates and have embraced local, material and agency-based, rather than discursively-oriented approaches to the nation. As well as the city/nation divide, a progressive idea of the nation as shared experiences is analysed within an urban performance project which involved young migrants in the city of Padua (Italy) during winter 2013. These performances are read from the particular perspective of the scale debate, suggesting that, through the performance of *urban* heritage sites, those migrants physically and emotionally locate themselves within the hosting *nation*. Finally, I discuss this scalar shift and I propose extrapolating the concept of the "urban unconscious" to the national level, thus suggesting a way to think about the nation as a frame of co-existence and not as an identity bond.

Keywords: nation, Italy, scale, transnational urbanism, urban performance

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, research on migration has focused primarily on transnationality, exploring transnational communities, ties, citizenship and belonging. Usually associated with the ideas of displacement and deterritorialisation, the transnational approach more recently has, at least partially, acknowledged the centrality of place. It has been argued that transnational practices are always located on the ground (Smith 2001: 3) and that, against the macro-analytic accounts of spaces of flows, they need to be conceived as always emplaced. Thus, while some studies emphasise the deterritorialised, highly mobile and fragmented experiences of *transmigrants*, other concentrate on local/plurilocal/translocal attachments and relations (Blunt 2007: 687).

Within transnational studies, the research on the local has brought the city and urban scale into focus. Moreover, reflections on transnational urbanism and urban citizenship show how transnational studies have increasingly opposed the conceptualisation of the city to that of the nation-state. The cities, as compared to nation-states, are revivified for their greater ability to face global processes and multicultural societies (Holston & Appadurai 1996). The recent emerging debates on the crisis of multiculturalism and, above all, the intercultural city approach (Wood & Landry 2008) strongly ar-

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gue that "the city, rather than the nation-state, increasingly appears to be the appropriate level" for managing diversity (Council of Europe 2013: 30).

This article questions the understudied city/nation relationship (Taylor 2007) by contesting the binary opposition of cities as dynamic, lived and open, and nation-states as fixed, abstract and constraining. The national, in fact, is often conceived as a mere matter of formal politics, discourse and ideology claiming a singular belonging, in contrast with the urban as the location of lived diversity where the ordinary sharing of symbolic and physical spaces promotes dialogical practices and encounters.

Against this background, this article follows recent re-discussion of the opposition between transnational societies and the vitality of national frames (Ehrkamp & Leitner 2006), as well as the rethinking of the idea of nation, prompted by the growing diversity in societies (Schandevyl & Haag 2010; Rembold & Carrier 2011; Antonsich 2015). In particular, this article draws from reflections on how nations are dynamically, daily, and locally experienced and given sense by individuals (Edensor 2002) and how the cultural dimensions of the nation can be practiced as inclusive, flexible and mobile by diasporic and migrant subjects (Tolia-Kelly 2006).

Alternative conceptualisations of the nation and of the city/nation divide are compared with an urban performance project which involved young migrants in the city of Padua (Italy) and focused on their relationship with the urban environment. These performances are considered in the light of recent interventions which emphasise co-existing in a shared space, rather than the sense of belonging to an urban community which strangers and natives feel in contemporary Westerns cities (Amin 2012). Finally, by engaging geographical debates on scale and scaling, I extrapolate the idea of the city as a space "between us" (Coward 2012) to the national level, thus suggesting a way to think about the nation as a frame for shared existence and not as a bond of shared identity.

Grounding transnationalism: the "urban turn" in transnational studies

The increasing centrality of the transnational paradigm in the study of migration during the early 1990s was marked by a relative absence of contributions by geographical scholarship (see Collins 2009). Transnational studies, as was later recognised, were dominated by a "liquid, uncontained, immaterial, and essentially metaphorical idea of space" (Collyer & King 2014: 2). More recently, migrant transnational studies have taken a "geographical turn", replacing a completely deterritorialised, displaced and abstracted concept of transnational space with a grounded, located, material one.

A main point made by early transnational approaches to migration was that migration must be 'unbound' from its focus on the nation-state as the key container of social action. In the early rejections of the so-called "methodological nationalism" (a view of the world as naturally ordered into nation-states), an escape from the persistent references to essentialised national communities even within transnational approaches was identified in the study of the connections between transnational actors "within the various *localities* in which they settle and into which they move" (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002: 324, emphasis added). Geographers of transnationalism then began to explicitly interrogate the spatialities of transnational practices, developing network and trans-local perspectives within the transnational approach (Featherstone et al. 2007). Consequently, the roles of 'place' and "sense of place" as analytical tools in the study of transmigrants' everyday practices have gained new attention (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret 2013: 3–4).

A further variation of spatially grounded transnationalism can be found in the concept of transnational urbanism. In this sense, Smith (1999), a political scientist, proposes focusing on the special relationship between transnationalism and the city. Contesting the objectifying and essentialising economic grand narrative of the "global city", Smith argues for what he calls transnational urban studies, a study of the intersections of global and local flows at particular spaces within potentially *all* cities. Viewing the turn in transnationalism as focused on urban research, Smith emphasises the emerging repositioning of cities in relation to nation-states. Against both the claim for the inexorable decline of the nation-state and the post-national assumptions of the global city framework, Smith maintains scepticism towards the idea of the deterritorialisation of nation-states. Nation-states are considered still relevant, however, mainly for their coercive power to police borders, their role as "institutional actors" and in ordering formations, capability to take actions beyond their own territorial jurisdiction and their ability to promote "nationalist ideologies", "essentialist nationalism" and "nativist sentiments" (Smith 1999). In a 2001 book on transnational urbanism which he edited, Smith (2005: 237) justifies his interest in the nation based on "the continuing significance of the nation-state as a repository of language, national cultures, and state-centered projects, a mediator of transnational migration and global networks through public policies, and a maker of political alliances and regulatory frameworks seeking to govern global trade, investment and production".

Drawing from Smith's conceptualisation, geographers engaged with transnationalism and contributed to its empirical unbinding by detailing transmigrants' and non-migrants' embodied experiences of multiplicity of *transnational spaces* well beyond an imaginary frictionless, dematerialised world (see Collins 2009). From these analyses, new registers of transnationalism in relation to the question of collective identity have emerged, and more nuanced understandings of the co-existence of transnational identities and integration/belonging/loyalty to the nation-state have been articulated (Collins 2009: 442–443). Notwithstanding this more fluid, multidimensional understanding of the complexity of transnational spaces, it seems that a persistent binary opposition, beyond the more frequent "local/global" binary, has been established: between the "nation(-state)" on the one hand and the "city" on the other.

Specifically devoted to the intersection between transnationalism and urban studies, a recent intervention by Datta (2013) emphasises how cities have gained a central position within the new geographical turn in transnational studies. Among the various spaces and scales of analysis, cities and urban spaces clearly stand out. Datta warns that the nation has not become irrelevant and joins Ong in saying that migrants' lives are still touched by its "juridical-legislative systems, bureaucratic apparatuses, economic entities, modes of governmentality, and war-making capabilities" (Ong quoted in Datta 2013: 91). The "nation" is identified with this list of attributes. Datta draws from Smith's conception of transcultural urbanism and endorses the idea that, instead of insisting on the global/local, migration research ought to concentrate on cities. To overcome the assumption that every experience references to the nation, Datta further uses the concept of the "translocal city", that is a city made of "a range of urban sites which are constructed in relation to other localities and neighbourhoods within and beyond the city" (Datta 2013: 100). The nation, thus, "continues to persist as a structural constraint or facilitator (depending on social class and group of migrants we are referring to) of movement" (Datta 2013: 101), but it is everyday experiences and memories of particular material spaces, encounters and objects at translocal levels that produce migrant identities. The scale, therefore, shifts from the transnational to the urban, even if, as Datta herself recognises without elaborating, this also entails a destabilising of the 'divide' between "national and urban" (Datta 2013: 102).

With respect to this literature, I suggest that these speculations do not acknowledge a simplistic rejection of the nation in favour of the city as the exclusive and appropriate level at which to grasp current transnational phenomena, but that when the idea of "transnational urbanism" is embraced, the concept of nation is increasingly described in a restrictive and negative way. The nation 'survives' as an institutional frame (that is a state), a coercive formation, a constraining structure. When the idea of transnational urbanism is embraced, the focus on the city seems to automatically entail a severe detraction from the nation. As it will be exemplified in what follows, these confrontations often give rise to even more curt oppositions, achieving an essentialist view of the city/nation divide. This divide, however, is epistemological rather than ontological, and tends to obscure how these scalar entities are much more blurred in the everyday experience.

