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The ‘everyday’ of banal nationalism – ordinary people’s views on Italy and Italian

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Abstract

In 1995, *Banal Nationalism* set a new way to study nationhood. Away from the traditional concern with its historical origins (‘when’) and its substantialist features (‘what’), *Banal Nationalism* offered a systematic analysis of its reproduction (‘how’). Informed by social and discursive psychology, Billig pointed to the role played by familiar, unremarkable ‘little words’ (deixis) to explain the persistence and pervasiveness of the idea of a world divided into nations. The present article aims to expand Billig’s seminal study on the reproduction of nationalism, by incorporating an ‘everyday nationhood’ perspective, which attends more closely to human agency and contextual interaction. To give empirical substance to this move, the article relies on photo-elicitation group discussions and written essays collected in a vocational school in Milan, Italy, among an ethno-culturally diverse sample. By bringing the voices of people in as active producers of national meanings, the article offers a more complex picture of a world banally divided into nations. Both a national ‘we’ and a national ‘here’ emerge in fact as socio-spatially differentiated, fragmented and articulated at a plurality of scales, thus defying the logical linearity of banal nationalism, which unwittingly reproduces nations as singular, internally homogenous discursive entities. The article concludes by arguing for the need to complement the banal with the everyday in order to more fully capture processes of national reproduction in contexts of increasing ethno-cultural diversity.

Keywords: banal nationalism, everyday nationhood, Italy, second generation, diversity

1. Introduction

One of the major insights of *Banal Nationalism* (Billig, 1995) is a very simple metonymic image: a national flag hanging unnoticed on a public building. This highly cited image conveys two important ideas. First, the world in which we live is a world of nations. Nationality is a feature which identifies each of us and by which we identify others. As Gellner (1983: 6) famously put it: “a man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears”. In other words, nations are a fact of nature and so is national identity. Second, we are all reminded of our national place through the constant presence of familiar national symbols and ways of talking and writing. This pervasiveness makes us stop consciously

registering this reminding, so that nationalism becomes a banal, unreflexive presence in our lives.

Since this argument was made, ‘banal’ has gained considerable momentum as an analytical category to map the numerous ways in which nations are reproduced. Among others, geographers have largely deployed this category, studying, for instance, the ‘banal’ role of coins, banknotes and stamps (Unwin and Hewitt, 2001; Raento and Brunn, 2005; Penrose, 2011; Hammett, 2012), license plates (Lieb, 2011; Airriess et al. 2012), street names (Azaryahu and Kook 2002; Alderman, 2003), and buildings’ styles (Cusack, 2001; Lahoud 2008). Interestingly, the focus here is on the materialization of the nation through these very ordinary artefacts – something actually largely absent in Billig’s book, whose concern was mainly with the indexical reproduction of nationhood. This is to suggest that the fortune of ‘banal’ nationalism also resides in its being a potentially open and flexible notion that can be adjusted to a variety of contexts, at times rather distant from those originally discussed in Billig’s book. This is also true for its scalar conceptualization, as banal nationalism has been re-worked to fit a plurality of other spatial dimensions: local (Alasuutari, 2013), European (Cram 2001), transnational (Aksoy and Robins, 2003), cosmopolitan (Beck, 2004), and ‘Occidental’ (Bozatzis, 2014).

My argument is that both in its original formulation and in some attempts to read the mundanity of the nation in material artefacts, banal nationalism tends, unwittingly, to overlook human agency. To be true, Billig in the past had rebuffed a similar critique (Skey, 2009), stating that “there is nothing in the theoretical background of *Banal Nationalism* to deny that ordinary people will engage in sense-making” (Billig, 2009: 348). Elsewhere, Billig (1991) has indeed clearly theorized this active role of ordinary people. Yet, in *Banal Nationalism* human agency does not seem to fully come forward. One can argue that exactly because unreflexivity is so central to the functioning of the notion of ‘banal’, human agency fails to fully enter the picture. Building on Billig’s seminal argument, my aim in this article is to attend more closely to the role ordinary people play in reproducing a sense of nationhood. To this end, I wish to engage with the notion of ‘everyday nationhood’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008), which I believe is a fruitful way to further expand Billig’s thesis. Certainly, ‘everyday’ is no less an open, general and multidimensional category than ‘banal’ (Burkitt, 2004). Thus, in this article, I shall focus on the everyday as it has been deployed in other influential studies on nationalism (Edensor, 2002; Brubaker, 2006; Skey, 2011), namely as a site for investigation of discourses and practices through which people make sense of their social world (Jones and Merriman, 2009: 166-167; Fox and Jones, 2013: 395). From this

perspective, the everyday is neither an analytical category, nor an object of investigation per se, but a mere domain of enquiry into other phenomena (Fox and Jones, 2013: 396). It is “a place, not spatially or temporally circumscribed, but imperfectly delineated by the individuals who people it” (Fox and Jones, 2013: 396). I would argue that adding the ‘everyday’ to banal nationalism would not only allow overcoming the distinction between ‘banal’ and ‘hot’ nationalisms, which has indeed proven empirically questionable (Jones and Merriman, 2009; Benwell, 2014; Closs Stephens, 2015); but it would also better serve the purpose of exploring how nationhood can be activated ‘from below’. Implicit in Billig’s image of the unnoticed flag there is indeed the idea of a state-centered, symbolic nationalism. Billig’s nationalism is the nationalism of the state, i.e. a top-down rhetorical strategy which conditions and constraints people’s lifeworld. A focus on the everyday might allow nationhood to be viewed in complement with this focus on state-centrism (and its banally displayed official symbolism), attending to unremarkable sites, objects and practices (Löfgren, 1993; Linde-Laursen, 1993; Edensor, 2002). So activated, nationhood might work as a positive dimension in people’s lifeworld (Calhoun, 2007), rather than as a mere source of a ‘banal, but not benign’ nationalism (Billig, 1995: 6).

Focusing more closely on ordinary people might also overcome the notion of an unencumbered national subject, which seems to implicitly inform Billig’s banal nationalism. As noted by Skey (2009: 335), apart from a very short passage (Billig, 1995: 71), *Banal Nationalism* operates with an unrealistic notion of a uniform, homogenous national audience. It is instead plausible to suggest that, far from being uniformly distributed in time and space, carrying an equal, banal meaning to all the members of the nation, nationalism might be consumed, articulated and mobilized differently by the different subjects involved. What kind of nation is made banal by ordinary people in the everyday life? By analyzing views of an ethnically diversified sample, this article explores the multifarious ways in which nationhood is made meaningful by these diverse participants. In so doing, the aim is also to respond to Smith’s (2008) criticism that ‘everyday nationhood’, not dissimilarly from banal nationalism, works with the notion of an undifferentiated ‘ordinary people’.

