

Dwelling on the move: negotiating home and place with resident communities

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Abstract

This paper explores how places are culturally constructed through the practices, bodily performances and memories of dwelling in the context of places that stand out as destinations of temporary mobilities. To do this, I narrate my own personal experiences of finding my way and respectively make or contest personal roots, in two autoethnographic accounts of my city of origin, Venice, where I return occasionally, and in Barcelona, where I settled in the 2000 decade. In these memoirs, I excavate on the nexa between domestic home spaces and public life in the urban space, focusing especially on my experiences of homing, on the assemblage of domestic spaces as unfolding in a negotiation between my old and new self, my family (past and present), and other place users, including friends and passers-by in the spaces in questions. My own navigation and mooring in those cities is analysed as a collective, relational process that calls in affinity and distancing, serendipitous engagements and purposeful disengagements. In this way I hope to shed more light on the cultural construction of two cities that stand out as 'touristed' places, and contribute to debates on translocal urbanism and the need for an embodied, grounded understanding of the social and cultural evolution of cities.

Keywords: dwelling; mobile lives; home as assemblage; tourist spaces; engagement with place; Venice; Barcelona

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explore and make sense of material and affective entanglements with place, focusing on their temporary and performed nature. I am particularly interested in places that, as sites of dwelling and transit, are enacted through the aspirations, longings, delusions, boundaries of differently mobile and temporary populations, in specific space and time frames across their more general development biographies.

My research is therefore positioned at the junction of the academic interest for lives on the move and their multiple, multi-scale engagements with space; and for the performative turn as analytical device to detect the manifold bodily practices, encounters, negotiations that destabilise places continuously. As to the former domain, under the broad episteme of the mobilities literature (e.g. Büscher et al., 2016), I take a relational approach to the examination of the different entities – material and nonmaterial, human and nonhuman – that are assembled in and negotiate place, along with McFarlane (2011). As to the latter, my interest in the production of space as enacted, performed and dwelled by mobile or transient populations is grounded in seminal works such as Edensor (2007) or Minca (2007). I am especially inspired by Blunt & Sheringham's (2019) analysis of how dwelling unfolds in the city as a process of appropriation through practice, which in my text involves homemaking and home-sharing, learning space, socialising, working, moving around the unfamiliar city.

The methodological route I take for this exploration is an autoethnographic narrative of personal experiences, memoirs of dwelling and, through dwelling, of my learning to be in the world and making sense of the world, in two different cities where I have lived during my life. These are Venice, my hometown, which I have been visiting over and over for short periods after leaving permanent residence in my young adulthood; and Barcelona, the place where I have settled at the end of my study career, formed a family and fully embraced adult working life, before moving on and establishing a permanent home in another city in its proximity. Both cities are characterised, to different degrees and in different stages, as *tourist places*, strongly attractive for transient populations but also sites of negotiation and contestation between different or 'differently mobile' populations.

The narration of my own experiences as a 'dweller on the move' is populated with that of similar population cohorts, with remarkable entanglements – of intermission as well as rejection and estrangement – to the landscapes of mass tourism. Such engagements play out in the domestic environment – an inherited, mostly uninhabited family home in Venice; a newly acquired, progressively furnished home in Barcelona – as well as in exterior and public spaces, with strong elements of continuity between the two dimensions in my social bonding and progressive knowing-of and adjustment-to the dwelling place. In my reflexive account, I use the concept of dwelling as device to examine the intersections between mobile lives and situated moorings, and to identify practices, performances, assemblages that subsume the relational production and 'domestication' of space in places that are hubs of different and unevenly empowered mobilities. In that way, my ambition in using autoethnography is to develop a *cultural genealogy*, situated in time and space, of these two cities. Hopefully, my work will help unpack some of the most critical issues evoked by dwelling on the move, and inform a broader process of analysis of mobile and translocal urbanism.

The paper is so structured. The next section presents the conceptual and methodological framework in which I situate my work and the details of my autoethnographic work. The third presents my narration of experiences of temporary dwelling in Venice and in Barcelona. The fourth concludes relating back to the theory and the outputs of other authors in the field.

Conceptual background: tourist cities as dwelling assemblages

The interest of this paper for dwelling as relational process of ‘homing’ of humans in a landscape or lifeworld is inspired by the works of Tim Ingold. In Ingold (2005), he proposed that a focus on dwelling in analyses of landscape makes it possible to understand awareness and activity as rooted in the engagement between persons and environment, which involves “architecture and the built environment, local and global conceptions of environmental change, landscape and temporality, mapping and wayfinding, and the differentiation of the senses” (p. 5). Thus, dwelling can be mobilised as conceptual tool to unpack processes of homing-in-place or learning place, an area of engagement which is relevant across critical approaches in the social sciences, as in cultural anthropology, critical geography and place studies, or the study of mobile societies. In this framework, McFarlane (2011) assumes learning as an evolving form of perception of the environment, and conceives dwelling as a process of awareness-making and attuning of perception *through* the (urban) environment; we “learn and relearn place” by engaging with it through combinations of tactile, sensual, and explicit knowledges (p. 663). For Obrador Pons (2003), “our way of dwelling in the world is mainly practical, not cognitive. Being-in-the-world is an everyday skilful, embodied coping or engagement with the environment” (p. 49).