City vs. nation: a tale of two scales?

The debate on transnational cities has also been extended to the question of citizenship, challenging the natural, taken-for-granted connection among citizenship, nation and state in the light of new forms of grassroots or supra/transnational citizenship (Smith 2003). Holston and Appadurai (1996) identify the dismantling of urban citizenship as an essential project of modern nation-building (the nationalizing of the urban well described by Taylor 2007) and predict unprecedented change from the new unsettling of national citizenship experienced within cities in the global era. For Holston and Appadurai (1996), given the crisis of ethno-national membership and that civic conceptualisations of the nation based on equal formal rights are too abstract and passively felt by today's highly differentiated societies, cities seem to offer paths toward a reconfiguration of meaningful democratic citizenship. Avoiding the potential regression into post-national violent affiliations, cities are conceived of as potential grounds for a rethinking of citizenship. As throughout history, thus, cities remain the arenas where "the tumult of citizenship" is most 'palpably' engaged (Holston & Appadurai: 188).

Discussing the new pathways adopted to accommodate ethnic diversity within the city of Amsterdam after the crisis of state multiculturalism in order to overcome the tendency to return to nation-based senses of belonging, Uitermark et al. (2005) endorse a re-scaling of multiculturalism at the urban level. The ideal of a post-national citizenship building more dynamic, equal, democratic and inclusive forms of inter-ethnic dialogue, it is said, will be played out on the urban scale where the vibrancy of everyday life provides prime conditions for the formation of cross-cultural identities. For Kalandides and Vaiou (2012), migrants contribute to creating new spatial levels of citizenship not limited to the scale of the nation-state.

A 2012 position paper by the Social and Spatial Inclusion of International Migrants UNESCO chair based in Venice (SSIIM Unesco Chair 2012) links phenomena such as the revival of urban citizenship and the decoupling of citizenship from nationality with the commitment to the development of the so-called "intercultural city". The focus on the urban scale, in fact, also characterises post-multiculturalist literature, which tries to move beyond traditional multiculturalism to find novel ways to institutionally manage diversity. While multiculturalism is discussed in contrast to interculturalism (Meer & Modood 2012), the concept of the "multicultural city" (Hoernig & Walton-Roberts 2009) is challenged by the "intercultural city approach". Invocations of interculturalism, in fact, tend to promote dialogue and cohesion "on a local level" (Meer & Modood 2012: 187–188). Based on conceptualisations developed by Wood and Landry (2008) within the British think-tank Comedia, the intercultural city approach can be defined as a strategy for the management of diversity which focuses on the urban context. Viewing traditional (national) policy models to address diversity (segregation, assimilation, multiculturalism) as no more appropriate, the new model inspired by the intercultural integration paradigm aims to overcome their limits at the level of cities (Khovanova-Rubicondo & Pinelli 2012: 14). In 2008, a joint Council of Europe/European Commission pilot initiative adopted this model, with an Intercultural Cities Network then implemented. Among its advantages, the intercultural city approach fosters encounters and mobilises citizens around common interests that cut across ethnic boundaries and considers the city, rather than nation-state, as the most appropriate level for doing so (Council of Europe 2013: 30).

Although the intercultural city has as its precondition democratic legislation which guarantees equality to all citizens and which is "responsibility of the national state and therefore largely beyond the sphere of influence of a single city", the intercultural city can "ensure that the law is effectively implemented and policed at a local level" and can follow the "emergent trend of cities beginning to take into their own hands matters such as the conferring of new forms of sub-national citizenship on migrants" (Wood 2009: 30). Even if national and supra-national bodies continue to influence cities, they are increasingly encouraged to proactively reinvent themselves through an intercultural lens, taking advantage of diversity in a sort of socio-economic adaptation of the economic, neoliberal imperative of the self-regenerating entrepreneurial city (Rossi & Vanolo 2012). Compared with other models of diversity management, the "intercultural [urban] paradigm", in the words of its supporters, seems to fit "what the other [national] models lack", that is "any sense of the dynamic energy of our diverse European urban society" (Wood 2009: 26). Here, the emphasis on the vibrancy of cities (Rossetto 2012) and the new leading role of urban policies is combined with the typical way in which European institutions work to 'light' European identity at the urban level through symbolic policies which by-pass the national, such as the European Capitals of Culture initiative (Sassatelli 2009).

As the city becomes the preferred site for lived, practiced difference, the nation is increasingly framed as a detached, formal container: people concretely experience the *locations* of difference, while national policies (from multiculturalism to post-multiculturalist national cohesion ideologies) remain far off. In the city, we encounter lived, ordinary, mundane forms of diversity, while the nation is the repository for the normative interpretation of difference. The city provides the ground for sharing symbolic and physical spaces, while the nation is disconnected from the everyday. Urban politics might take into account multifaceted layers of difference, while nation-centric policies demand singular belonging. In the city, we find informal acts of citizenship, while national citizenship is strictly formal. The city is dynamic, while the national framework is fixed. The nation is a (guilty) 'narrative' or 'discourse', while urban cosmopolitanism is "a way of living". The city is transitive, while the nation is close. The city is the site of hybrid cultural creativity, while the nation is the site of mainstream homogenous elite culture (Georgiou 2006). In sum, thinking from the urban perspective has frequently been equated to thinking "against the nation" (Robins 2001; see also Closs Stephens 2013). This opposition has been nurtured by a historical tendency to view cities and states as possessing quite opposite fundamental natures (Taylor 2007): cities as embodying complexity, mixing, vibrancy, unpredictability, chaos and liberty and states simplification, homogenisation, stasis, regimentation, order and discipline.

However, this re-insisted opposition between the city and the nation, I suggest, seems to fall in line with only a *certain* concept of the nation. Thus, having in mind trans-national/post-national views of the city, the following section briefly refocuses the more recent debate on the nation in order to propose quite different modes of its conceptualisation.

Alternative conceptualisations of the nation

Reflecting on the "scale of the nation", Herod (2011) finds that the idea of the national scale being undermined by globalisation is logically coherent if built on a series of other assumptions; however, once these assumptions are challenged, it becomes difficult to sustain the claims of the decline of the nation and the withering of the national scale. These assumptions are "that the national scale is an entity discrete from other scales, that the national scale serves to enclose all 'subnational' activities and the territory of the nation-state, that the national scale is the scale at which sovereignty is exercised, that the national scale is inherently subservient to scales that are 'larger' than it (such as the global)" (Herod 2011: 209). For Herod, "only with the withering of the power of the image of the nation-state as a container of discrete economies, cultures, and polities has it been possible to envision it in other forms" (Herod 2011: 199).

Similarly, I argue that if we change our assumptions about the nation, we can consider in different light narratives of the nation/city divide and see how attributes associated with the city have also been associated with the nation. Before engaging with the recent conceptualisations of the nation, I highlight a case in which accounts of the city's supremacy over the nation become quite slippery. Koefoed and Simonsen's (2011) account of their fieldwork with migrants in Copenhagen focuses on the emergence of different narratives of the nation and the city among the interviewed participants. The researchers explicitly adopted an a priori notion of the nation as an "imagined community", a discourse which invents and bounds itself as a coherent, excluding entity against "the stranger". They found that respondents expressed "a significant feeling of being Danish" (Koefoed & Simonsen 2011: 350), but in some cases noted reservations due to controlling practices, which the authors define as a "national technology of racism" which transforms the other into "an enemy of the nation" (ibid: 349). Following these authors, the ambivalent affiliation to the nation expressed by the respondents is in general based on the "doubt about whether it is possible to become a full member of the imagined community" (and not of an otherwise conceptualised nation, I would add) (ibid: 350). The city, in oppositional terms, is a priori conceptualised as "a world of strangers", the site of dynamic interactions and encounters, the space of emotional life, intensity, bodily closeness, association, coexistence, complexity, involvement, freedom, possibility, participation, dwelling and responsibility. In a young Dane's statement about everyday urban life[1], the authors see confirmation that the city is the real site for "lived, everyday multiculturalism" (Koefoed & Simonsen 2011: 351). Although the authors here cite Billig's (1995) well-known work *Banal Nationalism* in reference to the "small things" named by the respondent, the researchers completely obscure the fact that the mentioned street experience has activated a narrative of the nation, rather than of the city. To prove a clear binary opposition between the city and the nation in respondents' narratives, the authors provide the example of a young Dane who says, "Nobody can take away from you that you are a Copenhagener, but to say proudly "I am Danish!", I obviously have problems if I shall proudly say "I am Danish" because Pia Kjærsgård [the leader of the right-wing populist party] is also Danishness, and I am no Danish in *that* way" (quoted in Koefoed & Simonsen 2011: 351; emphasis in the original article). Although the respondent clearly refers to a *certain* Danishness, the authors simply infer that "it is easier to be a Copenhagener than to become a Dane" (an assumption that becomes the final conclusion of the entire article) and that here, the multicultural city is opposed to the nation, which does not offer the possibility of inhabitability and thus plays the role of the "constitutive outside" in relation to urban identity.