Before delving into the empirical data, the article will further elaborate on the theoretical move of incorporating everyday nationhood in banal nationalism. It will then introduce the case study and the methodology adopted for the collection of data. These will be presented and discussed around three of the most commonly used deixis in *Banal Nationalism*: ‘here’, ‘we’, and ‘the’. Although imperfect, this rhetorical move aims to explore the geographical and social complexity that lies behind these ‘little words’, thus illustrating

empirically the importance of attending to the ‘everyday’ as a way to better understand the ‘banal’ of nationalism.

2. Banal nationalism and everyday nationhood

Billig’s (1995) major concern in *Banal Nationalism* was to challenge the taken-for-granted idea of a world naturally divided into separate nations – what scholars have labeled as ‘methodological nationalism’ (Chernilo, 2007). In order to explore the common-sense character of this idea, Billig analyzes the indexical reproduction of nationhood. Besides being reproduced via celebratory events, aimed at instilling patriotic feelings among its members, nationhood is called into existence through the routine use of deixis (‘we’, ‘them’, ‘here’, ‘the’, etc.), which make nationhood appear like a natural presence in people’s everyday life. The key point in this argument is that this constant indexical reference is a daily reminder of one’s national place in the world which, exactly because of its pervasiveness, goes unnoticed. People fail to consciously register this familiar, routine language, which therefore enables nationhood to be continuously reproduced in very banal terms. As Billig (1995: 93) puts it: “banal nationalism operates with prosaic, routine words, which take nations for granted, and which, in so doing, inhabit [sic] them. Small words, rather than grand memorable phrases, offer constant, but barely conscious, reminders of the homeland, making 'our' national identity unforgettable.”

Banal nationalism clearly speaks of the importance of the everyday as the locus where a world of nations is reproduced. Yet, as noted above, this is an everyday in which people’s agency is not fully acknowledged. Banal nationalism, like other interpretations of nationalism, unwittingly overlooks the place of the individual in reproducing nationhood (Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012). As Rossetto (2015) observes, Billig’s discursive-centered approach tends to treat people as being passively and unconsciously exposed to banal national ‘flagging’ orchestrated from above, failing to discuss how individuals daily, actively, and often deliberately ‘make’ nationhood.

A way to compensate for this accidental obliteration is to look at ‘everyday nationhood’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008). In this perspective the everyday becomes the locus where people creatively and self-consciously mobilize nationhood in their social interactions. As Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008: 539) write: “nationhood is not (only) lurking in the crevices of the unconscious, furtively informing talk without becoming the subject of talk; it is

simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people giving concrete expression to their understandings of the nation. Nationhood does not only define their talk; it is defined by their talk.”

A key contribution in this agency-centered approach to nationhood is Thompson (2001). In his sociological account of nation and nationalism, Thompson switches from the ‘banal’ to the ‘local’, by which he means the ways in which nationhood is made real to the individual by the individual in the course of their interactions. In this sense, ‘local’ comes to signify both the personal appropriation of nationhood as well as the local situatedness of this embodied perspective, since any understanding of nationhood is necessarily mediated by what an individual experiences locally (Thompson and Day, 1999: 29). This latter point clearly challenges those scholarly views which instead see the national and the local/urban as two distinct and opposite socio-spatial registers, privileging indeed the latter as a lived, open space and discarding the former as an abstract, fixed entity (Rossetto, 2015).

By attending to people’s everyday nationhood, Thompson liberates nationalism from an exclusive top-down perspective which often characterizes traditional understandings of nationalism, and which *Banal Nationalism* partly reproduces – an objectified image of nationhood which seems to exist above and beyond the agency of the individual (Thompson, 2001: 20). Against treating people as ‘cultural dopes’, Thompson suggests looking at them for how they come to understand ‘their’ nationhood rather than for how a sense of nationhood is transmitted to them (Thompson and Day, 1999: 38).

Moving from a similar perspective, various scholars have engaged with the ways ordinary people make sense of their national place in the world of nations. Working in the same tradition of Billig’s discursive analysis, people’s narratives of national identity have been studied, for instance, by Condor and colleagues (Condor, 2000; Condor et al. 2006; Condor and Fenton, 2012) and by Skey (2011) for the case of England and by Wodak and colleagues (2009) for the case of Austria – all pointing to the context-dependent and dynamic character of (national) identity talk. Approaching the same subject from a more sociological perspective, the Edinburgh National Identity Group has equally explored ordinary’s people agency in narratives of nationhood, particularly in Scotland (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015). A more geographical account of people’s engagement with nationhood has been offered by Jones and colleagues (Jones and Desforges, 2003; Jones and Fowler, 2007; Jones and Merriman, 2009; Jones and Merriman, 2012), who have also reflected on the importance of place in shaping a sense of nationhood.

One of the most compelling studies, though, on everyday nationhood is Brubaker (2006). Supported by rich ethnographical data collected in the Transylvanian town of Cluj, this study moves away from a substantialist and objectifying account of nationhood for an eventful one. Contrary to Billig's banal nationalism, which assumes that nationhood is omnipresent both temporally and spatially, Brubaker points to the contingent and intermittent presence of nationhood in everyday life. The task, therefore, is to map when, where, and how nationhood is made salient by people during their interactions.

An important contribution to everyday nationhood also comes from Edensor (2002). Steering away from viewing nationhood as the product of high or official culture, Edensor looks into the everyday for those forms and practices of popular culture which contribute making nationhood a relevant framework in people's lives. For him, it is the mundane choreographies of ordinary people queuing at the bus stop, getting stuck in traffic jams on holiday trips to popular destinations, or sitting in front of the TV for the evening news which produce a common spatial-temporal matrix, which in turn draws people and places together around a shared sense of nationhood (see also Löfgren, 1993). Moreover, Edensor observes that these routinized and synchronized practices take place within a familiar landscape of unremarkable objects (traffic lights, street furniture, fencing style, petrol stations, etc.), which also contribute making nationhood a visible, tangible presence in people's daily lives. Whereas *Banal Nationalism* is about the everyday of the symbolic, Edensor's everyday nationhood is about the seriality of the a-symbolic.

It is within this theoretical move aimed at complementing banal nationalism with everyday nationhood that this article is located and to which it aims to offer an additional empirical and theoretical contribution.

