

Picture 2. The incredible landscape of Goreme in Cappadocia



Picture taken by Antonio Bertini® (1992)

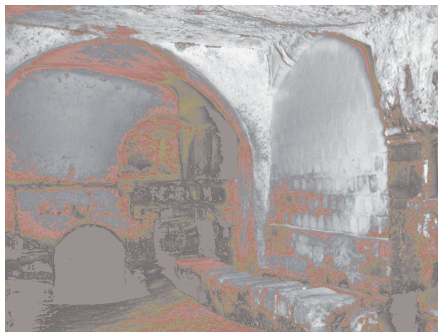
They were uninhabited for a long time and only rediscovered in 1965 to be included in the UNESCO List in 1985. Written traces of this subterranean site are found in some works by Xenophon dating back to 400 BC. In these towns, the underground was not only an answer to the ancestral need for protection from enemies and for storage of supplies – the internal temperature remaining constant throughout the year at 7°-15° C – it was also the most impressive model of a multifunctional urban project to have been developed. These towns have a complex structure that includes private housing as well as public buildings, which include productive spaces, public services, and meeting points.

However, perhaps the most remarkable underground urban settlement is Matera, in Italy, where the engraved caves have been inhabited since prehistoric times (Laureano 1993). Fodor's guide reports:

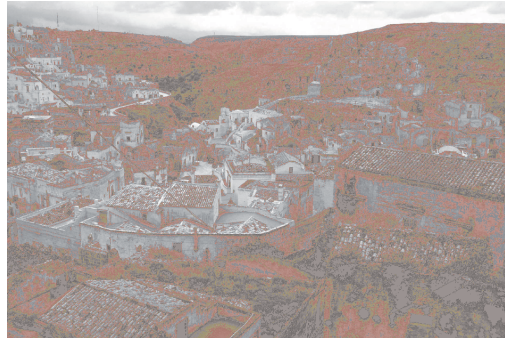
"Matera is the only place in the world where people can boast to be still living in the same houses as their ancestors of 9,000 years ago."

Moreover, it is true that the Sassi site originates from a troglodyte village and it is thought to be one of the first human settlements in Italy. The construction of the entire complex – composed of 80 churches and 3,012 houses (665 of them with an underground entrance) – reflects the progressive transformation of natural caves into an urban landscape (Pictures 3 and 4).

Picture 3. The inside of a "Sasso"



Picture 4. The aboveground urban settlement of Matera



Pictures taken by Antonio Bertini® (2004)

In the case of Matera, the underground morphology influenced the dislocation of both public and private buildings. In fact, the very first step in the building of each house was always the choice of a suitable natural cave, to be shaped only later in response to its inhabitants' needs (magnificent pools which collected rainwater completed the infrastructural networks). In Matera, the *ground level* is the demarcation between the urban settlement and the apparently inhabited world in an overturned relationship.

The prominent characteristic of this site is that it has remained in continuous use, even though most of the houses have been abandoned for about 400 years. Current local administration has become more tourism-oriented and has promoted the regeneration of Sassi, which has now become one of the most famous tourist attractions in Southern Italy and was in 1993 the first underground site to be included on the UNESCO list.

As we have seen, although the four above-mentioned examples refer to different geographical areas and historical periods, they have several common elements. In fact, *negative building culture* carries very individual connotations, much more influenced by the subterranean location than by the local aboveground town planning approach. The undertaking and the results required shared certain common denominators building- method wise and the reasons for adopting the underground solution were similar, thus, the underground architecture of diverse geographical locations has much more in common than the corresponding aboveground architectural styles.

Religion, safety and emergency

In the first paragraph we analysed some cases where the underground was the place for physical urban settlement. In this paragraph, another aspect of the tribute of the underground to the definition of the aboveground city will be analysed. In fact, very often in the Mediterranean area, the urban underground was part of the social, cultural, anthropological and religious life, clearly reflecting in an original and uncommon way the most deeply engrained modes of the aboveground cities. The perception of the underground as a place of fear and death was generated because it was used to erase the effects of mortality from the surface of the city. In this way, darkness became a metaphor for the unknown and today it is perceived as an ideal *scenario* for the transition from the light of life to the obscurity of death.