Yet, the nation is more diverse than a right-wing populist party's narrative of it. As Antonsich (2015) has clearly summarised, within current debates on nation and nationalism, the nation appears as often marked by the aforementioned (and other) negative attributions, but more nuanced, complex or even positive and hopeful conceptualisations of the nation are also acknowledged. As is well known, the modernist approach in nationalism studies, best represented by Gellner's works, answered the unsolvable question of "what is nation?" by identifying it with the artificial product of political manipulation. During the 1990s, in conjunction with the cultural turn, the nation was deconstructed as an essentialising discourse, a powerful representational device, an ideological practice or an imagined community, to cite Anderson's (1983) pervasive definition. From a critical perspective, the nation has been de-materialised to such an extent that even its verbal reification, the simple use of the term, has been condemned as dangerous and regressive.

However, the nation as a practice occurs in different ways and different moods. Confuting Gellner's thesis, Lanaro (1996) points out the need for a clear distinction between a *nationalistic* ideology or attitude (and its critique) and the common, existential, lived sense of the nation that permeates ordinary practices (see also Antonsich 2009a). The "nationalism of nationalists" or even what Billig (1995) has termed "banal nationalism" are completely different from the common sense of the nation. During the 2000s, the focus on official, elite, abstract nationalism has been replaced by an agency-centred literature on nation concentrated on the "local life of nationhood" (Confino & Skaria 2002). In contrast to Billig's discursively oriented approach, Thompson (2001) speaks of the 'local', rather than the 'banal', to discuss how individuals daily, actively, openly and often *deliberately* make sense of the nation, rather than being passively and unconsciously exposed to the banal 'flaggings' of the nation orchestrated by powers. Moreover, nations have come to be thought of as existing for people through their materialities and multi-layered spatialities. For Edensor (2002: vi), national identity has to be "differently scaled" because nations are *experienced* in "dynamic, ephemeral and grounded ways" and in "mundane, quotidian forms and practices" as open, fluid, multiple entities. Edensor (2002) puts a particular emphasis on the spatial, material and embodied dimension of the experience of the nation. Similarly, Lanaro (1996) sees that between the two poles of the ethno-cultural and civic conceptions of the nation lies a more dynamic and concrete idea based on shared experiences (above all, of suffering; see Hoskins 2012) and the sharing of these practical ways during normal life. This "national pragmatism" (Lanaro 1996: 22) includes economic arrangements, school systems, models of social relations and *loisirs*, as well as memories, experiences, rhythms of affective and working life, and existential and physical environments (Lanaro 1996: 48), which produce affinities and consonances beyond any ethnic affiliation.

Globalisation has led to a re-thinking of the nation and the supposed death of the nation-state has been counterbalanced by the assertions of its paradoxical revitalisation (Rembold & Carrier 2011). In a globalised era, then, the theorisation of the nation has come to be deeply interested in the question of diversity, as nations have always been, but are increasingly constituted by diversity (Schandevyl & Haag 2010). The nation has also been re-considered as complementary to or overlapping with transnationalism and cosmopolitanism and as the place where can be felt a shared sense of the collective built upon diversity, thus giving shape to forms of "intercultural nationalism" (see Antonsich 2015). In this context, against post-national hypotheses, it is maintained that the nation-state continues to matter as a guarantor and enforcer of human rights (Ehrkamp & Leitner 2006: 1594). Far from being residual, democratic nations, with their programmatic ability to accommodate internal cultural diversity, are conceived as crucial for the maintenance of pluralistic societies in a globalised era (Lanaro 1996).

An experiential idea of the nation, it seems, can be associated with a "feeling of belonging to the country [in which one] reside[s]" that is "*experiential, practical* and *affective*", "formal and informal" and lies between polarities such as state multiculturalism and cohesion, membership in a civic community and identification with a collectivity (Anthias 2011: 208, emphasis in the original article). Here, the possibility of a progressive (Antonisch 2009b: 292) and inclusive (Uberoi & Modood 2013; Meer & Modood 2012: 189) idea of the nation clearly emerges.

Unfortunately, as Taylor (2007: 134) notes, studies at the urban and national scale have too often proceeded in parallel, with urban geographers (and social scientists in general) focusing upon the city and political geographers (and political scientists in general) upon the nation-state; consequently, little intellectual space seems to have been allocated to city/nation-state relations. Following Taylor (2007) again, however, the multi-scalar world in which we live implies the development of a new city/nation-state *modus vivendi*, rather than the triumph of globalised cities over (declining or dead) nation-states.

In the next section, I confront echoes of these debates in an urban performance project with young migrants in the city of Padua (Italy) during winter 2013. This creative project is used to evocatively explore possible alternative understandings of the city/nation divide in relation to experience, emotion and meaning-making, rather than economics and politics.

Young migrants performing the city and the nation: the "InVista" project

During winter 2013, a site-specific, art performance project was undertaken in the city of Padua (North Eastern Italy, Veneto Region). Promoted by an informal group of Paduan social activists and civic artists (named 'SocietàPerAzioni') together with immigrants and student associations within the wider frame of an institutional project on the cultural regeneration of public urban spaces, the "In Vista" project involved young migrants as performers. Most of the young migrants involved in the "In Vista" project belonged to a group of Italian and non-Italian youngsters called "Rete Oltre i Confini di Cittadinanza" (Network Beyond the Boundaries of Citizenship), created through joint projects promoted by intercultural local associations and the Municipality of Padua. The creative team of 'SocietàPerAzioni' asked the migrants to autonomously choose locations in the city as sets for public photography shoots. The script for every performance was first conceived by the performers and then discussed and developed in collaboration with the creative team. During the performance, members of the creative team took photographs, thus placing the presence and the acts of the young migrants "in sight" ("in vista") against the urban backdrop (Fig. 1). The performances pro-

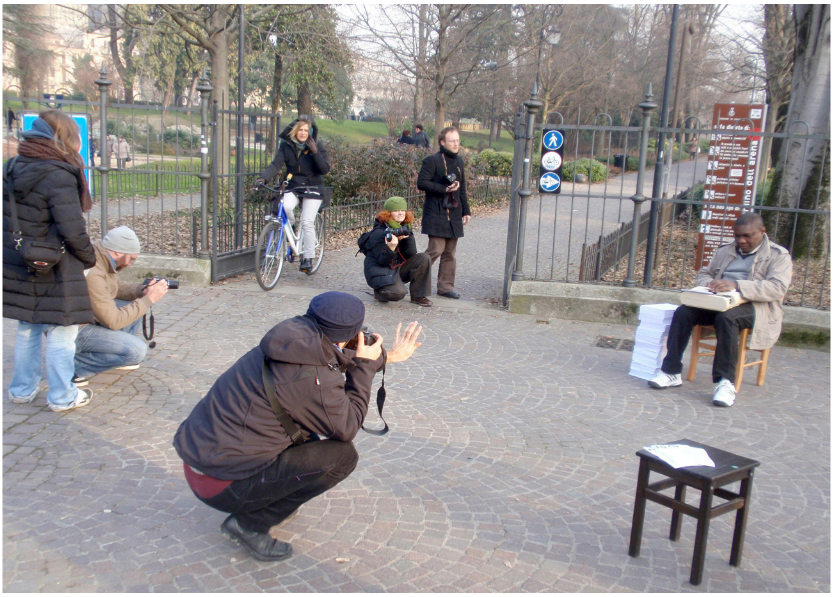


Fig. 1. Photographic set at Giardini dell'Arena, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