3. Researching 'Italy' and 'Italian'

Before explaining the research design, the Italian context should be briefly introduced. Various scholars, Italian included, have noted the weak sense of national identity among Italians (Galli della Loggia, 1998; Haddock and Bedani, 2000; Patriarca, 2010; Graziano, 2010). In the well-known study by Putnam (1993), Italians' poor social capital and civic spirit are mentioned to explain the social fragmentation of the Italian space. Geographically, this fragmentation is exemplified by the so-called *campanilismo*, a deeply rooted sense of one's local identity and defense of local interests, which might find a historical justification in the

Italian tradition of city-states (Galli della Loggia, 1998; Agnew, 2002). To this socio-spatial fragmentation it should be added the North-South divide, which is constantly referred to in scholarly debates as a major obstacle in Italy's national unification (Schneider, 1998), and which, more recently, has also been exploited for electoral purposes by the Northern League (Agnew, 1995; Giordano, 2000). Besides these factors, scholars also mention the weakness of the Italian state, since the state-building process has only partially succeeded and has been largely detached from the nation-building process (Gentile, 2010). However, one can say that talking negatively about Italy is a very 'Italian' trait (Galli della Loggia, 1998). Moreover, when asked about their feelings of national pride, Italians show a percentage higher than the European average (Antonsich, 2009). In 2011, Italy also celebrated the 150th anniversary of its political unification, with one-year long celebrations largely attended by ordinary people and with a rich editorial production on Italianness.

Belonging to the so-called Mediterranean model of immigration (King and Black, 1997), Italy has changed from a country of emigration into a country of immigration only in the 1970s, with the first mass arrival of Albanian migrants in the early 1990s (King and Andall, 1999; Colombo and Sciortino, 2004). In this sense, Italy is somewhat representative of other countries in Europe (e.g., Spain, Greece, Ireland, and Finland), which contrary to more established countries of immigration (e.g., UK, Germany, and France) have only recently experienced important immigration flows. On 1 January 2014 there were 4,922,085 foreign nationals living in Italy (8% of the total population) (ISTAT, 2015) – the majority of them coming from Romania (1,072,342), Morocco (513,374), Albania (497,761), China (304,768), Ukraine (224,588) and the Philippines (158,308). Their geographical distribution was uneven, as they were mainly located in the North (61.8%), with relatively fewer people in the Centre (24.2%) and even less so in the South and Islands (14%). Their presence within Italian cities was also characterized by geographical dispersion – the absence of ghettos together with the smallness of each minority group have so far prevented the emergence of strong ethnic community networks and related recognition claims (Colombo et al. 2009; Spanò, 2010).

Children of migrants are still a new phenomenon in Italy, as also reflected in their declining proportions across the four-tier Italian school system: 'Early years' (9.8%), 'Primary' (9.8%), 'Secondary I' (9.6%), and 'Secondary II' (6.6%) (MIUR, 2013). Despite being relatively few, they have been very vocal in various associations (e.g., ReteG2, AssoCina, Giovani Musulmani d'Italia), demanding the reform of the Italian citizenship law.¹ Academic interest in these so-called 'New Italians' (Dalla Zuanna et al., 2009) has mainly

focused on their socio-economic integration (within the school system and the labor market, in particular – for a review see Ricucci, 2010: 53-64), with only a very few studies analyzing their feelings of national identity (Andall, 2002; Colombo, 2010; Volpato, 2011).

For the purpose of this article, qualitative data were collected among students of a multicultural secondary school in Milan, Italy, during May 2013 and January 2014. The choice of Milan was dictated by its being one of the most diverse cities in Italy – on 31 December 2013, the foreign nationals accounted for 19.5% of Milan's total population (Comune di Milano, 2014). Their nationalities differed from what seen above, being in fact the Philippines (13.0%), Egypt (8.7%), China (8.3%), and Peru (6.8%) the most common countries of origin (ISTAT 2014) – a presence somewhat reflected in the schools, where out of the 17.7% foreign national students, 19.1% had a Filipino background, 10.0% Peruvian and 9.3% Ecuadorian (MIUR 2013).

The choice to recruit participants in a vocational school was justified by the fact that this type of school is the one most likely chosen by children of migrants (Barban and White, 2011), thus guaranteeing their presence among the participants. After obtaining clearance from the school board, the research was presented to the students by their professors, who then collected the names of those who volunteered to participate. The original target was 18-year-old students, with and without foreign background. However, due to practical problems, the sample turned out to be much more differentiated (see Table 1). With the help of a local research assistant – well experienced in researching children of migrants – a total of eight focus groups were organized, all moderated and transcribed by the research assistant, whom the Author guided closely throughout the data collection process. The focus groups convened in the school premises so to guarantee a familiar setting (Jones and Desfarges, 2003: 280). The methodological choice of the focus group was informed by similar studies with young participants, which found focus groups less intimidating and conducive to better discussion than one-to-one interviews (Stevenson and Muldoon, 2010: 586; Scourfield et al., 2006). The 22 students were divided in four groups (5-6 participants each) – two groups were made of native Italians and two of children of migrants. Each group met twice. During the first meeting, the broad aims of the research were presented and students were asked direct and indirect questions about what Italy and Italian stand for. In the following days, students were invited to perform a small task: 'Photograph things, places, people or acts which for you represent Italy and/or Italian'. They were asked to take a maximum of 10 photos, to rank them in order of importance and, for the first three photos, to write what they represented, where and when they were taken, and what they meant for them. A week after the first

meeting, a second group discussion was organized around their photos. Although this photo-elicitation exercise was enthusiastically welcomed, at the end not all students took photos and some preferred to download them from Internet.

As an additional source of information, we then invited some professors to show a selection of these photos in class and to ask their students to write their personal considerations on Italy/Italian prompted by the view of these photos. We gathered a total of fifty essays, each being between 400-500 words long. Although demographic information was not collected, for almost all the essays, thanks to the gendered nature of Italian language and personal life stories told by the student, we could retrieve relevant demographic information (see Table 2).

All data were collected in Italian (translations in this article are by the Author) and coded via an ‘analytic induction’ approach (Crang, 1997: 188) which, echoing grounded theory, relies on the iterative process of going back and forth between original data and theoretical concepts in order to reach successively more abstract categorizations.