Southern Italy is a perfect example of this attitude. During the period of Magna Graecia, from the 8th to the 3rd Century BC, bodies of notables were buried underground in engraved stone bedrooms which included pillows and linen. The underground rooms were completed with handiwork, mainly pottery and jewellery. The Museo Nazionale di Reggio Calabria hosts the most impressive collections of finds from the

tombs of Calabria but despite its importance, it is one of least visited archaeological museums in Italy. The linkage between underground, religion and death was confirmed during the Roman period. It was the place to practice the Christian religion during the persecutions: Catacombs were very popular in the Mediterranean; in Southern Italy there are approximately 120 underground roman caves used for religious purposes. Some were also used during the Middle Ages to host the mummified bodies of religious or very important people and later on in the Modern Age to bury bodies during cholera and plague epidemic disasters.

The Catacombs of Rome are surely the most famous and the most visited catacombs in Italy. Though better known for Christian burials, they also include pagan and Jewish burials, either in separate or in the same catacombs (Baruffa 1989). Their construction began in the 2nd Century to satisfy the need for persecuted Christians to bury their dead secretly. The Catholic catacombs are extremely important for the history of early Christian Jewish art. The Catacombe dei Cappuccini in Palermo dates back to 1599, when the local priests mummified a holy monk for all to see and to pray to after death. During the following years, several local citizens wanted their relatives remembered in this same way and very soon, there were hundreds of corpses. Some of the deceased wrote personal wills about their bodies also expressing the clothes in which to bury them, or to have them changed after a period. Some of the bodies stand up on the walls, some are buried in coffins, some of them have long ago lost their flesh and are skeletons, and others have mummified flesh, hair and even eyes. Children – the most famous of whom is Rosalia who died about 1920 of pneumonia and whose nickname is *Sleeping Beauty* for the perfect state of conservation – soldiers – Colonel Enea Di Giuliano who was mummified in his 19th Century French Bourbon uniform – priests, and notables all together depict a scene that, surprisingly, is not terrifying. Nevertheless, only in the city of Naples does the importance of the above-mentioned underground sites perfectly reflect the aboveground history. It can be proposed as a complete and innovative tourist route.

On September 19th 2009, Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe and Monsignore Gianfranco Ravasi inaugurated “The holy Mile” (Iaia 2009), a human and spiritual itinerary starting from the grave of St. Gennaro and leading to his treasure in the Cathedral of Naples. It passes through, several subterranean locations: the St. Gennaro Catacombs, the tuff caves valley, the St. Gaudioso Catacombs, the Fontanelle Cemetery and the tuff cave where, plague victims were buried from the 16th century onwards. (Esposito 2007). In 1872, with the support of local women, Don Gaetano Barbati decided to honour the memory of all plague victims by creating a great sanctuary for all anonymous bones, which became the most famous ossuary in the world. Thanks to favourable climatic conditions, the bones do not appear to have decomposed at all – and after the recent restoration carried out by the Department of Geological Safety and Underground of the municipality of Naples, this site has been reinstated to the local population and tourists.

The Holy mile is an innovative project that aims to intercept the fluxes of tourists who visit the Capodimonte Museum, which is also on the route. A project, which involves the young generations of the underprivileged district of Naples *Sanità* is, at the same time, an opportunity of getting to understand this fascinating city and of searching for its historical roots, in a fashion that is far from the stereotypes. The approach this paper intends to take is that, it is the right opportunity to translate a project of urban history research into an innovative touristic proposal.