These conceptual perspectives are challenged by the increased transitory nature of dwelling, by the velocity of engagements, and by the multiplication and hybridisation of the material entanglements with the environment that connote contemporary forms of social organization (Merriman, 2012). For John Urry (in various works, e.g. 2000, or 2004 with Mimi Sheller) and other subscribers of the ‘mobilities turn’, the dwellings practices and habits of populations that are inherently on the move become entangled with the very nature of place, as multiple as the vast diversity of ways to be mobile and of regimes of mobility – ranging from the forced mobility of migrants and refugees to and through spaces of segregation, to the unhindered mobilities of lifestyle migrants and global business elites; and, in terms of rhythms, from the stickier movements of the mobile workforce and digital nomads to the short-termed, tightly scripted movements of weekend tourists or daily visitors.

One of the fundamental insights of the mobilities literature is that processes of construction of space enacted by such myriad human mobilities and the non-human and technological flows that enable and order them, are highly relational and enmeshed. It is through mooring, bordering, and discourse, that diverse mobilities negotiate their dwelling potentials, or their differential ability not only to get attuned to the environments that support their mobility, but also to mould them to their routines and perceptions – a negotiation for space (Jensen, 2010), both embodied and discursive, that fathoms dwelling as basis of a process of adaptation of some, and unsettling of others, taking place at a scale and intensity unseen before Bærenholdt et al. (2004) offer a conceptualisation of how the bodily performances of tourists, their memories and cognitive processes, provide meaning to ‘tourist space’ as a forcefield of enactment by multiple agencies and time-space scales. In their work, ‘inhabiting’ is measured on familiarity and (re)constructed relational and cognitive bonds (p. 128-ff.): the analysis of tourism and its relationship with places within a mobilities framework extends thus to the examination of lives on the move, cohortship (in travel), and awareness-building, whose cognitive roots elicit both the ‘faraway’ as well as the destination spaces, communities and objects. Light & Brown (2020) further emphasise that the new ‘turns’ in the social sciences, such as the mobilities paradigm, calls in question the assumed conceptualisations of tourism as characterised by escape, liminality and otherness, creating the potential to position ‘dwelling-mobility’ within this debate and allowing positioning mobile lives as relationally enmeshed with forms of tourism mobility and tourist spaces.

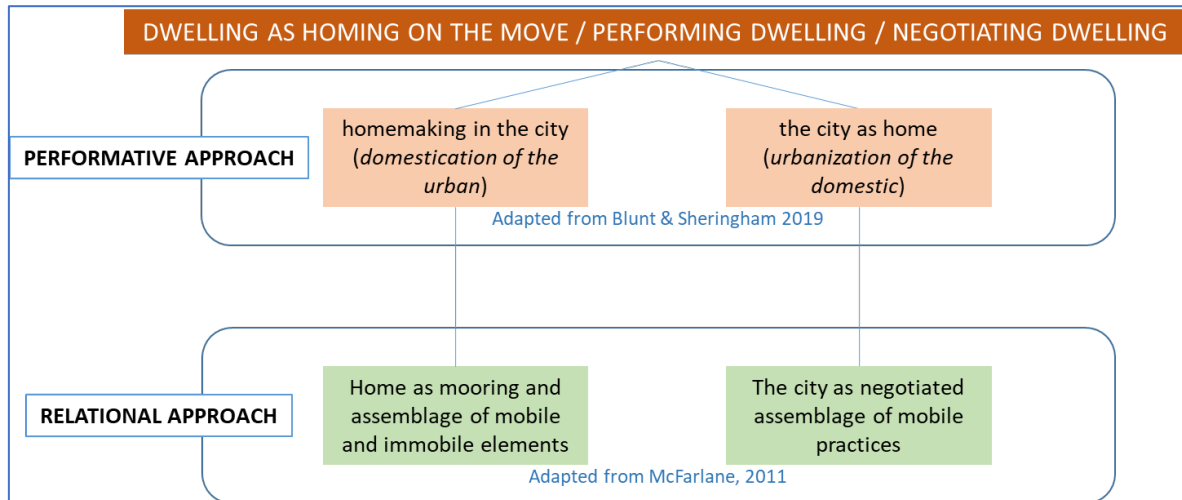
My work is essentially preoccupied with the ways through which dwelling constitutes space through learning and practice and is at the same constituted through space through agency, and the relational coming-together and negotiation of the diversity of mobile populations we hinted at. In this sense, we again refer to McFarlane (2011) proposing the powerful analytical device of assemblages as sociomaterial alignments, “sometimes stable, sometimes precarious” (p. 662), which constitute space relationally, enabling or disrupting the possibilities of dwelling. Tourist cities, in this sense, stand out as places constructed through thick assemblages of temporary dwelling practices and discourses. Cities like Venice and Barcelona are commonly understood as archetypical tourist destinations: practiced, dwelled in, performed and represented by millions of visitors yearly, or tens of thousands on a daily basis, often pushing to the extremes the negotiation for space. The ‘tourist city’ (Judd, 2002; López Palomeque, 2015), is not just ‘a city with tourists’, but rather an ecosystem that becomes inextricably associated, in its socioeconomic and cultural construction, morphology, evolution, politics, and collective meaning, with its global projection as a site of dwelling and leisure for temporary populations. A space that nests the tight interplay between tourist bodies and the social and physical environment that they navigate, subverting it constantly, through power and material agency, often at the expenses of forms of stable community (Salerno & Russo, 2022); and in which social capital is rather seen as the adaptive result of dwelling and bordering than as emanating from territorialised social networks (Briassoulis, 2017; Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014). My interest in the production of urban tourist space led me in previous works to situate temporary populations, fluidly and dynamically, in a continuum of degrees of attachment and persistence (Russo & Quaglieri Domínguez, 2012); using that framework, cities as dwelling spaces for the temporary populations may well be posited as a biopolitical construction that reflects uneven material capacities in the negotiation through which such different populations gain or retain their leverage on social capital formation (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018).