4. ‘Here’: a multiscalar account

Banal Nationalism works with an undifferentiated ‘here’. It is implicitly assumed that ‘here’ refers to a uniform, homogenous, unvarying national space. While there was certainly evidence of this rhetorical usage among the respondents, it is important to contextualize it. In the group discussions with native participants, the undifferentiated ‘here’ was triggered by the topic of immigration:

Laura: *If you come here, you must adapt*

Elena: *Exactly*

Laura: *Exactly! If you come here, you are in Italy, like all the Italians, you must adapt, if you are not ok with it, then goodbye!*

In this brief exchange between two native Italians, ‘here’ stands for Italy, not the local place where most likely the immigrant (‘you’) ends up landing and/or living. The construction of Italy as a unified and undifferentiated space in this case is made possible by the reference to an external Other (Triandafyllidou, 2001). Thus, the reinforcement of a sense

of nationhood not only gets constituted in the opposition between ‘us here’ and ‘them there’, like in *Banal Nationalism*; but also via the perception of ‘them here’.² Implicit in the conversation is also a ‘here’ characterized by a clearly discernible (although unspoken) system of cultural practices, to which the immigrant should adapt (Antonsich, 2012). Failing to do so would lead to their expulsion (‘goodbye’). This cultural system is supposed to homogenously spread over ‘here’, thus contributing to give Italy a clear, singular identity.

In the same group discussion, the reference to immigrants also led to constructing ‘here’ as a space unified by law – an identity construction once again made possible by casting the immigrant as a bearer of ‘other’ rules and therefore a potential violator of ‘our’ laws:

Elena: [...] *They come here and they hang onto their cultures. They maybe do what they do in their country. You come here, you must adapt to our laws anyhow, to what we do.*

Laura: *I don’t think this is right! You are in Italy, you wear a bikini. If you don’t want to wear it, don’t wear it, but don’t come to my beach! Why shall I create a place [on the beach] on purpose for you? You are in my country, respect my law! [...] Here it’s like this. If you want to come to the beach, you must do like this.*

These two extracts, uttered by the same participants as above, confirm that ‘here’ is not only discursively constructed as a unified, singular ‘it’, but it is also something non-negotiable. ‘Here’ is a coherent, fixed, unchangeable place, which cannot be reshaped so to accommodate diverse practices – in this case exemplified by an alleged request of Muslim women to have a separate beach (a news story previously reported by another focus group participant).

Yet, when the conversation steered away from immigration and the moderator asked a direct question about the participants’ national feelings, ‘here’ became a much more unstable identity marker:

Interviewer: *And when you think of yourselves as Italians, well if [stressed] you think of yourselves as Italians*

[everybody laughs]

Interviewer: *What comes to your mind when you think of yourselves as Italians?*

[silence]

Anna: *Is it a difficult question?*

[Claudia and Elena laugh]

Fabio: *But in Italy there is no 'the Italian'! Italians are more attached to their cities: I am from Milan!*

Laura: *Exactly*

Claudia: *Exactly*

In the absence of a perceived external threat (immigration), national identity becomes a contested matter. The 'if' of the direct question generates a common laugh (including the moderator, Italian herself), which signals per se, in a very un-indexical way, a shared way of talking Italianness. In other words, the unison negation of a common national identity is an implicit confirmation of the existence of a common national attitude – Italianness performed in the common negation of its existence. I shall return to the question of the national 'we' in the next section. Here, I want instead to note how, from a unitary, undifferentiated 'here', Italy now becomes discursively activated as an internally fragmented space. Significantly, this shift also characterizes Laura, who in the previous discussion about immigration declined 'here' in absolutely singular terms. The idea of an undifferentiated 'here' which informs *Banal Nationalism* collapses. Both in the focus group discussions and in the students' essays, reference to regions, cities and the North-South divide came to the fore rather frequently:

We are a country marked by profound differences, between North and South, between one region and another, between one city and another or a neighborhood and another.

(Essay B7ITAF)

Lucia: *Italy has already its own problems in feeling united. A person from the South is already considered a foreigner in relation to a person from the North. The saying goes "south from the Po [river] ...". We are already divided... I don't know... we are not united!*

Italy is no longer articulated as a homogeneous, uniform 'here', but as a highly diversified space, across which also the law, contrary to what previously said in the group discussion, applies unevenly:

Matteo: *You see 12-year old kids who ride motorbikes... 'the helmet? What is the helmet?' But it is a very safe place; it is not like Naples.*

Recalling his personal experience of visiting a place in the South, Matteo, having himself a southern background, challenges the idea of an undifferentiated 'here'. While one can certainly say that this regional and local articulation might be specific to the Italian case (as also mentioned in one of the essays, thus constructing 'Italy' exactly through its regional exceptionalism), it also seems legitimate to argue that rather than assuming its spatially and temporally undifferentiated meaning, 'here' should be explored in the various contexts in which ordinary people make it meaningful to them.

There is something more than meaning, though, to be said about 'here'. Banal nationalism seems indeed to assume that 'here' operates at one scale – the national scale. Bringing people in and attending to their everyday lives reveal instead the plurality of scales at which nationhood is reproduced:

Laura: *There is a friend of my brother who is Egyptian... The eyebrows... his mother does not allow him to trim them. Basically, he has a mono-eyebrow, poor boy. 'Come here that I'll do them for you'. This poor boy... I extirpated him! Enormous! Really, it was unbelievable!*

Prompted by a discussion focusing on the Italianness of their peers with foreign background, this personal recollection contrasts an Egyptian mother and her cultural bodily practice with what Laura believes should be an appropriate body look. Her use of emphatic words is a rhetorical strategy to accentuate the diversity of that body and to justify her unsolicited act of reducing that diversity to something acceptable to her eyes. What is appropriate and normal 'here' is constructed at the bodily scale.

A similar reproduction of the national mainstream via the normalization of the body also emerged in other discussions, in relation for instance to the ways children of Filipino migrants wear their jeans ("their crotch is tighter") or the practice of a Pakistani female classmate to dress up in the same way "winter, summer, and spring". In all these instances, nationness is not reproduced indexically, but performatively. The performance of 'little things' more than the utterance of the 'little words' is what matters, thus going beyond the

discursive focus which characterizes *Banal Nationalism* (Reicher, Hopkins and Condor, 1997: 83).

It was not only the body which emerged in the group discussion as a relevant scale for the reproduction of the nation. Let's, for instance, consider the following three focus group excerpts:

Fabio: *For example the sofa, they have a type of Arab sofa...with a table within it. Then...I also saw some... there are more teapots than coffee makers... I saw different pots... I saw... if someone had asked me "which country is this?" I would have said : I am not in Italy here!*

[...]