Part Two

UNDERGROUND CITIES AND CAVED TOWNS: DEFINITION, TYPES AND LOCATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Caved towns is the definition given to extensive areas in which a community has lived and continues to live, either by choice or necessity, in spaces excavated underground, either in depth or under the surface. These spaces may be used either as private dwellings, as service areas to the inhabitants (religious buildings, olive oil presses, community kitchens etc.) or as development of urban infrastructure (paths, systems of water collection and distribution), hence such urban agglomerations can be referred to as *towns*.

Caved towns of particular interest around the Mediterranean area, even if for the greater part no longer inhabited, can be found in Andalusia (the southernmost region of Spain), in Apulia and Basilicata (in the south of Italy), Cappadocia (in central Turkey) and in the south of Tunisia.

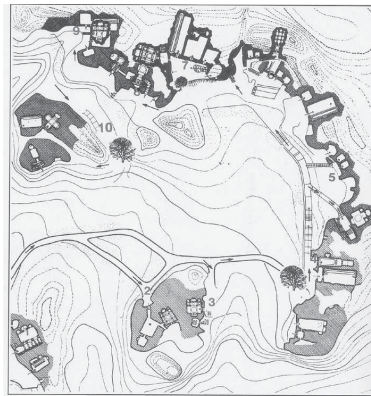
The type of terrain which is easy to excavate is the factor common to all these cave towns, which can be catalogued in three groups:

- Those created by digging into the side of the mountain and which have been completed with external structures.. (caved towns).
- Those built vertically by digging beneath the terrain (underground cities).
- Those in a crater or basin (vertical caved towns).

The following towns belong to the first type:

- Gausix, Cuevas de Almanzora and an extensive area near Granada in Andalusia (Sp).
- Settlements along the Loire Valley in France.
- Matera and the entire ravine settlement on the border between Apulia and Lucania.
- The open air museum of Cappadocia (Unesco world heritage site) in central Turkey, including the urban centres of Goreme, Uchisar and the entire system of settlements.
- Maaloula in Syria.
- Gomrassen, Chenini, Doiret, Heddej and most of the Berber settlements in the south of Tunisia characterized by built up external structures, which complete the towns, for the greater part underground.

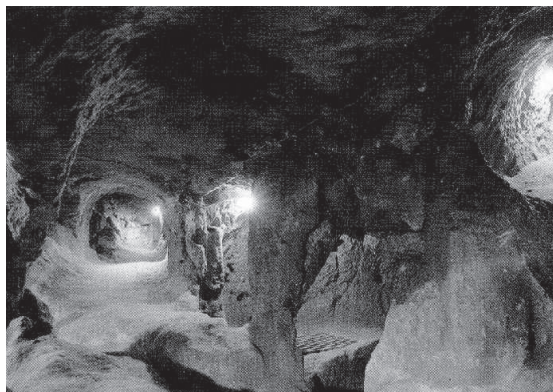
Picture 6. Goreme Map. Key: 1. Church (kilise in Turkish) with no name 2. Church with apple tree; 3. Church of Saint Barbara; 4. Church with a snake; 5&6 Cells and refectory for monks; 7. Dark church; 8. Church with no name. 9. Church with sandals; 10. Female monastery



Elaborated by the author on the basis of a government map

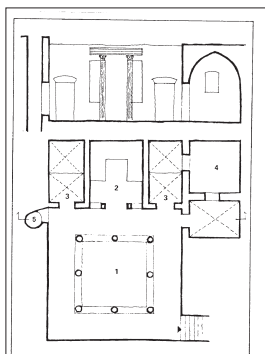
Quite rare indeed are the underground cities excavated beneath surface level. An interesting example can be found in central-western Tunisia on the archaeological site of Bulla Regia, in as much as it was built underground neither for necessity, nor for defense or even due to restricted economic possibility, but merely out of choice. In one part of the city, which dates back to the 2nd - 3rd century AD, there is an entire hypogeal quarter intended as a system of shelter from the adverse conditions of the summer climate.

Picture 7. Underground city on Derinkuyu



Picture taken by Antonio Bertini® (1991)

Picture 8. Section of Bulla Regia, Tunisia.