This framing of dwelling – as potential as well as performed – helps situating home and home-making also in relational terms, which is an important question in the light of the increasing academic interest and public debate on residence in tourist cities (e.g. Ioannides et al., 2019) or on social structures challenged by translocal urbanism (e.g. Rogers et al., 2015). Home as assemblage and ordering has been theorised upon by authors such as Jacobs and Smith (2008): “the world of home swarms with the many sociotechnical associations that coproduce home life. Home is not simply the cultivation of a sense of belonging, nor merely a site of consumption, it is quite literally a fabrication” (p. 516). For Wilson & Obrador (2022), tourism research has neglected home, conceptualising it in residual and oppositional terms as the opposite of temporary dwelling; however, mobilities research gives the possibility to position ‘homing on the move’ as part of the relational, performative processes through which destination places are enacted. In my research, following Wilson & Obrador’s (2022) understanding of home as relational and multiscalar, this preoccupation extends to the domestication and negotiation of (city) spaces, recognising tourism as a “situated, contingent and skilful process of engagement with the environment” (p. 103).

In this sense, I include in my narration in the two different contexts of life on the move, a reflexive glance at my homes as domestic spaces, assembled and performed, that stand in porous counterpoint to the open spaces I navigate with others. My examination of the process of learning place and homing in (unfamiliar) place, or re-adjusting to it as in the case of Venice, has been further influenced by Blunt & Sheringham’s (2019) ‘home-city geographies’, examining the interplay between lived experiences of urban homes and the contested domestication of urban space, and making sense of the ways in which urban homes and the ability to feel at home in the city are shaped by different migrations and mobilities – thus questioning how home and the sites of connection and disconnection for urban residents are related with different experiences of migration, mobility and housing.

To conclude this brief introduction that situates the objectives and approach of this work in the existing literature, I am proposing a synthetic diagram (Figure 1) that charts its main coordinates and objects of the narration.

Figure 1. Conceptual and analytical framework of my research. Source: author



From the interconnection between these approaches and dimensions of the analysis, my inquiry revolves around different questions that are centred either on home or on the urban space, but also looking at the enmeshments between the two, projecting performances of home into the city and conversely the performance of urban space into the home experience. Hence my research is an attempt at reconstructing how my own experiences of dwelling-on-the-move have been influenced by my biography; the lives of others (objects, traces, practices of sharing and conviviality, memories), and my homing-in-the-city; and with the conflicts, stridencies, serendipities, that unfold through my/my cohort’s dwelling-on-the-move, in my personal life and in the life of others.

Methodological approach: autoethnography of place

The method I take is a memoir of my experiences in the two cities chosen. This approach can be situated as self-narrative in the way described by Ellis and Bochner (2000) (cited by Chang, 2016, p. 33), and namely “a ‘reflexive ethnography’ in which authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self–other interaction”. Ellis et al. (2011) propose autoethnography as a method that allows a deeper, grounded understanding of cultural experience, acknowledges accommodating subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research. These authors invite autoethnographies to systematically and reflexively engage with the object of analysis, in a way that, departing from personal and interpersonal experience, may familiarise broader audiences with the characteristics of a culture (p. 4). Among different formats of autoethnography, they describe personal narratives as a way to “understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives” (p. 7).

Differently from authors who focus on dwelling-in-motion (Sheller & Urry, 2004: 213, 214), thus on the inherent mobile nature of dwelling as a lens to unpack bodily performances of place and,

thus, make sense of self in a relational conversation with place (e.g. Larsen, 2014; Rabbiosi, 2021), my approach tackles dwelling as ‘temporary’ and intermittent and focuses on a situated engagement with places which brings together personal experiences in the domestic/urban life-spheres and the changing nature of the places themselves. Nevertheless, I do value Chang’s (2016) claim that understanding geography as a force that shape people sense of self may help researchers to examine their preconceptions and feelings about others (p. 52), in this case, cohorts of mobile dwellers and visitors which animate such landscapes.

Of the cultural constructs that are evoked in this research, I’m more preoccupied with place – I use my personal narrative to unpack the broader set of material relations, assemblages and cognitive processes which configure a given spatial context, seeking verisimilitude and a certain degree of generalizability, intended as in Ellis et al (2011: 9) as the capacity of readers to compare their ‘place experiences’ with mine, and succeed by comparison or contrast to inform them about unfamiliar lives and places. The main objective of this exercise is thus to make sense of such places and how they are ‘dwelt on the move’, using my own (individual and collective) experiences and perceptions as an entry point, rather than deeply reflecting on my own performances or stir the self-reflection of readers on their cultural personality.

Examples of the use of autoethnography in tourist studies and more specifically in the examination of place genealogies and processes of cultural (re)construction of tourist places are not scarce. For instance, Cooke (2017) uses her memoir of bodily engagements and emotional entanglements in different period of her life with a holiday place, a ski resort at a native site in Canada, to nurture a reflection about the ordering and intersections between moralities and mobilities in the postcolonial construction of tourist places. Also engaging with coloniality and the construction of tourist space, Shepherd et al (2020) develop a group autoethnography through which the three authors re-story each own’s personal histories and experiences of a contested site – thus making sense of the multiple, assembled and intersectional nature of tourist space, eschewing categorizations or a unique narrative in favour of a more ambivalent, porous dialogue between the self and the ‘others’ that populate such spaces. Finally, I’d like to quote Bruttomesso (2018) for her engagement with one of the places and themes I also deal with in my work. Although the author does not position herself as a mobile researcher, her partly autoethnographic account of grassroots contestation to mass tourism in Barcelona explores the assemblages of/in public space and its purposeful mobilisations – staged resistance to public space appropriation by tourism is a device to explore community re-making.