Interviewer: *Whereas in your house... what makes it Italian?*

Fabio: *Everything! The furniture, the table, the kitchen, everything! Even the fridge, everything!*

Interviewer: *Why? Was their fridge empty?*

Fabio: *I don't know, but they had strange things, ready-made sauces! If you open my fridge you find sieved tomatoes, ketchup, sausages. If you open my cupboard, you find the Macine, Tarallucci, Mulino Bianco [popular brands of Italian biscuits].*

Interviewer: *Do you go in these shops? [grocery shops run by foreigners]*

Laura: *No, never!*

Interviewer: *Why don't you go?*

[...]

Laura: *Because they have their things, curry and those things... my gosh, how smelly!*

Anna: *The one here in Bligny street, you can see from outside that the floor is full of dust! Very dirty!*

Interviewer: *So you think the level of cleanliness is different?*

Anna: *If you look inside, because they always leave the door open, you can see the plastic bag on the floor, the pile of dust... I am not saying that Esselunga [Italian supermarket] is the cleanest place on the universe, but at least you don't find dust!*

Matteo: *I think culture is mainly a question of behavior [...] I mean, education. If you are on the bus and it's full, you can't scream as if you were at home! I see that these... I am not mean to them, but this is the most common example! Or maybe they take off their shoes and put their feet... I see them on the 95 [a bus route]. I see that they take off their shoes... I would never think about doing so! Or they scream... this for me is education, respect. I know that in Egypt you can scream like crazy, then I scream like crazy!*

These three quotes reaffirm how nationness can be reproduced at a scale different from the national scale (Appleton, 2002; Jones and Desforges, 2003; Jones and Fowler, 2007). In the first extract, Fabio narrates his experience of visiting the house of a friend of Moroccan descent. Both the house décor and the objects he sees confirm a feeling of estrangement and are contrasted with the reassuring familiarity of his home space and the trivial commodities which populate it. In the second excerpt, it is also a very unremarkable object (a plastic bag) which, among other things (leaving the door open, dust on the floor), is highlighted to remark the diversity of that place from what apparently an Italian place looks like. The last quote similarly reproduces a national mainstream – defined by what is considered a proper behavior – by evoking a very spatially contingent ‘here’ (the bus). In all the three episodes, a disciplinizing gaze confirms the importance of the agency of ordinary people in reproducing a national ‘here’ through very ordinary, a-symbolic objects and at a plurality of scales, all conveying a sense of order against which to assess what (and who) can be in or out of place.

5. ‘We’: between being and belonging

As mentioned above, *Banal Nationalism* has been criticized for assuming an unencumbered subject, as if people’s different positionality did not matter in the way they absorb and reproduce the national message – a critique which also applies to the notion of undifferentiated ‘ordinary people’ as deployed by some scholars working with everyday nationhood (Smith, 2008). Listening to the voices of an ethnically differentiated group of ‘Italians’ allows exploring the plurality of registers through which a national ‘we’ can be articulated, as well as detecting a short circuit in the functioning of banal nationalism when ‘belonging’ no longer coincides with ‘being’ (see also Anthias, 2002: 492). Let me start from this latter point.

When the group discussions focused on meanings of 'Italy' and 'Italian' facing the demographic change, both natives and children of migrants adopted an essentialist outlook towards their identities – something also observed in other studies (Anthias, 2002; Fondazione Intercultura, 2009; Wodak et al., 2009; Colombo, 2010; Fox and Jones, 2013). Entitled with what Hage (1998) calls cultural national capital, native participants rejected any claim of 'being Italian' voiced by their peers with foreign background, even if born and bred in Italy:

Interviewer: *But if they tell you that they feel part... I mean that they feel Italians, that they feel belonging to Italy...*

Fabio: *Well, I would be honored, so to speak, I mean it is an honor if a person says 'I feel part of your country'. But if he says 'look, I am Italian', well, you are joking...*

Bruno: *Why do they have this necessity of saying 'I am Italian'?! Sorry, but you are an Egyptian who lives in Italy, even if you are born in Italy... who cares!*

Fabio is a very outgoing person, having friends from various backgrounds, and fully aware and accepting that Italy is changing demographically. Yet, he clearly differentiates between 'being Italian' and feeling a sense of belonging to Italy, which still remains 'my' (not 'your') country. In the second extract, the potential claim of Italianness made by persons with foreign background is harshly dismissed by Bruno, who will later disclose that he also has friends of foreign origins.³ 'Being Italian' is an ontological condition which cannot be negotiated. It can only be granted under certain circumstances, when any sign of visible diversity is erased:

Laura: *We have a classmate whose mother, no actually both parents are Egyptians. But she was born here. For me she is super Italian! At times she speaks better than me! Absolutely. She has our culture, but she is Egyptian. She does not go around with a scarf... with a burqa, she does not do Ramadan. I mean, for me yes, she is Italian!*

Fabio: *'Where were you born?'. 'In Milan'. 'What are you doing?'. 'I am praying to Allah'... but are we joking?! I mean this cannot be. If religion starts influencing things... the cultural aspects of life, no! Then you are no longer Italian. It's not that I strip your citizenship off... I mean, maybe you are Italian in theory, but in practice...*

Both passages point to the precariousness of ‘being Italian’ for children of migrants. This status might be granted to them by their ‘titular’ peers insofar as they perform Italianness through language, dressing, and other practices (Antonsich, 2012). Yet, it is a very unstable status, since – as shown in the quote by Laura – being Egyptian and being Italian are simultaneously evoked, thus contradicting what it is exactly affirmed.

On their part, children of migrants, throughout the group discussions and also in the essays, positioned themselves as ‘being foreigners’. This is not surprising given the fact that they indeed have to constantly face the majority group’s skepticism about their ‘being Italian’, as also the two previous quotes suggest:

Munna: I am not saying that they consider us Italians, we are foreigners in Italy, but we belong to Italy anyhow.

Joshua: Growing up it seems... I don’t know... it seems that maybe people, other friends, they cut you off, ‘coz you are a foreigner.

Interviewer: Do they look at you like a foreigner?

Joshua: Yes, and maybe because of this you don’t feel much attached to the Italian society, even though inside you feel Italian.