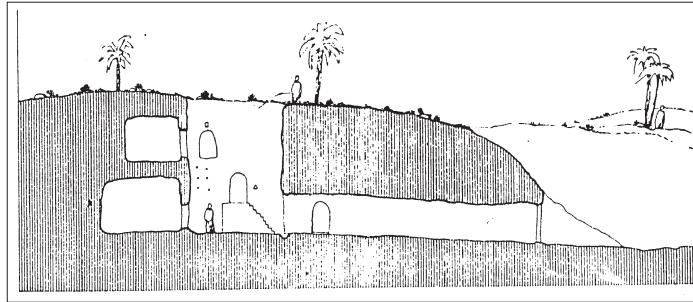


Picture by W. Barbero, guida Clup "Tunisia"

Cappadocia numbers the highest concentration of underground cities known today, in fact 36 have been brought to light, all dug out as a means of hiding from the enemy. They are part of a polycentric system of hypogeal structures, probably intercommunicating, for the passive defense of the population, which in times of peace normally lived above ground.

Matamata in Tunisia belongs to the third type of underground dwellings, along with the Chinese caved towns in the Shaanxi region, along the yellow river. China affords more examples of caved towns of socio-historical and architectonic value than anywhere in the world and these towns are still inhabited by thousands of people. An in-depth analysis will follow of the Apulia-Lucania system of cave dwellings in the south of Italy, whereas for further reading regarding other instances, refer to the bibliography.

Picture 9. Section of Matmata, Tunisia



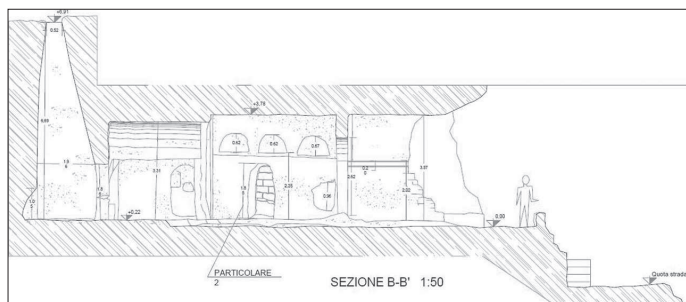
Drawing by W. Barbero, guida Clup "Tunisia"

THE CAVED TOWN SYSTEM OF APULIA-LUCANIA: MATERA AND THE CAVE DWELLINGS (SOUTHERN ITALY)

The ravine is typical of the karstic morphology of the Murgia Plateau. It is a deep rift – often more than 100m deep- created by the erosive action of meteoric water through limestone rock. The canyons formed over the course of thousands of years, have steep and in some cases vertical walls, between ten or twenty meters to more than two hundred meters wide. Over the centuries, indigenous populations and refugees from Asia Minor, more precisely from Cappadocia have settled in the ravine caves, which are most probably the one factor which the Hittite populations, the Frigites, the Romans and the Byzantines have in common. In Italy, on the border between Apulia and Basilicata is a small Cappadocia, where, between the IX and XV centuries, religious communities settled and dug out caved towns with Byzantine style churches and delicate frescoes (Those discovered in Fasano are well comparable to those of the Cappadocia).