In my own work, the performances of place I describe are shared with or involve others, which I interweave in my memoir as ethnographic subjects (old native friends, new occasional acquaintances and serendipitous companions in Venice; family and friends, neighbours, activists in Barcelona), also reflecting on the positioning of tourists as ‘othered subjects’, bounding and informing my/our engagement with such places, and on my own ambiguous status of dweller on the move. My engagement with others is not problematic in terms of ‘relational ethics’ (Ellis et al., 2011) – names or images are not revealed and they are described more as a generic group than as individuals, performing mundane activities; mentions to members of my family are also devoid or risk. To further position myself, I am politically engaged with both places, but in Venice I describe an increasing sense of hopelessness for the city’s future while in Barcelona my memoir is one of progressive reawakening to the ideals of urban cohesion and equality. My male, white and ‘mobile’ identity is embodied in the relations with friends in Venice, and in family life and roles in Barcelona. My aware status as mobile dweller clearly influences the whole narrative, situating myself as expat wanting to belong in Barcelona, and ‘leaver’ taking distances in Venice.

My study material is based on personal recollections, diary annotations, the revision of e-mail conversations, printed material, photographs, more recently Facebook posts, rather than on a

systematic work based on field notes. I have chosen to report only a few selected experiences that unfold in the backdrop of the tourist landscape of such cities, and are shaped by the transient nature of my engagement with / negotiations of it. This process is arguably open to limitations and biases from 'selective memory', and is also quite uneven in terms of timing and duration in the two cities, as to reconstruct by Barcelona experience I have to look back a considerable amount of time (ten to twenty years) while the memoirs from my Venetian transits are accumulating constantly, although the bulk of my argument was developed in relation to stays in the city in the last 10 years and prior to the pandemic. Thus, my memoirs are by no means exhaustive of the full range of experiences, in different domains, individual or collective, that have shaped my engagements with the environment of the two cities. Yet I have tried to systematise and select such material as to allow a reconstruction of my situation, as researcher and simultaneously an agent in the processes through which space in these two cities is enacted, as site of discovery and integration (Barcelona) or one of bordering and reification (Venice).

Memoirs of mobile dwelling: a reflexive analysis of myself as object or agent of change

Me in Venice around 2019

I have lived in Venice until I was 29, escaping – maybe at the last opportunity – the feeling of being 'caged' shared by many of my age who ended up stuck in Venice's dreamworld permanently. I embarked in an adventure, painfully cutting some of the ties that kept me bound to my hometown: my family, my girlfriend, my comfortable home, my political activism. And I have maintained over the next decades a relation of 'returns' in an increasing unfamiliar city – family disappeared, most of my best friends also abandoned ship, house reduced to a minimum through partition and sale, progressively also professional and social interests skimmed down. Venice has been indeed important as a study object for my academic career, but I progressively distanced from it, to be from time to time called in by the local academia or social and political actors, with whom I tried to maintain some connection, to say some wise words about the 'tourist future' of the city.

I go to Venice when I have something to do – usually some nuisance related with house maintenance or visiting my bank counsellor – or when I know my friends are there and there's going to be fun. The special type of partying that any young venetian is familiar with, moving around the city and the lagoon with a boat (which you can only do if you have friends or friends of friends who can maintain a boat in the city), assisting to events like the Biennale film festival or the Carnival, in the 'insider' way that venetians have, taking the slow pace to wander around the city's tourist outskirts in the low season, is well worth a short visit. However, these intervals are bounded by time and family obligations; I don't stay in Venice for long, until the being caged feeling kicks in again, the hindrances of living in that type of place start showing up, and the acknowledgement that this is not any longer the city I lived in as a youngster and I have left, starts casting a gloomy shadow over the whole experience.

The centrepiece of my Venice returns is my home, a much smaller home than the one I left 25 years ago, reduced to one floor of my last parental house. Every time I climb up the stairs I pass by my parents' apartments, reminding me of the sadness and pain of those last years before they passed away, but also of the space I relinquished. My apartment is exactly as I have left it, minus my record collection, that I've brought away with me, and the books, stowed away in boxes to make space for the occasional visitor. Old posters populate its walls – the Lenins, the Che Guevaras, rock bands – or paintings left by a former girlfriend who ironically is now helping me with housekeeping while I'm not there. My cupboard still stores food stuff and spices from

25 years ago, there are clothes in the wardrobe that I could not wear anymore, and I can still find unforgotten house utensils in certain closets.

I am active in the homeexchange.com house swapping community – a house in the centre of Venice is a treasure in the platform –, and very often my guests leave ‘traces’: gifts, bottles of wine, some forgotten garment, or the occasional broken electrical apparel. I never see these people, although some stay in touch. In fact, I hardly invite friends over, unless it’s some fellow visitor who needs a place to sleep. I am not comfortable with sharing such a small space, and that they see who I am – or who I probably was – hanging from the walls. When they do, they tend to be noisy, and this collides with my consideration of my old home as a refuge, a place to be alone in, in total quietness, something I occasionally look forward as a pause from my frantic family and working life in Spain.

My social activities unfold in the open space of a city that to some extent is an assemblage of familiar, homey spaces – no cars, little noise, pavements you could sit on – less those that are taken over by mass tourism, which I tend to avoid. The street where my home is, is one of those: walking out of home in the summer months or in a weekend is often like plunging in a sea of (tourist) bodies, all walking in the same direction in the morning, then in the opposite direction in the afternoon. I steer off these spaces and look for less crowded areas, or that are crowded with the ‘right’ kind of people – not strangers you have to negotiate space with, but possibly faces you recognise and stop by to catch up. As in the ethnographic study of Bernadette Quinn (2007), my everyday mobility experience in Venice is strongly shaped by my desire of not being confronted with the tourist landscape, of to navigate through it.