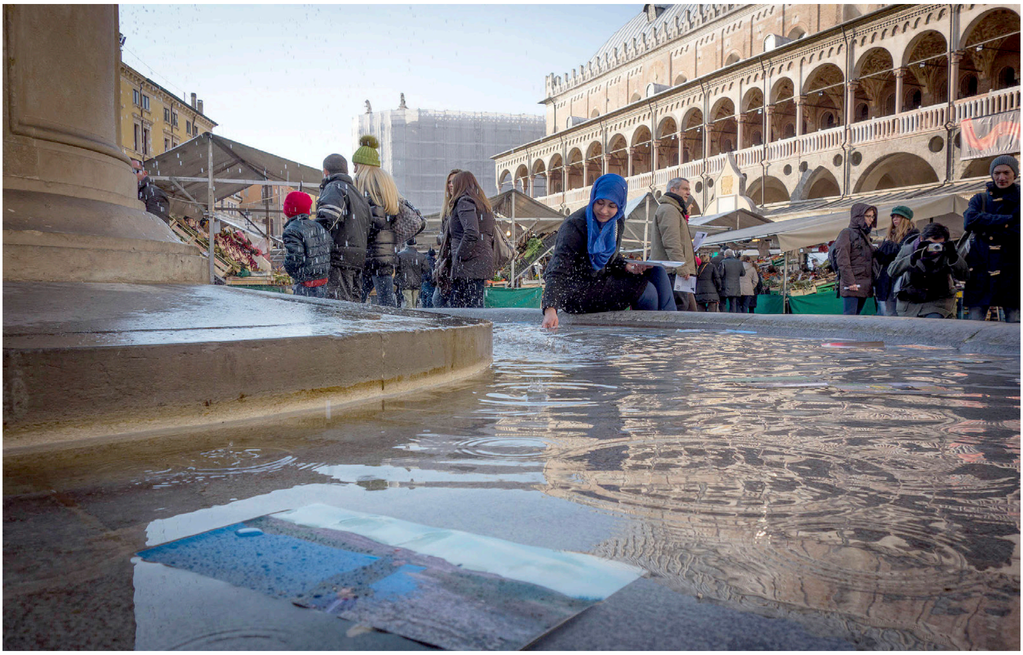


Fig. 2. Ghizlan at Piazza delle Erbe, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

claimed their own presence through the unusual practices of the performers, the members of the creative team photographing the set, and the distribution of papers with a printed message to passers-by or in the surroundings. The written message was conceived by young migrants and revised only for linguistic correctness by the creative team. Thus, migrants were given the total control of the representation of their own body and identity in the urban space.

I learned about this project by accident from one of the librarians of my university department, who is a member of the 'SocietàPerAzioni' creative group. My engagement with the project, thus, was restricted to an appreciation of some performances as a mere spectator. Therefore, the kind of relationship between art practice and geography at the basis of the present article follows a 'dialogue' approach, whereby geographers interpret art works, rather than a 'doing' approach, in which geographers collaborate with artists (Hawkins 2011). As Rogers (2012: 60) has shown, performing arts have become "established means through which cultural geographers can examine how people experience and make sense of their everyday worlds": with their "evocative modes of experience and expression", performing arts may "animate the understanding of how different spatialities are lived and constituted". The creative practice of performance as a way to explore migrant experiences and emotions, then, has recently entered the wide range of methods employed in migration research (Blunt et al. 2007). Intercultural performances within urban spaces and, more generally, how performances involve the material and immaterial geographies of differences in the city are emerging areas of interplay between performance studies and geography (Rogers 2012: 70–71).

As for the "In Vista" performances, they produced "fields of visibility" (Mubi Brighenti 2007) which altered the normal dynamics: every single migrant achieved a temporary, empowering 'supra-visibility'. In a variation of the well-known photographic artwork *Pastoral Interludes* in which black British artist Ingrid Pollard attempts to reclaim the English national rural landscape as a multicultural space by physically and artistically inserting herself in the picture (Edensor 2002: 44), the *Urban Interludes* of the "In Vista" project constructed 'incongruent', aesthetic portraits of migrant people against monumental cityscapes (Fig. 2).

While I was attending these performances, I noted that they simultaneously involved different articulations of space. Apparently, their performance was communicating something of their relationship with the city. It is worth noting that the whole project, following the advertising of the "In Vista" events, was meant to put "in sight" the enrichment that the personalities of every single migrant could provide to the "*urban* culture" of the city of Padua. Moreover, in the online official presentation of the "Rete Oltre i Confini di Cittadinanza" association, those young migrants defined themselves as "new citizens" of the city of Padua, coming from different backgrounds, but linked by a common belonging to and active participation in city life. However, the written messages distributed during the performances did not directly address the city of Padua. The performances did not speak of "place attachment" or felt "urban citizenship". Some of the messages were built around a metaphor or an ideal figure, such as water or the door. Those messages were not dealing with the urban frame or with the national one. The remaining messages, however, were embedded in a national, rather than a strictly urban, dimension.

I also noted that, according to performers' spontaneous preferences, the photographic sets were nearly all heritage sites or near buildings with artistic or cultural value in the historic city centre. Significantly, performers selected those sites of Padua included in the "visual dictionary" of the lately unified nation arranged by Alinari, the most famous photographic *atelier* in the history of Italian iconography (Bollati 1979; Comune di Padova 1981) (Fig. 3A, B, 4A, B). Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Alinari's photographers systematically framed portraits of Italian cities characterised by rigid and homogeneous rules in their stylistic composition, perspective view and choice of subjects. The long series of monumental city views collected by Alinari are considered the foundation of Italian national visual culture, as well as of every single Italian city's visual culture (Zevi 1977). The "In Vista" migrant performers did not select the most typically *local*, i.e. Paduan, city icons, such as Basilica del Santo or Caffè Pedrocchi but, rather, sites more symbolic of Italian urban monumentality. The selected sites, thus, functioned as *transcalar* local-national icons of Italy.

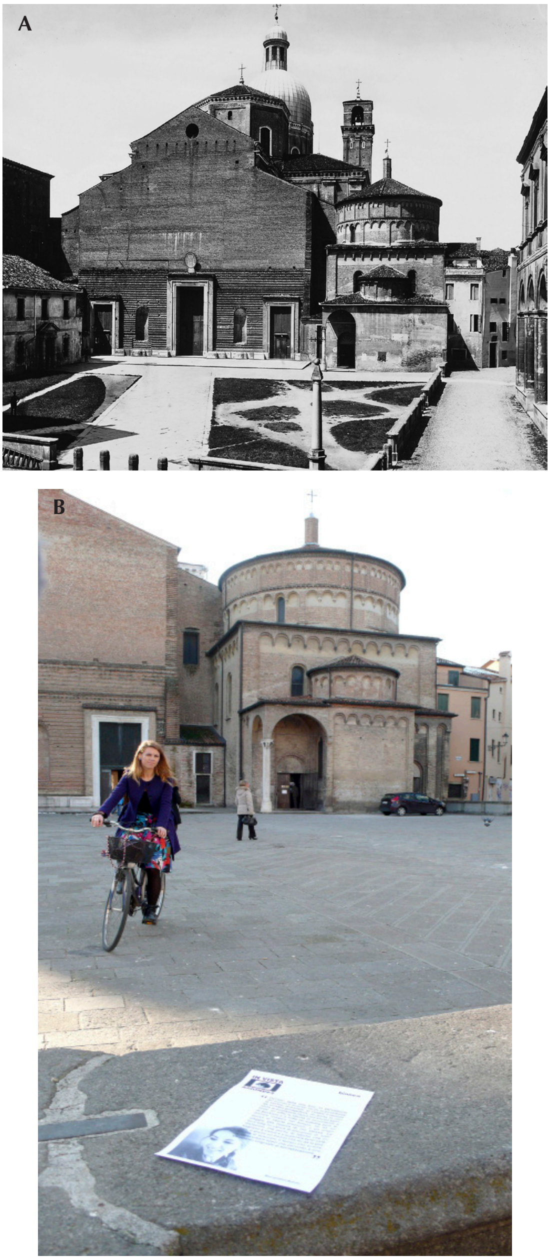


Fig. 3. Piazza del Duomo, Padua, c. 1900 (A) (by permission of F.lli Alinari Archives), and Bianca at Piazza del Duomo, Padua, 2013 (B) (© In Vista project).