The IX century saw the arrival of monks escaping from Asia Minor and the iconoclastic laws. They influenced the spread of the dug-out architecture with hermitages, laura and coenobies along the deep ravine strongly characterizing the landscape of the town of Matera. In the 13th century the town of Matera became an Archdiocese, hence the number of religious spaces. In the 15th century, the increase in the number of dwellings due to the demographic rise and the consolidation of the economy (artisan and commerce) gave the town as a whole an aspect not so different from that of today. There are more than 120 cave churches; the ancient cult venues, shelters and dwellings of the religious communities from the Benedictine monks of the 8th century to the Basilian monks persecuted by the Turks in the 12th and 15th centuries. They are places of ascetic life and in some, the frescoes are still perfectly visible. An ingenious system of channelling and collecting rainwater in cisterns meant complete autonomy as far as the water supply was concerned, whereas the meeting places were usually found in the areas where the agricultural yield was gathered and transformed, such as the mill and the oil-press or the places of religious worship like crypts or churches. The cave houses have certain characteristics, consistent with terracing for agriculture. In other words, they are perfect models of environmentally sustainable activity. This conspicuous patrimony has been abandoned for decades and only thanks to the 1991 "legge quadro sulle aree protette", the recent laws regulating protected areas have the considerable territorial resources become the object of some interest. The area of the ravine with the greater part of caved towns and villages between Apulia and Basilicata has been included in two different national parks. The "parco archeologico, storico naturale delle chiese rupestri del Materano" is the area of Lucania officially protected by the regional law n.11 of the 3rd April 1990, and the "Parco regionale della Terra delle Gravine", was instituted as a result of the regional law of Apulia n.18 of the 20th December 2005.

Picture 10. Palagianello, Apulia (Italy).



Drawing by Arch. M. Carobbi and Ing. E. Vozzi

THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION AND EXPLOITATION OF POTENTIAL

In 1991 a law – one of the best in the world “Legge quadro sulle aree protette” n.394/91 - was passed in Italy regarding protected areas, which provides for the conservation and promotion of national parks, nature reserves and marine parks.

The national park, among the various forms contemplated by the legislation regarding protected areas, allows not only for the conservation of areas of particular natural and historical value, but also for the enhancement of the historical and cultural background which is the result of human settlement and agricultural, forestry and shepherding activities over the centuries. Consequently the idea of a conservation park remains a valid means for ensuring the continuation of these traditions which are otherwise destined to die out even if they have made a significant contribution to the development of characteristic, local values.

Matera is part of an urban system of ravine settlements, which became a regional park for the archaeology, history and nature of the cave churches of Matera in 2005. Continuity of these phenomena is to be found in the excavated settlements of Gravina di Puglia, Mottola, Ginosa and Massafra, in the Apulia region. The denomination “Sassi di Matera” in the Unesco list of the patrimony of humanity has been extended to become “I Sassi ed il Parco delle Chiese rupestri di Matera.” Another concentration of cave dwellings is to be found not far away, in the polycentric system, which includes Ostuni, San Vito dei Normanni and Carovigno and other scattered areas around Cagnano Varano, Monte Sant’Angelo Fasano, Palagianello (the only place in the world where all the existing caves have been mapped in detail). The numerous cave structures of Apulia also include the caved villages of Castellaneta, Laterza, Crispiano, Statte and Grottaglie.

The “Parco regionale della Terra delle Gravine” extends across 13 municipalites in the province of Taranto (Ginosa, Laterza, Castellaneta, Mottola, Massafra, Palagiano, Palagianello, Statte, Crispiano, Martina Franca, Montmesola, Grottaglie, San Marzano) and one municipality in the province of Brindisi i.e. Villa Castelli, totalling some 28.000 hectares. At Massafra and Mottola are to be found the best preserved examples of religious cave frescoes and of the architecture of these religious places dugout of the rock.

THE FUTURE OF THESE REMAINS

The heritage of these areas is considerable. They are rich in natural, historical and archeological resources, art, architecture, ethno-anthropological traces and eno-gastronomic traditions but this patrimony is not