Munna is an Italian citizen, born and raised in Italy to Bangladeshi parents, and she is an observant Muslim. During the group discussions, she was very vocal against the discrimination that she and other people of foreign origin encounter in Italian society. Yet, here and in other passages, she clearly draws a boundary between being Italian and feeling a sense of belonging to Italy. The same distinction also appears in the passage in which Joshua, born and raised in Italy to Filipino parents, recalls the mismatch between his feeling Italian and his being regarded as a foreigner. When looked from the perspective of children of migrants, there is an unsurmountable gap between being and belonging. The way they look at themselves (self-identification) does not reflect the way others look at them (social categorization). This incongruity generates a sort of ‘short circuit’ in the functioning of banal nationalism, which, working with an undifferentiated ‘we’, assumes instead that the unwaved flag reinforces both social categorization and self-identification, making an individual aware of their uncontested national place within a world of nations. Children of migrants disrupt this linear functioning of banal nationalism, as with their own very presence they challenge

the existence of a neatly and uncontroversially delineated national 'we'. By embodying a tension between being and belonging, they challenge the way banal nationalism fixates an individual to a given national identity:

Munna: *When you think about Italy, you think about the Italian culture, but within the Italian culture now there are other cultures... at the end it's all a mix... a mix between Italy and foreigners, 'coz by living in Italy you acquire the Italian ways of doing, I mean you always take something from Italy.*

Arjuna: *Of course*

Munna: *Of course [...] but I would like to also keep something of my country*

Interviewer: *And you think this does endanger your belonging to Italy?*

Munna: *I don't think so!*

Interestingly, in this excerpt Munna confirms and negates at the same time the existence of a world of nations. On the one hand, she contrasts 'Italy' to 'her country', according to her rhetoric of self-labelling herself as 'being foreigner'. On the other hand, she blurs the boundaries of nations, by showing the creolization of national cultures, thus exposing the imaginary of a world divided into nations as artificial, abstract and ultimately untenable.

Attending to the everyday experiences of children of migrants challenges even more clearly the notion of a singular, stable national 'we':

Walter: *There are moments when you feel Italian, but there are also moments when you know that you are not Italian. For instance, in summer, you are with your friends and then one day from another you see everybody going on vacation. You – being born here, but from another country – you know that you don't have money, you can't go on vacation, to the sea. You stay here in Milan and then you realize that you are not really 100% Italian, even though you were born here. You are from another country, you are a poor devil, with no cash, and if you don't have cash where you go?*

Walter grew up in Milan, where he was born to Peruvian parents, with whom he still lives and whose economic status, according to him, negatively affects his life choices. Yet, interestingly, Walter does not explain his inability to go on vacation by his class status (there obviously are many other native Italians who cannot afford a summer vacation), but to his

foreign origin. Difference is here perceived as national difference and a mundane event (summer vacation) is what makes this difference becoming apparent.⁴ This is an interesting point as it challenges Edensor's (2006) notion of national synchronicity. Like the unencumbered subject of *Banal Nationalism*, everyday nationhood also tends to assume the existence of an undifferentiated ordinary people. The routinization of time through institutional practices (e.g., schooling, holiday times) and daily practices (e.g., eating times) is what for Edensor contributes reproducing a shared national 'we' feeling. Yet, paying attention to the different positionality of ordinary people reveals, even in this case, a short circuit in this mechanism of national reproduction. The synchronic event, when Italians head in mass to the seaside in summer, might generate an opposite result among 'new Italians'. This a-synchronic perception disrupts the idea of an undifferentiated national 'we' – something which also emerged in a few other instances, like in the essay of a Copt student of Egyptian origin who realizes her being diverse when she celebrates Christmas on a different day from the rest of Italians.

There is also another point to highlight about the notion of a national 'we', when this is not merely transmitted through the subliminal messages of banal nationalism, but made meaningful by people in their everyday life:

Matteo: Maybe they don't even wash themselves... I have met many Moroccans guys — because Moroccans, Christians or Orthodox or whatever... they are completely different. For example, I go to a pizzeria. A kebab of a Christian is completely different from the one maybe... Arab, Muslim. I mean, they are completely different! My mother has a restaurant: I saw the cleanliness... I mean the Christians are super clean. This was Egyptian, although he was very kind...

This excerpt from Matteo, a well-travelled student, belonging to an upper middle-class family, came as part of a discussion about who can be regarded as Italian. In this instance, the national 'we' is constructed by referring to something larger than the nation. Christianity is invoked to substantiate a sense of nationhood, thus complexifying the banal idea of a world divided into nations. Similarly, in the group discussions, other identity markers were called into existence, thus constructing the national 'we' beyond the national spatial register, as already seen in the previous section:

Anna: *We need to see what kind of foreigners... because if an English person moves to Italy, I believe the mentality would basically be the same*

Interviewer: *Of an Italian?*

Anna: *Of an Italian, yes! Then we need to see who moves over here, because if one comes from an underdeveloped country, then there is still the idea that people go around with carts and oxen[...]*

Interviewer: *So if I take an English person and an Italian... what does distinguish you as an Italian from an English person?*

Laura: *Nothing*

Anna: *Indeed*

In this exchange between two native Italian participants, it is a sense of modernity versus backwardness which fills the content of the national 'we'. And yet, again, this view clearly blurs the singularity and uniqueness of the national 'we' which banal nationalism supposedly reproduces.

In other instances, rather than up-scaled, the national 'we' was narrated at the sub-national scale:

Claudia: *When I go down to my auntie, in the family, I really feel... I mean, I don't know how to explain it... I mean, southerners are different from us, I mean from me, who I am more... I am from Milan, I mean... I don't know how to explain it, I feel more... I mean they represent another Italy for me.*

To be Italian for me means to wait for the summer or the first good chance to be able to return to our cherished lands of origin, to feel even more at home.

(E12ITAM)

Claudia was born to Italian parents of southern origin and grew up in Milan. Her comment originated while discussing the photo she took of a table filled with various dishes, which for her represented the Italian habit of family gathering around meals. The spatial fragmentation of the national 'here' discussed above now mirrors the identificational fragmentation of the national 'we'. Her syncopated talk suggests that she feels better in the South – a feeling shared by all other participants with southern origins. Yet, she struggles to

affirm this point, caught in the tension between her 'being' from Milan (North) and her emotional 'belonging' to the South. In the second excerpt, from a native Italian's essay, the re-articulation of the national 'we' at a scale different than the national scale is also present, but in this case a feeling of belonging to Italy is smoothly reconciled with a greater belonging to one's local region.

Contrary to the notion of an undifferentiated national 'we' which characterizes banal nationalism – and at times also some accounts of everyday nationhood – the voices of the participants of the present study reveal the variable geometry of the national 'we', which expands or shrinks according to the context and the positionality of the speakers. Rather than a single, homogeneous national 'we', evenly reproduced through the banality of nationalism, nationhood appears as a much more complex phenomenon when looked through the ways people make it meaningful in their everyday.