Ahmed, a Somali student, emplaced his performance in front of Palazzo Bo, the central historical building of the University of Padua. The university's front door (a key image of the Paduan contribution to the national visual dictionary), however, is not treated as a particular icon of the city. Ahmed, instead, emphasises the role of this place in the exchange between Italian and foreign stu-

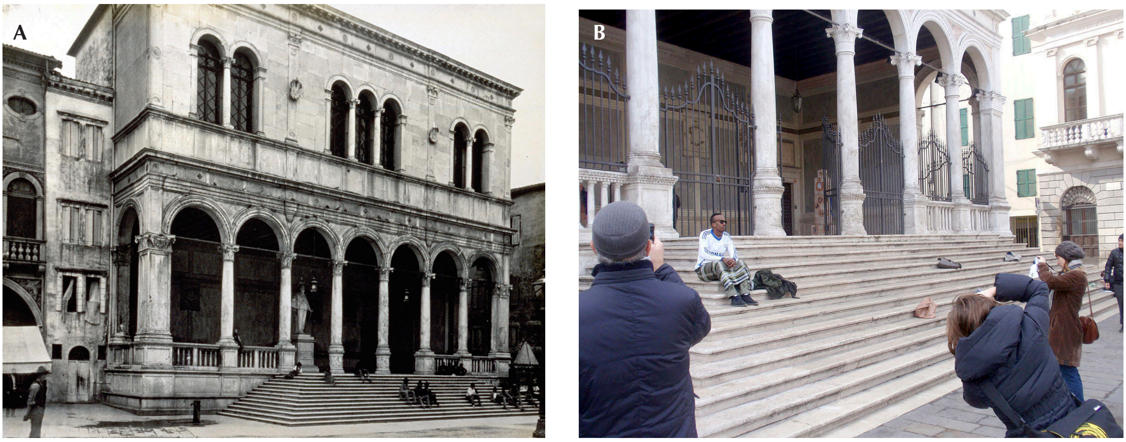


Fig. 4. Loggia del Consiglio, Padua, c. 1900–1920 (A) (by permission of F.lli Alinari Archives), and Jabir at Loggia del Consiglio, Padua, 2013 (B) (© In Vista project).

dents. He displays his great-grandfather's passport from the former Reign of Italy to express the "historical relationship" between the nations of Italy and Somalia (Fig. 5). Ahmed is sitting between Palazzo Bo and the town hall, along what is considered the most iconic promenade in the city of Padua (Fig. 10). Nonetheless, his performance does not express a connection with the city. The verbal message about students attending university is articulated in national terms, and the material display of his great-grandfather's passport clearly involves a national framing of autobiographical memories and experiences. Curiously, he exposes the most prominent of those codes by which people attach themselves to the nation-state, codes that have been criticized and replaced by other material, grounded ones, which mediate the identity of the urban citizen within the fabric of the city (West-Pavlov 2013: 332).

Sassou, from Togo, decided to emplace his performance at the Roman arena. Scrovegni Chapel, with its famous Giotto frescoes, rests in the same area as probably the most powerful artistic icon of the city of Padua. Sassou, however, is interested in the ruins of the ancient arena, a vestige of Roman Italy, particularly because it represents a space of conflict. He sits at the entrance of the Arena Gardens (Fig. 1), in a small square with a sculpture of the national father figure of Garibaldi at its centre, where Paduan migrants use to meet. His message is metaphorically written with an Olivetti Lettera 35 portable typewriter, a blatant symbol of Italian design, and Italianness more generally (Fig. 6). His message is painful. In fact, he refers to the many problems affecting Italy: economic crisis, indebted businessmen committing suicide, workers ascending high buildings to protest against the closure of their factories, financial cuts to the national health service, unemployed persons being forced out of their homes and growing poverty. Sassou, therefore, is criticizing the hosting nation, but he does this by placing himself among the Italian people. He empathises with the common suffering of the people in Italy. His message implies a sharing of the experiences of trouble and struggle.

Jabir, another young Somali, performed his daily act of dressing and undressing in the open air, switching between European and Somalian clothes, expressing that he did not want to completely Italianise himself, but rather bring these different cultural backgrounds into co-existence (Fig. 4B, 7). Against the backdrop of the typical Italian Renaissance architecture, Jabir wears his multiple identities, which he deliberately articulates at a national, rather than an urban, level. The heritage space here does not function as a distanced device for national inculcation, but as a very close, earthy entity, which is bodily and openly performed. The "doing of heritage" happens in a playful way while Jabir consciously takes a (material and metaphorical) seat in the hosting national space.

Bianca, who comes from Romania, decided to ride her bicycle to the Paduan Dome's churchyard, a place which normally functions as a secular, rather than a sacred, space. Apparently, her message is a mere reflection on her particular way of experiencing space by cycling (Fig. 3B). Without any connection to the city of Padua or the city more generally, she talks about the sense of freedom and empowerment felt while biking. Her bike is a means of both introspection and socialisation, she writes. The message implicitly reveals a sense of well-being, a joyful way of running her life in the present (post-migration) situation. During the performance, Bianca got off her bike and wrote a further message, which she then jokingly displayed to the photographers and passers-by: "I love two kinds of men: the foreigners and those of my country" (Fig. 8). The cheerful message clearly produces a shift from the material space of the square embodied through the bicycle to the national frame of reference. It suddenly connects the material practice of space with concerns about national diversity.

Ha Sha, from China, sent a message about the process of integrating into her new Italian context. Her performance took place in Padua's cultural centre, one of the "countless similar wonderful places spread all over Italy", Ha Sha says, where she would like to experience a relaxed life, reading and drinking tea as if she were in her own home (Fig. 9). Ha Sha reflects

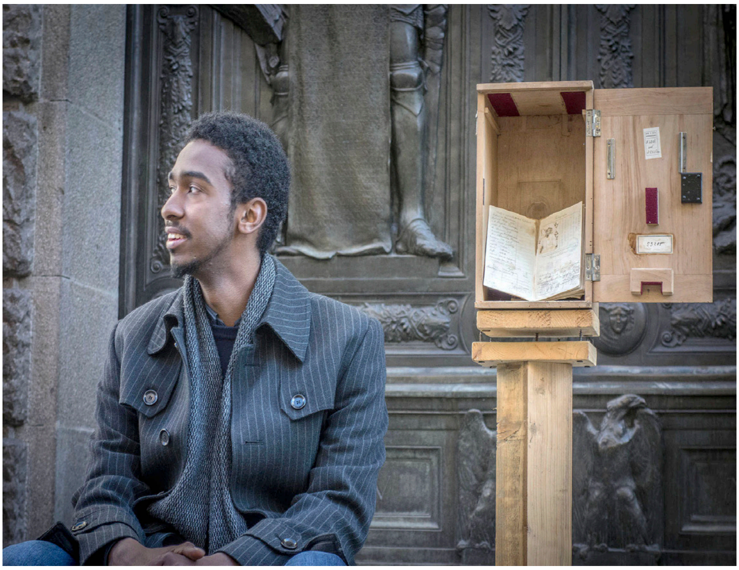


Fig. 5. Ahmed at Palazzo del Bo, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

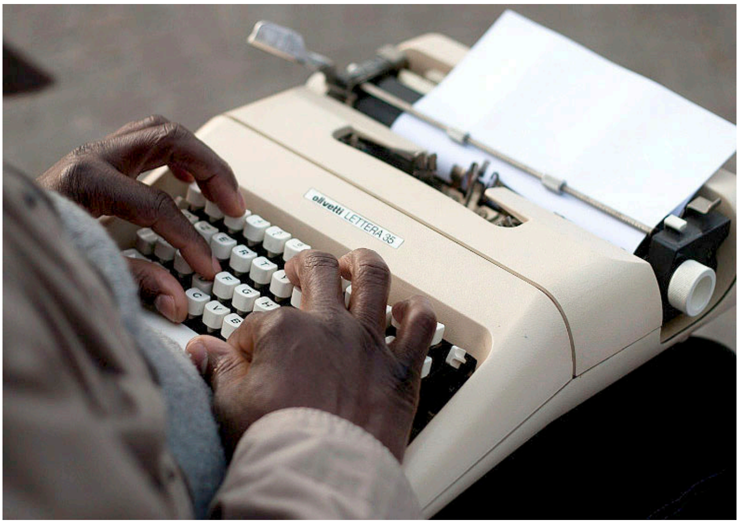


Fig. 6. Sassou at Giardini dell'Arena, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