sufficient to activate the much hoped-for development of these areas in the brief space of 5 - 10 years. The areas in question are dispersed and somewhat distant from the main flow of national and international interest. With the exception of Matera which after decades of promotional activity has managed to gain itself a niche in the tourist industry and hence to create a few job opportunities, the rest of the area is completely unknown at an international level and lacking in any sort of organized enterprise. The idea of relying merely on the development of tourism as a satisfactory solution is therefore a utopian idea. The bulk of the necessary economic processes which will prevent the local populations from abandoning the areas in question and which will create an improved quality of life are still to be devised. In our opinion it is necessary to involve the local communities in the fundamental process of acquiring the pertinent knowledge, of organizing a system of study for this purpose and then of using the acquired knowledge to enhance the value of their heritage through promotion of the same. Through promotion, this culture can then be divulged and so produce, by means of sustainable processes, further culture and the relevant products, which will lay down the basis for lasting development. An effective proposal could be that of regenerating the micro-system of artisan production and commerce by rehabilitating many of the traditional activities so tied in with the culture of these areas. The stagnant local economies may be brought back to life without destroying their intrinsic identity. It may yet be possible to save the historical memory of the agricultural world of the south by inciting respect for and recuperating the rural areas and villages. The rural settlements need to be recuperated in their entirety, and single buildings given a similar importance, as these are the expression of the interdependent relationship between the population and the surrounding land.

The smaller old towns provide us with diverse examples of cultural heritage, the roots of which are still deep in the surrounding environment and these afford valid means of rediscovering clear, authentic values. In contrast to historical urban areas, where the relationship between the town and the surrounding territory has been influenced and subsequently impeded by urban expansion and the development of functional infrastructures, the smaller towns still maintain close ties with the surrounding environment, which is the basic reason for their existence. They are also of notable economic, and infrastructural importance as, together with the local networks for which they represent the reference point, they provide many supporting infrastructural resources for the enjoyment and use of the surrounding area and the recuperation of historical economic activities or, indeed, innovative ones. In a country like Italy, the minor towns are a source of fixed capital available to the community but for the greater part under or even unutilized.

A lesson for future generations can be drawn from the study of the caved towns. These places could be turned into workshops where new styles of living can be experimented, or past traditions recuperated and adapted with the help of technological innovation to the requirements of modern existence. The lesson to be learned is that of how to turn the difficult conditions into renewable resources so that the areas with particularly hostile environmental features can become those of major ecological organization and harmony. The employment of meteoric water, the rehabilitation of the caves and the intelligent management of local resources is not an undertaking that contrasts with modernization but is an idea for a sustainable future.

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"PASSAGES" TO EGYPT BY AHDAF SOUEIF

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Abstract

Since the 70s the analysis of travel writing has been a main concern in postcolonial and feminist studies which questions concepts of 'innocence' or 'transparency' of representations of other cultures, putting it under the microscope of cultural critique.

The paper is going to examine the themes and narrative features that the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif employs with a view to draw attention to unresolved questions within the debate on asymmetrical intercultural relationships which develop when foreign tourists visit a country. As Soueif points out in her collection of essays published under the title *Mezzaterra*, there is a tradition of travel writing "that wishes to find itself at odds with its subject; to highlight the subject's weirdness by insisting that the only normal behaviour is that of the author and – incidentally – his readers". For that reason she opted to focus her attention on the role played by travel writing as a representative modality of the knowledge of the East from the point of view of Western, predominantly British travellers, during the colonial period as well as in the present. Soueif is involved in revising the cultural impact of tourism within the genre of travel writing. She opens up a critical discussion that exposes the workings of the Western mechanisms involved in the production of stereotypical representations that produce an "inferior" perception of otherness. One example of this is her review of William Golding's *An Egyptian Journal* (1985) also included in *Mezzaterra*. Soueif's alternative writing tends to interrupt the linearity of the flux of Western literary production, by sparking off a polyphony of previously ignored or neglected voices of local people that emerge from the shadows of the "periphery" and re-write their own languages, stories and cultures, whilst critically re-examining the stereotyping Western gaze.

Soueif addresses the cultural role of the travel-narrative as an important instrument that is employed to support imperialism; on the one hand she employs it in order to profitably overhaul the past and, thus, once again give voice to those who had no place in the historic transmission, and on the other, to call into question the discriminating representative forms that endure in the present.

The aim is to give rise to a narrative generated from the perspective of these people's specific historical and cultural experiences, via a process of *writing back*, which entails speaking out in conjunction with a revision-process that, through the re-reading of travel writing, calls into question the discriminating Western representative apparatus. For these reasons her works are defined as counter-narrative.