I meet my friends in some such slightly ‘peripheral’ places in relation to the geography of tourism flows. In 10 minutes, I can walk up to La Rivetta bar, an iconic, slightly decrepit gathering of an interesting mix of eccentric university types and plain dropouts. We sit on the floor on a canal front outside the bar, and pass around bottles of beer or bad wine that we drink directly from the bottle. This crowd, including some of my best friends but also more occasional acquaintances, are mostly incomers, people who arrived in Venice for studying a long time ago or just a few months back, and they fell in love with the city, successfully fitting into the hyper-relaxed venetian lifestyle. The few original born-and-raised teach them words in the local dialect, and the result is an intriguing cacophony. Someone always has a guitar and strums endlessly some incomprehensible tunes. Sometimes this becomes the occasion to involve the occasional stranger, maybe a couple of young foreign tourists wandering off the beaten track or looking for places to plug into the so-called authentic venetian life. If they are nice enough, they sum up to the chit-chat and eventually they are invited to join over a boat ride, which is always utterly improvised and depends on the availability of momentarily sober pilots.

These rides take us to other joints, where we get drinks and tapas which we consume, as others, in our own boat, a sound-system blasting loud music. Or we wander off the exceptional geography of the venetian lagoon, with its secret spots, favourite landings, and other meeting-places, removed from the bustling and sweaty tourist city. These spots offer at the same time the consolation of light-headedness and companionship: the smell of the lagoon water, the customised musical vibe, the nocturne breeze after a day of African heat, the slow pace of water transport, define a unique landscape of detachment that at the same time fences off the multitude and reunites the selected few. At all times I am aware that I’m living the life of a 20-something at more than 50, but that is a momentary relief.

I only face the tourist wave when I have to carry our daily errands, as going shopping with my trolley at the Rialto market, or when as a group of friends, we decide for rare ventures in the city’s hotspots; anyway, our public life is essentially nocturne, and in the night the visitor crowds

are mostly gone (while those who stay tend to veer off iconic sites and tourist traps). A good place to mingle with visitors is at art events, which fortunately the old dying animal Venice maintains, and clings to. In the most popular bars and cafés, you pick on tourists when asked for suggestions regarding the tapas that show in lists or on the bar; the most popular eateries still retain the element of serendipity of not knowing exactly what is coming from the kitchen, and the surprise is shared among insiders and outsiders. However, these occasional encounters hardly stick.

I meet old friends and even older connections I lost sight from, who will have stories to tell - what have you done the last 20 years? Who did you marry eventually? Then I rediscover the affections that tied us once, or plainly notice how our lives have shifted apart. Their experience of a 'dying city' is not the same that I have, they bear with this every day of their life and cope with it in the best possible way. Something I'm done with, and I can't fully relate to.

The 'schoolscape' of Venice – what remains of it, or what has it become – is another carrier of memories and relationships that in most cases have faded away with time. The most frequented installations – faculty building and campuses – are part transformed into luxury hotels, part redressed as representation places. Gone are the writings on the walls, the bustling activity of student collectives, and some of the spaces that hosted some of my fondest experiences as a student, like certain bars in the university areas or the classrooms where I have given exams during the day and maybe squatted in the night. The tourist-heritage complex has taken over, and erased all signs of life from them. Some of my old university mates are still around, aged, turned into fatigued professionals, but reuniting frequently for dinners or to watch football games. In those occasions I make myself available, and re-live those moments. It's not my crowd anymore, but there's an element of 'how good we were and how well we got on' that is still utterly enjoyable.

Then I return to my home, sometimes with the first light of day, use whatever utensils I have and are still functional to prepare a snack, and go to sleep under a Peterstojka poster from 1989 hanging from a wall.

Me in Barcelona around 2005

I arrived in Barcelona in late 2003, in a sort of a life bet. I had visited the city a couple of times earlier, and fell in love with it at first sight, chaperoned by my cousin – who was there already since a couple of years and familiarised me with the academic environment. Most importantly I had a girlfriend, met in Rotterdam, that had moved back to her hometown Barcelona; so when we decided to be together permanently and eventually get married, after a few failed attempts to get postdoctoral positions in the UK, I found a way to 'run away' from the Netherlands in a moment in which I didn't feel at ease there anymore, and settled in Barcelona for a temporary visiting post, which afterwards led to a permanent position.

These were years in which Barcelona was immensely popular with young adults as a 'lifestyle' migration choice; still a very cheap place, where even people with few resources could afford to live in the heart of the city. To my eyes, that was the perfect combination: a big cosmopolitan city with a 'Mediterranean' atmosphere, making itself open to the world, with a very high level of tolerance and openness to strangers and a trendy profile, assembling rooted cultural expressions with contemporary culture. Not by chance, I was not the only one in my circle of close friends to decide this move: a good group of former venetians, and some of the old Rotterdam connections (mostly former students) popped up as well.

Barcelona – and the people I’ve worked with there – has given me a big kick in my academic career, and moved me to embrace new research interests. If Venice for me had been a palette to becoming interested in the disasters produced by tourism, and Rotterdam had served me to get me closer to issues of urban design and place marketing, my experience of Barcelona instigated me towards research on social and cultural geographies and urban politics. Hence, my life in Barcelona, at least in the early years, could be framed by a permanent sentimental relation, then family, in (for the first time in my life) a shared home; a great cohort of friends, old and new, discovering the city in the same period; an enticing urban and cultural landscape to decipher, plug in to, and use also to advance in my professional life.