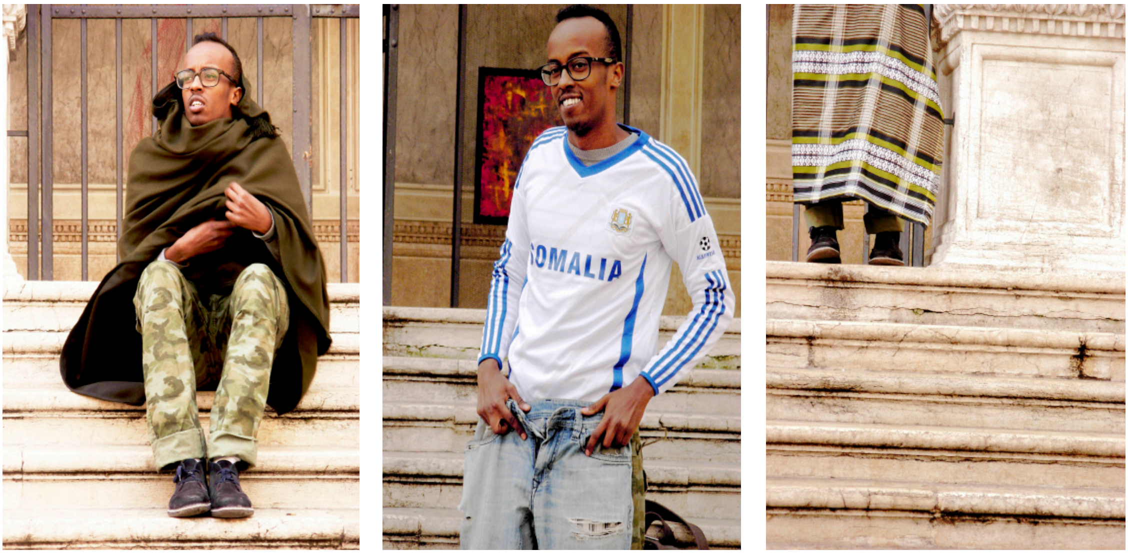


Fig. 7. Jabir at Loggia del Consiglio, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

upon her achievement of tranquillity after a difficult period of adaptation to new faces, new symbols and new voices. The idea of finally making herself at home is not related to the city of Padua, but to Italy. The art museum, in her words, functions not as the symbol of an abstract, distant national culture, but as one among a constellation of concrete spaces spread all over the national territory which could become 'home'. Ha Sha dares to *live* in those spaces as if they were her home. The performance, then, factually transforms the Italian art museum into the migrant's living room, with Ha Sha reading on a sofa and drinking tea.

The only performer (one of nine) who did not select a monumental site provides the most direct reference to the national frame. The re-writing of a prejudiced street graffiti performed by Julija, a Croatian woman, references the ideas of separatist political movements (in particular, the *Leghisti*, members of the Italian party of the Northern League), the linguistic diversity inherent to the Italian nation and the role of language skills in the integration of migrants[2].

The performances of the "In Vista" project, I observed, engaged the urban and the national (with particular reference to the hosting nation) scales simultaneously. My accidental involvement in this project stimulated the idea of confronting these performances with geographical literature on transnational migration and the "scale debate". Thus, here the art performance functioned as counterpoint to theoretical reflection, rather than as a rigorous set of data carried out from ethnographic fieldwork. The same role of 'counterpoint' is assigned in this article to the visual material. While the very act of framing the migrants against the urban backdrop was crucial to the performances, the process of speculation upon, the selection and composition of the photographic material for this article (which was mostly provided to me by the 'SocietàPerAzioni' creative team) has been expressly aimed at "making arguments *through* images" (Newbury 2011).

Between us in the nation: interpreting the performance through a scalar lens

It has been argued that, within art performances, site and event question the distinction between geographic scales, challenging the tendency to consider these scales as separate (Matless & Pearson 2012: 126). Through site-specific performances, places can literally become a synecdoche for other geographies and their identities, particularly nationality, since site-specific performances can "use a place to contest, rework and hybridise" what it means to be of a given nationality (Rogers 2012: 67). Performance studies, indeed, has interrogated the city/nation distinction, demonstrating how issues of nationness and urbanity may intersect in the performing arts (Roms 2008).

The "In Vista" performative events, with their disruptive effect upon the normal way of being in public spaces, influenced the temporary meaning given to the urban sites in terms of scale. The audience assisting in the performances recognised these sites as Italian, not as Paduan, because the difference put "in sight" was the nationalities of the non-Italian[3] performers and the native viewers. Moreover, the performers *deliberately* worked with personal understandings of the nation (Thompson 2001: 28), while socially, emotionally and existentially positioning themselves within both the hosting country and the urban material landscape. The performances gave expression to migrants' affective, embodied and emotional engagement with heritage sites (Crang & Tolia-Kelly 2010), often connected to a national frame of reference. The playful, familiar engagement with iconic, historic buildings disclosed traces of variated, alternative and inclusive cultures of the nation (Tolia-Kelly 2006).

As discussed above, the city/nation divide sometimes resembles a sort of "tale of two scales", or a narrative structured around two scales (Jonas 2006: 400). To be clear, I do not mean that nations and cities are tales, mere cultural constructs or mental devices, but that the city/nation divide tends to be reproduced as a narrative. Traditional hierarchical models, which treat scales as separate domains, often impose the micro-scale of the urban onto the domain of experience and the meso scale of the nation onto the sphere of ideology (Marston et al. 2005: 417). Rather than simply replacing (or decentring) the national scale and performing a re-scaling process through which the urban/global scales becomes dominant, the reorganisation, multiplication and relativisation of scales that occurred with globalisation have resulted in scalar complexity. Famously, Marston et al. (2005) proposed a "human geography without scale", or "flat ontology", which dismisses equally both the vertical conceptualisation of scale as a fixed, nested hierarchy of bounded spaces and the more recent turn towards a network model in which the horizontal relations between scales complicate and nuance scale in various ways.

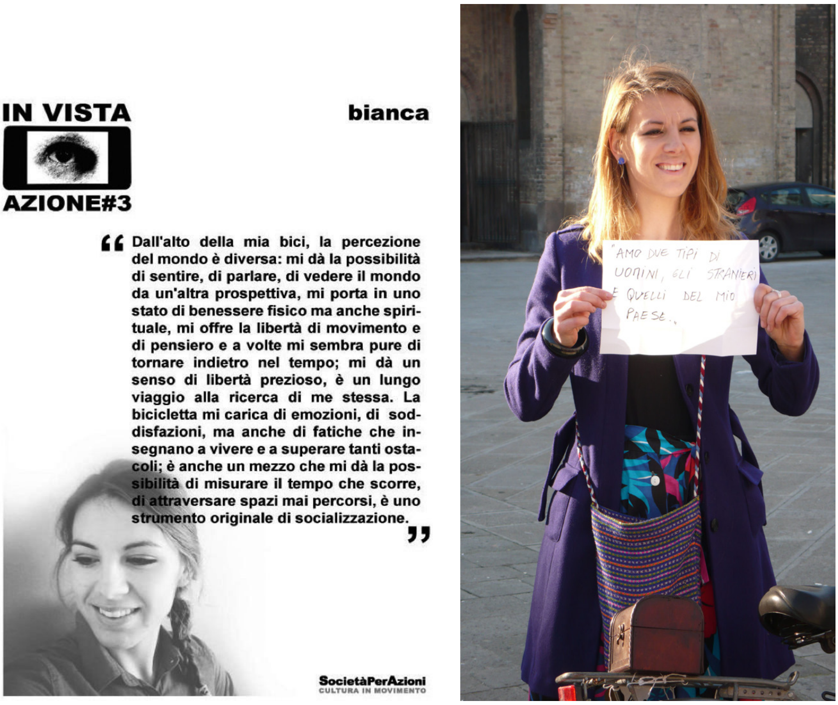


Fig. 8. Bianca at Piazza del Duomo, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

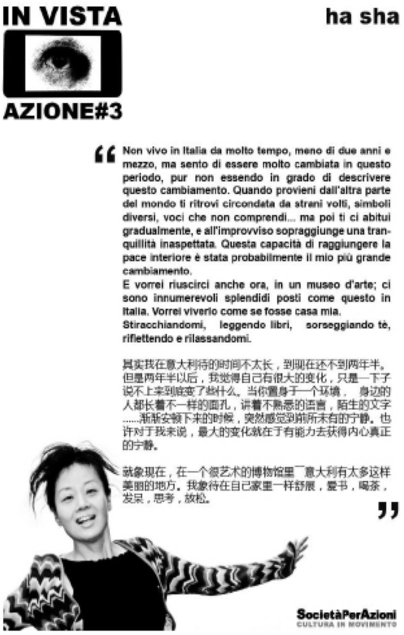
IN VISTA

AZIONE#3

bianca

"Dall'alto della mia bici, la percezione del mondo è diversa: mi dà la possibilità di sentire, di parlare, di vedere il mondo da un'altra prospettiva, mi porta in uno stato di benessere fisico ma anche spirituale, mi offre la libertà di movimento e di pensiero e a volte mi sembra pure di tornare indietro nel tempo; mi dà un senso di libertà prezioso, è un lungo viaggio alla ricerca di me stessa. La bicicletta mi carica di emozioni, di soddisfazioni, ma anche di fatiche che insegnano a vivere e a superare tanti ostacoli; è anche un mezzo che mi dà la possibilità di misurare il tempo che scorre, di attraversare spazi mai percorsi, è uno strumento originale di socializzazione."