6. 'The': beyond indexicality

Indexicality is one of the main ways through which Billig's banal nationalism operates. The 'small words' are those which make 'our' nation sound and look unique within a world of nations. 'The' is maybe the quintessential form of constructing this essentialized uniqueness. Not surprisingly, prompted by the essay and photo questions, the participants duly reproduced this distinctive character of 'the' nation by mobilizing a variety of historical, geographical and mundane referents. In the essays, the great and long history of Italy was often mentioned, as were its monuments (e.g., Duomo of Milan, Colosseum), landscape, and cultural heritage. Fashion (D&G, Armani) and food (both generically and specifically) were also repeatedly cited. Interestingly, there was no noticeable difference in the type and frequency of the historical and cultural referents used by both native Italians and children of migrants, perhaps pointing to the power of the school in transmitting a hegemonic national narrative. In the case of native Italians, though, a sense of national pride, triggered by implicitly associating themselves with these referents, emerged more often than in the essays of children of migrants. Native Italians also tended more frequently to narrate Italy by stressing its exceptionality:

[...] An environmental and cultural heritage which is unique in the world. (B12ITAF)

Italy is a nation different from all the rest of the world. (B2ITAF)

We are the only one to have an artistic and cultural heritage of great value, acknowledged by everybody. (E17ITAF)

Only in Italy can one find a great variety of landscapes. (E2ITAM)

A literary, artistic and monumental heritage which is unique in its genre and which represents us in the world. (A10UNU)

There are habits and traditions which distinguish us from other countries, like for example the uniqueness of our dishes, very well-known all over the world. (A6XGF)

Italy is a country which, thanks to its artistic and cultural heritage, is envied by the entire world. (B8ITAM)

‘The’ nation, i.e. its unique identity, is here clearly conveyed by the rhetorical positioning of Italy in relation to the rest of the world. The use of superlatives (e.g., ‘Italian craftsmen are the best in the world’) and emphatic words (e.g., ‘spectacular sea’, ‘wonderful scenery’, ‘marvelous artworks’) also added to this uniqueness.

Contrary to the children of migrants, native Italians were also more prone to identify ‘the Italian’ through a series of stereotypical images. Whereas children of migrants mentioned place of birth, economic contribution to the country and feeling Italian, their native peers cited habits (to gesticulate, to go for breakfast at the bar, to share meals with family on Sundays), attitudes (Italians have good heart; Italians are family-oriented; Italians know how to get by), and values (Italians respect traditions; Italians honor their family). As social psychologists have noted, stereotypes are essential in processes of identity formation and, when it comes to national identities, stereotypes act to symbolize homogeneous national figures (Lindsay, 1997; Barcellos Rezende, 2008): ‘the Italian’, indeed.

In the photos, this stereotypical image of Italy and to a less extent ‘the Italian’ also emerged through the very same referents used in the essays: monuments (Duomo, Castello Sforzesco), landscape (seaside, countryside), food (pizza, maccheroni, nutella, Colomba – a traditional Easter cake), fashion (perfume, shoes, clothes), arts (museums and specific artefacts), Italian brands (Fiat, Olivetti), institutional symbols (flag, constitution), besides objects of daily use (coffee maker) or apparel related to ‘the’ Italian sport passion (football). They all contributed of putting Italy (and the Italians) on the world map, i.e. giving Italy a unique and easily recognizable identity in the world of nations. Even in this case, no major differences were observed between the photos of the children of migrants and those of native Italians.

There were also times, though, when a sense of nationhood was narrated beyond indexicality, i.e. beyond ‘we’, which implies an opposition to ‘them’; beyond ‘here’, which separates it from ‘there’; and beyond ‘the’, which constructs an identity category essentialized around fixed traits:

Angel: *This is a square close to my home, near Porta Venezia...*

Interviewer: *Did you want to take a photo of the car and the church?*

Angel: *Mostly of the square and the church [...]*

Interviewer: *Why did you shoot the church, the square?*

Angel: *There are also some memories in this photo, and also some changes... for instance this thing of the bike rack did not exist, they put it later... in the past people were playing football, in front of the barracks.*

Interviewer: *Were you going there to play?*

Angel: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *So there are personal memories attached to this space?*

Angel: *Yes, the square was the [football] field, and the pylons were the goals! It was like a field in between the church and the barracks, something which was actually forbidden... and the bank was just behind!*

Interviewer: *So you were going there with your friends...*

Angel: *Yes, it was a meeting point, we were going there in the evening and we were hanging there, before and after dinner.*

Angel was born to Filipino parents and grew up in Milan. She is an Italian citizen, who affirms that she feels more at ease with her Italian than Filipino friends. In this excerpt, she

describes one of the photos she took (Figure 1). Although the church enters the photo, it is not the focus of her narration. What matters to Angel is the emotional charge of the place, filled with her childhood and teenage memories. Here a sense of nationhood is re-written as a space of personal memories, beyond any indexicality. Nationhood is not activated in opposition to someone or something, but narrated as a localized affective space (Cohen, 1996; Herzfeld, 1997). Although evoked by a ‘new Italian’, this understanding of nationhood could have been equally mobilized by a native Italian, as no sign of diversity enters the picture: everybody belongs to this convivial space.

Various scholars have investigated the importance of emotions in nationalism, both in its ‘hot’ expressions (Connor, 1994) and its more mundane happenings, like concerts and sporting events (Wood, 2012; Closs Stephens, 2015). In both cases, though, emotions are analyzed in their role of generating a national ‘we’ feeling. In the case of Angel, no national ‘we’ comes to the fore. Nationhood is made present in terms of the intimacy of place belongingness (Antonsich, 2010), a personal, intimate feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place, beyond any intention of including/excluding someone/something.

Angel’s personal take on nationhood was not isolated, for it also appeared in the accounts of other participants:

For me Italy is my second homeland. It’s a country which has given me much... it has welcomed me... it has given me the possibility to learn new things while going to school and, most importantly, it reunited my family which before was divided.
(E131.25GF)

As she explains in her essay, the author of this excerpt came to Italy from Egypt when she was 13 (she is now 18). Like for Angel, Italy is here made present not in indexical terms, but as a locus of emotional attachment, related to the person’s biographical trajectory. Other children of migrants talked of nationhood along the same lines, mentioning how Italy was for them “a space where I feel protected” (E151.5GF arrived in Italy from Egypt when she was 12), or “a nation which has allowed my parents to improve their life conditions” (B10UGF), thus showing that nationhood can also be benign, contrary to Billig’s understanding of nationalism.

This perspective was not only confined to children of migrants, but was echoed by a few native Italians as well:

I am glad to have grown up in a multicultural world. My boyfriend has a south-American background. If my nation was not multicultural, I would have never met him... or many of my group of friends, also from South-America, with whom I get along very well and who are part of my life. For me they are Italians, even though their origins are different from mine. My Italy is this one: people with different origins, but who love each other and who share their daily life together.