Dwelling in Barcelona has been for me a synonym to homing with my wife and later on with my daughter. The houses we lived in as tenants – and especially the last one – has been literally constructed together, from our own experiences and common tastes, but with some space for the assemblage of our own identities – possibly, and I regret to say, mine being the most dominant. Often our home has been a meeting place for our social life, where my wife made friends with my friends, while her own friends and family visited less often. As such, I used our kitchen a lot as my milieu of expression and attraction – I’m a good and creative cook, and I like to explore exotic cuisines, learning from the exposure I had to all that in Rotterdam, but also nurtured by our frequent travels. I also listen to a lot of (I assume) great music and watch a lot of movies, with leftfield tastes that I have probably transmitted to some degree to my wife, and our friends’ gathering would often become ‘musical journeys’ or group screenings.

As many other houses in Barcelona or in other ‘dense’ big cities I virtually share domestic space with a large community of neighbours in our large block’s inner courtyard, which acts as an amplifier, casting it all into a familiar sound- and smell-scape which accompanies your home experience day and night. The typical population of our neighbourhood – the quiet, middle class and aging slice of Barcelona’s society that is so prominent in the Eixample – progressively gave way to a more diverse assemblage of student apartments, tourist flats on Airbnb, younger families with kids. As the noise increases correspondingly, also at night, it shows tangibly the cost of living in a big city. On the other side of the patio, facing my living room veranda, a newspaper office, lights on day and night, journalists working on their desks, the bustling energy of meetings – I’m reminded constantly that Barcelona is a living city, a city there’s always ‘news’ about.

However, my first approach with Barcelona was that of a city that invites exploring, a city of neighbourhoods, each one different and each one with its own stories and scripts. These explorations, as it is becoming increasingly common with the swelling tourism crowds, tends to focus on their everyday – neighbourhood markets, typical shops, quiet squares and historical streetscapes; but mostly, specific forms of social interaction, which are approached in a flaneur-style, but sometime invite returning and including in a menu of places to take your visiting friends. Some such areas are good to go with the Italian friends who shared my desire to find their ‘own spot’ in the city, some other we navigated with the acquired family – Barcelonans with roots in the middle-class city centre tend to explore other neighbourhoods frequently, making a certain point of pride of how diversely interesting the whole city is, well beyond the global representations of the tourist city.

While family outings were strongly bent on exploring playgrounds for our daughter, public pools in the summer, or speciality shops, of the explorations with friends I stick with memories of the early days when – having interiorised the funscape of the most touristy of ethnically mixed sections of the old city –, we started looking beyond, venturing out towards neighbourhoods we’ve heard about, some only a stretch away from the solid boundaries of the touristy or ‘Erasmus’ Barcelona, to taste different streetscapes, unseen views, historical bars and music

clubs, venues for political and social activism, 'fiestas mayores' that retained a tight neighbourhood spirit, or the gastronomic offer of yet another cultural minority. These areas eventually became favourite spots for some of those of us looking for more affordable or better-quality homes than the ones we naturally anchored to upon arrival in an unfamiliar city. These outings presented us with a slightly different human landscape, at the same time welcoming and not so openly oriented at turning us into visiting consumers.

Living and navigating through this diversity made us also aware of the inequalities, breaches and underground conflicts populating the city - for instance in relation to the use of Catalan in common conversation or the predominance of other Castilian dialects and inflexions, depending on the neighbourhood. In other words, our explorations started to make us aware of a political landscape, which, beyond the grand statements on the resurrection of Barcelona as a global icon, interrogates the everyday of social struggles: the absence of social services in certain areas, the marginalisation of place identities in public discourse, the reification of dissidence... Only faintly aware that we (as embryonic gentrifiers and carriers of change) were part of the problem, we started wanting to be part of this struggle.

Around 2006, attending a concert in a *casal de barri* (neighbourhood civic centre, mostly in squatted spaces), we got in touch with a community of foreigners, including fellow Italians, who had been on the ground of grassroots activism already for years; in a friendly way, they suggested that it was time for us to 'grow up', leave our group flaneurism, make roots, and take part in social action. Some of us followed that advice; for me, it meant a return to activism after my time in Venice. That large warehouse, including many working spaces for artists, craftsmen and social counsellors, where meetings of aging migrant workers were held side by side with poetry readings and garage sales, was in itself a cacophony of discarded or recycled objects, narrations written on walls, faces of all ages and dress codes, yearning to establish a dialogue.

This was all heightened in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, which landed hardly on the Barcelona economy around 2010. While some of those who had come a few years earlier, lured by Barcelona's buoyant scene and job opportunities, suddenly found themselves with no other option but to settle somewhere else, those of us who remained were faced first-hand with the social impact of the economic catastrophe. Shops and restaurants out of business, a rarefying nightlife, civic services severely downsized, neighbours – even the better off ones – clearly bearing the signs of disrupted lives in their worried faces. This wide discontent, and the acknowledgement that policy responses to the crisis were going to create even more desperation and inequality between 'survivors' and losers, opened a genuine urge for me to be politically engaged, and not anymore between groups on Italian expats, but in the reorganisation of grassroots movements that eventually led to the key moment of political change of 2015 in Barcelona and in the rest of Spain.