SocietàPerAzioni
CULTURA IN MOVIMENTO



IN VISTA

AZIONE#3

ha sha

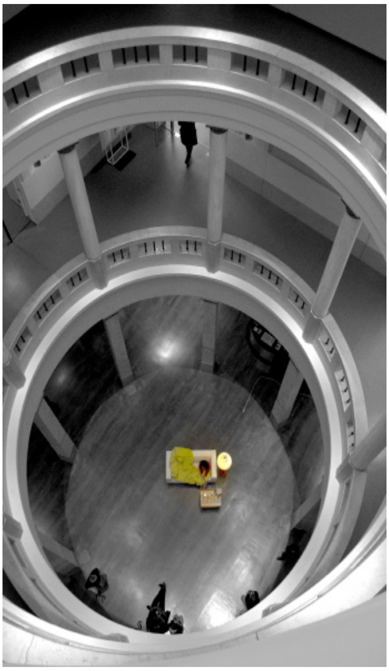
“Non vivo in Italia da molto tempo, meno di due anni e mezzo, ma sento di essere molto cambiata in questo periodo, pur non essendo in grado di descrivere questo cambiamento. Quando provieni dall'altra parte del mondo ti ritrovi circondata da strani volti, simboli diversi, voci che non comprendi... ma poi ti ci abitui gradualmente, e all'improvviso sopraggiunge una tranquillità inaspettata. Questa capacità di raggiungere la pace interiore è stata probabilmente il mio più grande cambiamento.

E vorrei riuscirci anche ora, in un museo d'arte; ci sono innumerevoli splendidi posti come questo in Italia. Vorrei viverlo come se fosse casa mia. Stiracchiandomi, leggendo libri, sorseggiando tè, riflettendo e rilassandomi.

其实我在意大利待的时间不太长，到现在还不到两年半。但是两年半以后，我觉得自己有很大的变化，只是一下子说不上来到底变了些什么。当你置身于一个环境， 身边的人都长着不一样的面孔，讲着不熟悉的语言，陌生的文字……渐渐安顿下来的时候，突然感觉到前所未有的宁静。也许对于我来说，最大的变化就在于有能力去获得内心真正的宁静。

就象现在，在一个很艺术的博物馆里¯意大利有太多这样美丽的地方。我象待在自己家里一样舒展，看书，喝茶，发呆，思考，放松。”

SocietàPerAzioni
CULTURA IN MOVIMENTO



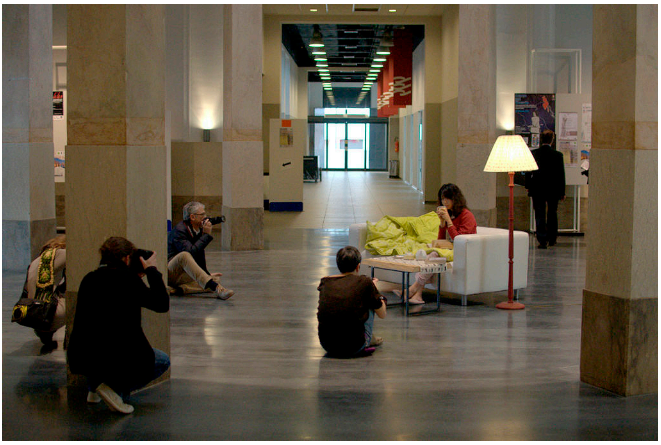


Fig. 9. Ha-Sha at Centro San Gaetano, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

The scale complexity of our times implies that different scales not only are interconnected but also function simultaneously, generating scale bending moments (Smith 2004: 208) and processes of “scale jumping”, whereby claims at one geographical scale are expanded to another. Referring to the scale debate, Featherstone et al. (2007: 386; emphasis added) argue that grounded transnational practices should be seen as constituted through dynamic relations with the nation and through particular places in both human and non-human realms. Using Smith's notion of scale jumping to analyse the activist actions of migrant students in the city of Melbourne, Robertson (2013) argues that activists' agency, in both intended and unintended ways, reframes the relationship between the scale of the campus, city and nation in a way that is neither hierarchical nor sequential. Instead, these scales are activated as simultaneously differentiated and interconnected spaces throughout which migrant activists physically move as different, particular urban sites of protest, thus claiming

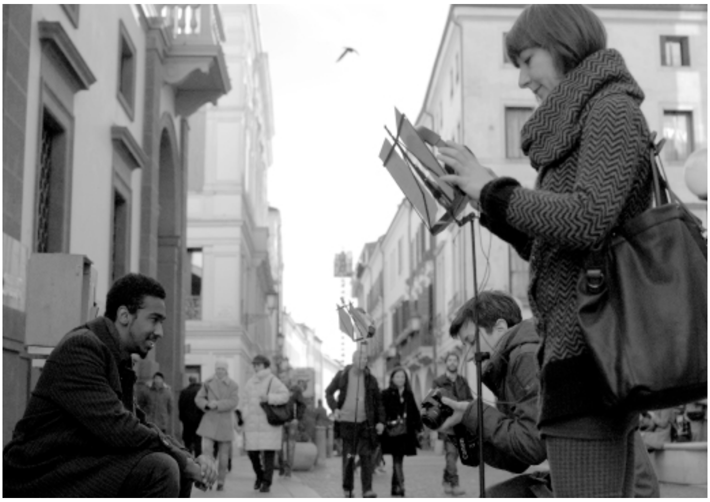


Fig. 10. Photographic set in front of Palazzo Bo, Padua, 2013 (© In Vista project).

"their belonging to the city *and* the nation as more than one of just transience" (Robertson 2013: 981; emphasis added).

Migrant subjects, of course, are crucial figures in this critique of the rigidity of scales. Papotti (2011) proposes employing a 'transcalar' approach, or the treatment of different scales together and in reciprocal relationships, in order to explain the coexistence and interpenetration of many scales of analysis in the migratory experience. The exploration of the emotional dimension of migration has recently focused on the senses of belonging which can occur at a range of spatial scales: drawing from Antonsich (2010), Wood and Waite (2011) call for a more careful investigation of the plurality of scales at which the 'here' is articulated, particularly by migrant subjects. As Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006: 1593) suggest, migrants' transnational practices do not dissolve identifications with national frames; rather, migrants show their commitment to the host country through actions on multiple scales, both local and national.

Finally, as Jones and Fowler (2007) argue, if most of the literature by non-geographers emphasised the national scale as the only appropriate level at which to study nations, works produced from a geographical perspective have dealt with particular landscapes as the repositories of nationalistic sentiment or special sites that assume relevance for the members of a nation. This body of work, however, focused excessively on static, detached, iconic *representations* of the nation, rather than on dynamic, contingent and heterogeneous *reproductions*, or *articulations* of nations. Jones and Fowler (2007) propose that focussing on the local scale as a 'metonym' for the nation often risks treating places in an abstract and homogeneous sense, as local passive symbols appropriated by the nation; much more attention should be paid to how nations are actively shaped within actual, mundane settings in particular circumstances. In this light, the recent problematisation of the concept of scale reveals a crucial need: if the nation is thought of as actively produced by a variety of different individuals, groups and institutions, then various sorts of scales of analyses can intersect and be mutually interpreted (Jones & Fowler 2007: 338). As the authors maintain, there is a danger that an emphasis on the relational quality of scales will ultimately collapse all spatial scales into one other in a sort of "scalar mush". Thus, Jones and Fowler (2007) contend, it is important to conduct empirical research with the aim to explicate the complex connections between the chosen, and other, scales. Here, I attempt to interrelate the urban and the national scale. In the same vein, analysing how the local articulations of national identity contribute to local immigrant policies in a sample of American suburbs, Walker (2014) introduces the idea of an "inclusive local nation".