(A8ITF)

In this essay, written by a native Italian female student, a sense of nationhood is again invested with deep, emotional feelings. Italy is not called into existence in categorical, indexical terms. This makes possible to generate an inclusive space, where diversity is not framed through a 'we'/'them' opposition, for this very opposition becomes meaningless in the everyday context of young people who share their lives together.

Bringing people back in, with their biographical trajectories, memories, and emotions reveals another image of nationhood, one which goes beyond the indexicality of the world of nations of *Banal Nationalism*. A nationhood which nevertheless is no less relevant a dimension in people's lifeworld.

8. Conclusion

In 1995, *Banal Nationalism* set a new way to study nationhood, liberating it from the mainstream developmentalist account of the time, mainly concerned with the origins and nature of nations in institutional, historical terms (Antonsich, 2015). As a category of practice populating daily language, nationhood became an object of analysis in discursive terms. Together with Anderson (1983), Billig opened the way to the constructivist turn in nationalism studies. Since then, scholarly attention on 'when' and 'what' is a nation has been complemented by new scholarship on 'how' is a nation, i.e. on its social reproduction. In time, banal nationalism has become a catchword no less popular than Anderson's 'imagined community'. Yet, it did not come without limitations. In its original formulations, in fact, banal nationalism seems to hold onto a rather state-centric conception of nationhood. Not surprisingly, for Billig, nation and nationalism are not benign concepts. Behind them, there is the state with its destructive arsenal. Reproducing nationhood even in banal terms is therefore functional to the reproduction of the state. In fact, the exemplary symbol of nationhood in

Billig's banal nationalism is the flag – the symbol which maybe more than others stands for the conflation of state and nation.

This article has investigated ordinary people's accounts of nationhood to go beyond both this conflation and the idea of a self-contained, internally undifferentiated national 'we', which also seems to characterize *Banal Nationalism*. By closely investigating the ways people actively engage with nationhood, the article has offered a more complex picture of the world of nations than the one reproduced through the banality of nationalism. Building on scholarship which can be broadly grouped under the label of 'everyday nationhood' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008), this article has explored the different ways in which nationhood is made present to people by people themselves. In so doing, it has more clearly highlighted the role human agency plays in reproducing nationalism. This focus is necessary to further expand banal nationalism's goal of understanding how nationhood is such a pervasive presence in our daily lives. Moreover, attending to people's practical and discursive construction of nationhood allows declining nationhood in the plural, rather than in the singular. Banal nationalism, in fact, works with a spatially and socially uniform idea of nationhood. When introduced as active makers of national meanings, people show how a national 'here' and a national 'we' can be highly differentiated. The national 'here' can be mapped at a variety of scales, pointing to a spatial fragmentation which goes unnoticed in the linear and quasi teleological functioning of banal nationalism. Similarly, the national 'we' can be activated at a plurality of registers, which trespass national boundaries, thus blurring the image of a world neatly divided into nations. This becomes even more apparent when ordinary nation talks are situated within today's increasingly ethno-culturally diverse societies. Whereas banal nationalism assumes the coincidence of social categorization and self-identification, so that the unwavering flag reinforces one's national place in the world, people's everyday nationhood points to a short circuit in this identity overlapping. Children of migrants' self-identification (their feeling Italian and belonging to Italy) does not coincide with their social categorization (being indeed regarded as foreigners by the majority society). This introduces a problematic tension between 'belonging' and 'being' which complexifies the notion of a singular, homogeneous national 'we' on which banal nationalism relies. Finally, attending more closely to the everyday also permits to acknowledge the discursive existence of nationhood beyond its indexicality. Rather than being constructed in reference or opposition to an 'Other', nationhood might also be a locus of personal memories and emotional attachment, challenging therefore Billig's ideological assumption of a banal nationalism which is never benign.

There is still much more to be investigated beyond the national flag, whether waved or unwaved. A good starting point is the everyday of increasingly differentiated ordinary people.

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Table 1. Demographics of focus groups' participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Italian citizen	Born in Italy	Parents nationality
Luca	M	19	yes	yes	Italian
Laura	F	18	yes	yes	Italian
Claudia	F	19	yes	yes	Italian
Elena	F	19	yes	yes	Italian
Lucia	F	18	yes	yes	Italian
Anna	F	18	yes	yes	Italian
Cristina	F	18	yes	yes	Italian
Bruno	M	18	yes	yes	Italian
Filippo	M	18	yes	yes	Italian
Andrea	M	17	yes	yes	Italian
Fabio	M	20	yes	yes	Italian-Colombian
Matteo	M	18	yes	yes	Italian-Argentinian
Joshua	M	19	no	yes	Filipino
Walter	M	16	no	yes	Peruvian
Arjuna	M	20	yes	yes	Sri Lankan
John	M	16	no	yes	Filipino
Hosni	M	16	yes	yes	Egyptian
Gabriela	F	16	yes	yes	Peruvian
Angel	F	23	yes	yes	Filipino
Munna	F	19	yes	yes	Bangladeshi
Adriana	F	17	yes	no (arrived when 5)	Ecuador
Era	F	17	no	no (arrived when 3)	Albania

Table 2. Demographics of the students who wrote the essays

	Native Italian (ITA)	Children of migrants and migrants*						Mixed Background (XG)	Unknown Nationality (UN)	Total
		2G	1.75G	1.5G	1.25G	1G	Unknown Generation (UG)			
Male (M)	4	2	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	9
Female (F)	19	2	1	2	2	1	3	3	-	33
Gender Unknown (U)	2	1	-	-	-	-	4	-	1	8
Total	25	5	1	2	3	1	9	3	1	50

* 2G (born in the country); 1.75G (arrived when 0-5); 1.5G (arrived when 6-12); 1.25G (arrived when 13-17); 1G (arrived when 18+); XG (one parent Italian).

Figure 1 caption

Personal nationhood (Author: Angel)

¹ Children of migrants, even born in Italy, have to wait until they turn 18 and meet various criteria before they can apply for citizenship.

² I am in debt to one of the reviewers for suggesting this point.

³ Although rather 'sensational', these positions equally appear in other studies on Italian youth facing their 'foreign' peers (Fondazione Intercultura, 2009a: 181; Colombo, 2010: 143-145).

⁴ Summer vacation in Italy is still largely a mass and not an elitist phenomenon. Working class Italians might go for shorter periods and in very popular destinations (e.g. Rimini) or, if of southern background, they often return to their towns of origin.