My group of friends around that time was bond by political activism; gone the frivolous partying and the 'urban safaris', we met in community circles and explored the surrounding places with eyes made wiser by political consciousness. In my increasingly eroding free time after work or family obligations, the closest circle of us engaged in discussion, sometimes in hard frictions, with others. Reuniting at friends' homes in the aftermath of such intense gatherings, or of raucous public events, more than one of us expressed their longing for a time, only a few years back, when we didn't have to worry about all that and Barcelona was still a young adults' playground.

The culmination of this process led some of us to become engaged with a new social movement that eventually, after a hard campaign, won the mayoralty at the 2015 municipal elections. I remember this period as an endless series of campaign meetings, heated talks with

neighbourhood organizations, attempts to frame my own academic knowledge into policy performance, and sharing with others the amazement that what our expertise could actually be useful and the object of practical implementation in a policy program. Home was the place where we forged ideas; streets and squares, civic centres, neighbourhood meetings the places where we brought them to discussion and made new bonds with the locals. As my interest was mostly in the (supposedly, unsustainable) development of Barcelona as a tourist city in a postcrisis landscape, the 'tourist' was a solid part of my landscape of engagement: enemy or potential ally? External body, or an established actor in our everyday? Such concerns, mediated by the fact that after all we were almost all newcomers to the city, eventually also shaped some of my and my friends' intellectual approaches, for instance embracing new turns in the social sciences. Multitudinary public speeches of scholars as Harvey, Soja, Urry, Massey, who'd come to Barcelona frequently in that period and took a direct interest in the critique of Barcelona's recent developments, have been part of this process of learning.

Eventually, however, Barcelona had lost some its fascination in my eyes, and when the time came to buy house and stabilise my work career, we decided to move to Tarragona, closer to my job, a much smaller and quiet place, safer for our preadolescent daughter, my wife switching with me the tole of commuter of the family. I now live close enough to visit friends and my wife's family whenever possible, however I have retracted radically from the frenzied social life I had experienced between homes, spaces of exploration, and sites of public debate.

Discussion and conclusions

In this concluding section I will try to address in a structured way how the wide range of spaces, objects, relationships and desires assembled in my brief memoirs of dwelling on the move may reveal a genealogy of space in the two cities.

My experience of homing (in domestic and urban space) is tightly enmeshed with that of other people, who, like me, are to different extent 'on the move'. Navigating and mooring in the urban space is a collective, relational process that calls in affinity and distancing, serendipitous engagements and purposeful disengagements.

What I learned from reflecting back on my memoirs is that personalities, desires, shifting identities, of people on the move come together in geographies of homing and home making in the city that are strongly shaped by the reflexive character of mobility.

Following Wilson & Obrador's (2022) narration of the community of caravan and mobile homes tribes, I have tried to unpack how mobile dwelling unfolds relationally through the rituals, feelings and memories that are contained in homes as well as domesticated environments. In so doing I related to Blunt & Sheringham's (2019) call to explore the materiality of home-city geographies to understand how hyper-diverse cities "can both be spaces of exclusion and alienation as well as inclusion and connection" (p. 22). In this sense, and although my personal narrative is strongly situated in space and time, both Barcelona and Venice are revealed as spaces that can hardly be disentangled from the performances of the 'mobile tribes' navigating them, promoting or inhibiting the respective upwards social mobilities. Possibly, as any other city that is the hub of multiple mobilities situated between temporary leisure and permanent lifestyle migration, their contemporary cultural and social landscape is better understood from the point of view of a convergence of lives on the move, their affects and negotiated desires.

In the Venice memoir I have used the example of La Rivetta bar, a space that maybe has been inherently venetian once, and now a meeting-place of non-venetians, not-anymore venetians or intermittently venetians like me, who build a mooring of bohemianism to shield off from the landslide hovering over the city. La Rivetta – as many other places of such characteristics – assembles a landscape made of boiled eggs to be picked from the bar, guitars changing hands, cheap wine, erudite postdocs caught in intense conversation with homeless foreigners with an artsy past, boats docked in the canal ready to ride off with serendipitous one-night companions. This place tempers daily obligations and is the place to return to after venturing out to the rest of city where encounters could be more problematic, people become roadblocks, old acquaintances remembered with regret.

In Barcelona, the construction of a family life and home, is not detached from my desire of wanting to know better the city and appreciate its diversity in order to ‘make roots’. This exploration has been taken through a journey of discovery and learning, which I shared with others. The deciphering of neighbourhood identities, made of nights spent in popular bars and eateries, art events, visits to second-hand record shops or ethnic food stores, brought me/us to face diversity or difference, not just as spectacle but also as issue. The occasional encounters with foreigners that were engaged at a deeper level with the social struggles, and their joyfully cacophonous, colourful meeting and working spaces, have been for me an invitation to take sides and do my own. The dirt and voidness of the city struck by the lightening of the crisis of 2010, the participation to rowdy demonstrations, the work in associationism brought me - and a good bunch of us - back to political activism.

I have been in these examples a purportedly ‘transient’ place-user in Venice, performing mobility in a way that mirrors the pace of tourists, to whom, at the same time, I strive to steer away. I do that because I am a former venetian, with roots (mostly, my sanctuary-home), and as such I am wary of a deeper-level of engagement, and possibly assemble my mobile experience of Venice on the life of others that are similar to me, at least in their night-time interludes.

And I have been a newcomer in Barcelona, sharing the experience of many others, living a mobile life while trying to settle, and learning how to settle in an informed way, at the same time being strongly influenced in this exploration by the lives of the sedentary ones, on whom I have taken a concern. In a city like Barcelona, where the excesses of tourism have been going hand-in-hand with a subtler process of cosmopolisation, elitization and hyper-diversification of the social fabric, my role is ambiguous: I have been part of the problem and after trying to redeem myself as part of the solution, I have closed my experience moving elsewhere when the same issues that aroused my concern started affecting my personal life.