The social and political implications of the "In Vista" project performances were not based on a strong, contesting, transgressive act against spatial order, identities or borders, as is frequent in city-based street performances (Rogers 2012: 69). The project staged a 'gentle', embodied engagement with places, as if the performers were 'flirting' (Crouch 2010a) with the spaces where they were performing. This attitude moved from the material urban space to the national dimension, recalled by migrants' messages. The 'here' expanded its scale, and transcalar, co-present acts of "post-identity belonging" (Antonsich 2010) were performed through space. The kind of heritage which the migrants were performing was dislodged from the conventional idea of it as speaking of "Great Things" that are distanced from the everyday experience of individuals; here, the 'doing' of national heritage took place as an open, vital experience (Crouch 2010b).

The concrete sites of the Paduan performances, far from being merely urban or merely national, became "sites of coexistence", "dynamic contexts that allow various inhabitants to hang together in event-relations" (Marston et al. 2005: 425). Challenging the nation/city divide, thus, I partly embrace a 'flat', or 'site-based' ontology, which sees scales as representational, discursive tropes superimposed onto a real world where one encounters legal, organisational structures through emergent performances and practices within event-relations and event-spaces (Marston et al. 2005).

Nonetheless, I do not abandon scale *tout court* as Marston et al. (2005) suggest, but as a geographer, I use it to literally write, or verbally articulate, my reflections on scale complexity and interpenetration, which for Jonas (2006: 400) remain compatible with the 'site-scales' concept developed by Marston et al. (2005).

The "In Vista" performances, moreover, should be considered in light of recent interventions on co-existing in a shared space, rather than in the sense of belonging to an urban community which strangers and natives feel in contemporary Westerns cities (Amin 2012). I argue that the idea of the city as a space "between us", developed within the frame of the transnational urbanism (Coward 2012), can be extrapolated to the national level, suggesting a way to think about the nation as a frame for shared existence and not as a bond of identity. It has been asserted that, in cities, we experience a "mutual exposure to otherness through a shared relation to urban fabric", and "instead of a face-to-face relation", we may understand a "relation of touch" because between us in the city is a "surface of contact" (Coward 2012: 469, 479). In the same way, the "In Vista" project seems to interrogate what lies between us in the nation.

The "In Vista" performances were not intended to create face-to-face, meaningful encounters between the migrant performers and native viewers. To the contrary, the photographic set paradoxically functioned as a distancing device (Fig. 10). The alteration of the normal relational dynamics in public spaces through the arrangement of the photographic set emphasised that migrants and natives share a relation, not to each other but to the same urban space. Public space was not engaged as a means to build social communion or create a bond, as urban planners traditionally aim. Public spaces were not occupied as political sites for antagonistic claims, as usually aimed for by urban activists. Here I do not follow the "urban canon on public culture" contested by Amin (2008: 8), in which the inter-personal relations favoured by the practice of public urban spaces are directly linked with the civic engagement and political participation. Instead, with Amin (2008), I acknowledge a post-humanist social account which sees the material entanglement of human and non-human bodies (shared spaces, infrastructures, objects, technological intermediaries, things) at the base of a tacit, unconscious, pragmatic, mediated togetherness, or sense of the collective. However, this paper provocatively suggests that this sense of the collective constructed through shared practices and spaces is not distinctive of the (super-diverse) city and an urban public culture, but might also be connected with the nation and a national public culture emerging from spatial practices and events.

During the Paduan performances, the expression of a personal feeling towards an urban site tended to shift into the expression of how the migrant participant emotionally positioned him/herself within a (human and non-human) national frame. Similarly to the so-called "urban unconscious", or the sense of being together in the urban frame (Amin 2012: 9), a "national unconscious", or the sense of being together in the national frame, seems to be at work silently (but not guiltily) through the contingent performance of space. "Sites of shared living through which a dispersed sense of the plural communal can emerge" (Amin 2012: 79), "experiential fields in which collective feelings toward specific sites [...], along with judgments of co-presence arise" (Amin 2012: 66) and "new metaphors of belonging (e.g. solidarity, common life, shared concerns)" (Amin 2012: 82) are not the prerogative only of the progressive city but also of the progressive nation.

Conclusions

This article has aimed to reflect upon what seems to be a persistent conceptualization of the city as successful, and of the nation as inadequate, in the capacity of managing diversity within our growingly multicultural societies. The opposition between the urban and the national scale has been enhanced by the recent tendency to ground the transnational paradigm in specific spaces and places. Whereas this new focus on concrete spaces and places has led, at least in part, to a multidimensional understanding about the complexity and multiplicity of transnational spatialities, the blunt binary opposition between the urban and the national seems to be growingly emphasised. Recent debates on urban citizenship and the intercultural city clearly support the idea that the city, rather than the nation-state, is likely the appropriate level for managing diversity. As a consequence, the city and the nation have been researched, thematized and narrated as opposed, with the city being the realm of experience, freedom and heterogeneity and the nation being the realm of ideology, constraint and homogenisation. This opposition, however, becomes difficult to maintain when the alternative conceptualizations of the nation are implemented. Once the nation is considered from agency-centred, pragmatic, non-discursive, progressive, emplaced, dynamic and experiential perspectives, the firm "tale of two scales" creaks.

In order to discuss the narrative of the city/nation divide, I introduced the "In Vista" performing project, which provides evocative suggestions rather than evidence. "In Vista" is a performing art project and, consequently, it involves 'exceptional' performances. Nonetheless, as we have seen, it can also be considered as a project about the ordinary performances of migrants' identities in space. The insertion of this suggestive case study has been intended to highlight how what were expected to be urban-centred performances by young migrants within particular urban sites were mostly revealed to be performances of nationally framed existential acts of positioning the self through the performances at those sites. Adopting a 'flat' site-based attitude towards scales, but without dismissing scales as a means for articulating both life and knowledge, these site-performance events could be viewed as the 'transcalar' articulations of the urban and the national, or even the articulations of the national through the embodiment of urban materiality. Concluding the paper, I proposed a tentative hypothesis which requires further thinking and empirical research. Emphasising the idea of the nation as a shared space of experience, I challenged the nation/city divide, extrapolating to the national scale the idea that what lies between us, in both the city and the nation, are experiential fields. As people practicing and moving through the same urban space develop a sense of awareness of the space as a whole, forms of awareness of sharing spatial experiences could be recognised among people practicing and moving through a 'national' space, which is conceived as something more than the territory of a state. In the same way as "urban sentiments" and "urban commons" are seen as positively, progressively nurturing a sense of co-presence and the capacity for living with difference, "national sentiments" and "national commons" could be seen as progressively nurturing a sense of co-presence among people of different backgrounds. If the silent working in the background of urban morphology (city's material form, regulatory environment, the rhythms of domestication and symbolic landscape) produces "reflexes of urban living, including relations among strangers" (Amin 2012: 66), we might also think about a national morphology which silently, but not guiltily, works in the background producing the reflexes of national living, including relations among strangers. Instead of conceiving national affinities in ethno-cultural terms, can we think about human affinities formed within vital, open shared spaces, as urban affinities are thought of? Are the national dispersed spaces capable of being familiar and plural, as urban ones are? If, then, as Amin maintains, the quality of the urban unconscious and the feeling toward strangers are closely interwoven, the task for progressive politics at both the urban and national scale will be to advance "a culture of active usage of the city's [and the nation's] shared resources and spaces" (Amin 2012: 79).

NOTES

[1] "It is very small things. In the streets, you have a common culture, you have a common language where you integrate Arab or Asian expressions, and then it becomes part of the Danish language. And you develop common norms" (quoted in Koefoed & Simonsen 2011: 351).

[2] This specific performing event will be analysed within a subsequent article.

[3] The use of the term 'nationality' to characterise 'diversity' is more suitable in the Italian context than

the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity', which are preferred in other national contexts (Knowles 2010), but generally are not employed to indicate diversity of different national backgrounds in public, official Italian discourse. Concerning this matter and an overview of Italian immigration, institutional models of integration (reasonable, indirect and implicit integration) and spatial aspects such as the relative absence of segregation and the role of public spaces, see Magnani (2007).

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