Assembling domestic space has unfolded as a negotiation between my old and new self, my family (past and present), and other place users, including neighbours: juxtapositions fix this multiplicity and reveal new desires and life choices.

My Venetian ‘returns’ are revelatory of a depoliticization of my personal engagement with my hometown. My old home is a sanctuary of a maybe vanished personal identity, recreated from time to time through the juxtapositions of who I was with the traces left by other temporary users; the boundaries I establish with my old home as a ‘personal refuge’ in my Venetian interludes protect me in these negotiations. My scattered navigations of the city a conscious attempt to steer off the problematic sides of living in Venice towards the recreation of a leisure bubble, one that stands on some kind of reflexive affirmation of venetianism, but itself being a recreation of it that drinks from the incorporation of outsiders, passers-by, lovers of what there’s left to love in that city after the tsunami of mass tourismification.

In contrast, my Barcelona experience – and that of the cohort of friends that arrived in the city in the same period around 2003 – has been a story of progressive engagement. My Barcelona home stands out as the opposite of my own venetian sanctuary: a space in a process of open construction reflecting desires and accommodating the new practices constellating a discovery of life together, maybe largely shaped on my dominant personality but including more than one touch of the feminine gentleness of my wife and of the incursions of a little child. A space that I'm eager to share with others, friends dropping by from less spacious and equipped homes, in occasions in which we talk about the new city we dwell in, and we make plans about our new lives.

Along with Datta (2009), I hence understand my homes in Venice and in Barcelona as the spaces where – in two different ways– I have cast my personal migrant or mobile life on experiences of belonging, negotiating, and readapting to new spaces and places. In the interplay between personal biography and place genealogy, I built a cultural understanding of Venice as a *touristed* place “where time is fixed and unchanging” (Urry, 2004: 208), contrasting with Barcelona's cosmopolitanizing landscape of the early 2000s, one of expanding potential for a better life, which for McFarlane (2011) emanates from the “sense of possibility that the city can generate under varying conditions of restraint and inequality, and the relations between past, present, and future” (p. 654).

The objects, rituals and places that conform performances and negotiations of space (domestic and urban) also reveal unevenly distributed power, material capacities and ambitions that are defined (also) through mobile biographies.

I have taken a cue from Light and Brown's (2020) conclusions where they call for research that invites to explore the experiential nature of mobility and dwelling, with reference to a wide variety of forms of contemporary travel and tourism. In this sense I have focused on the multiplicity of mobilities that mould tourist places, and their negotiated, reflexive and relational enactments. My narrative could paradoxically support Salerno & Russo's (2022) argument that Venice, as many other tourist cities where permanent residence is hindered by market pressures, is a space increasingly attuned and accommodating mobile practices and performances. This genealogic constitution may be questioned on moral grounds, however it reflects a socio-cultural shift of places of transit and their resilience.

Thus, the lagoon boat rides I have described offer a singular, affirmative vision of the city that is not available to outsiders - and, as such, invites to engage strangers, echoing Granger's (2015) examination of spectators at music performances. I am, at all time, aware that this is not forever, just a few days, while others will stay but then again in a state of tension-for-mobility that is similar to mine. I am not making new friends and I hardly leave a permanent trace on the life of others, but I am reinforcing my reliance on the fact that whenever I come back to Venice, I'll know how to do and where to turn to in order to feel at home, at least a bit. In the tourist future of Venice, which is not going away, as the ship sinks there'll be a place to cling to.

My Barcelona's journey of discovery of my own self and of the city has brought me to feel that my presence in the city has left marks – living as an Erasmus student in the early days has arguably contributed to the transformation of the Old City in a contested space, the explorations to the periphery of the city an act of flaneurism that was welcomed, but in hindsight could constitute a reprojection of the outsiders' gaze to areas then devoid of tourist attention, the direct participation in 'crisis politics' an attempt to be part of the struggle and affirm a new discourse on social injustice (and the role of tourism in it).

To conclude, this piece of research has been an opportunity to reflect on how domestic and urban spaces are performed, relationally, and the objects and encounters enmeshed and assembled in such performances are cast into broader collective enactments of place. In spite of its limitations – the non-systematic ways in which fieldwork has been conducted, the inevitable bias in the selection of narrations from periods of time which are quite different – this exercise possibly contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural construction of the two cities in question, largely reflected in the place images that they have been projecting over the years. Venice, a city where residence is in itself a form of resistance, affordable only to some and for short periods of time, and where leisure is the dominant structuring for of social organization over working lives and production. A city in which home ownership is an absolute privilege and a safe haven from the maddening tourist crowds, and homes – possibly not anymore extended to a homey public space, as this is flooded and vulgarised – retain the signs of a cultural and social status possibly lost forever. Barcelona, a city of diasporas that are interiorised and integrated in its ancestral unique social and cultural fabric, but which retains strong socio-spatial divisions; one in which home and tight neighbourhood relationships have been for a long time a starting point of upwards social mobility, and in which the changes to which all that is subject in the face of the mounting touristification and cosmopolisation of the city, are political matter. My ambition is that the conceptual framing and methodology of this work may feed the current debate on the need to examine cities and urban transformations from a poststructuralist, culturally-informed, and embodied perspective. In doing so I hope to open up the multiplicity of critical issues, scales and subjects that are nested in contemporary translocal and urbanism (Smith, 2011), and to enrich the new wave of place research informed by the mobilities literature with a closer focus on homes, embodied practices of dwelling and the emerging social and cultural geographies of the city (Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014).

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