Key words: tourists – representations – travel writing - stereotype – revision

"PASSAGES" TO EGYPT BY AHDAF SOUEIF

Nowadays, because of globalisation and international communication the discourse of intercultural exchange has become increasingly important. To be part of a global community means that one has to now about other cultures and be aware of how people from other countries perceive one's own culture. To learn about the present it is useful to turn to the past, to find out how our ancestors related to others and what traces of cultural heritage they have handed down to us. Such traces are used in travel writing, assisting travel writers to construct their own ideas of the Other. Travellers tend to consider their own

travel as unique and authentic although their experience is inevitably tainted by their subjective vision. This is particularly true when it comes to the Orient which has a long tradition of being thought of as a 'mystic' and exotic 'place', a place very different from home "[...] which became a real alternative to their own at precisely the moment it was being opened up to them by European political and commercial expansion" (Thompson 1988, 4). The perceptive process on which the formation of the image of the Orient depends doesn't reveal itself only at the moment when individuals and a specific reality meet, but often there is an overlap of the same pre-existing images, filtered through the deformed and kaleidoscopic lens of their values and culturally determined preconceptions. As a result a discrepancy occurred between what Western travellers in the nineteenth century actually saw and what they imagined to see. In this way the Orient becomes a construction by the West as Edward Said reminds us. As Said points out, there is an "Othering process" going on, whose purpose is to assert European superiority. The travel writer establishes European behaviour as the norm against which the behaviour of the people whose country he or she visits is measured. Instead of appreciating a foreign culture as it is and trying to learn from it, this kind of travel writer imposes his/her own cultural values onto the foreign culture thereby making it impossible for any real cultural exchange to take place.

The birth of the agency-arranged protective tour doesn't date back to the last century, but began in the nineteenth century with Thomas Cook's organised tours in England and all over Europe. At that time Egypt attracted different kinds of tourism, ranging from the early "Grand Tour" to archaeologically-themed trips, from "sunshine" tours for consumptive people to package holidays organized by Thomas Cook. His agency at Ludgate Circus offered a reassuring vision of Mediterranean Europe and of Egypt (Pemble 1998). Cook was not the only one who arranged trips abroad but he was the most successful because he created a network of contracts between domestic tourist services and foreign institutions which would serve as a model for modern travel agencies. He negotiated with railway firms and hotel keepers, in order to lower their fares, he solved all the problems connected with authorisation of passports and, finally, in the early 70s of the nineteenth century, he created the first circular credit notes, which anticipated the modern traveller's cheques. The structured form of travel, now called tourism, gave customers the chance to choose among a range of options and perfectly fitted the middle classes, thanks to its cheaper costs, and women for the protection it offered against any possible inconvenience.

It is interesting to note that according to the British press at that time colonized areas equalled safe and attractive places suitable for European "civilised" travellers. As Dea Birkett points out:

[...] the dangers and hardships that marked their journeys, were mostly eradicated from the newly colonized and 'civilized' areas of North Africa and the East that were now appearing in the press as favoured destinations for holiday tours (Birkett 1989, 116).

My paper is going to examine the themes and narrative features that the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif¹ (who actually lives in London) employs with a view to draw attention to unresolved questions within the debate on asymmetrical intercultural relationships (Fanon 1967) which develop when foreign tourists visit a country. As Soueif points out in her collection of essays published under the title *Mezzaterra*, there is a tradition of travel writing "that wishes to find itself at odds with its subject; to highlight the subject's weirdness by insisting that the only normal behaviour is that of the author and – incidentally – his readers" (Soueif 2004, 188). For that reason she opted to focus her attention on the role played by travel writing as a representative modality of the knowledge of the East from the point of view of Western, predominantly British travellers, *1 Soueif, the daughter of an intellectual Muslim family, was born in Cairo in 1950 and studied English Literature at Egyptian and British universities. Since 1981 she has been dividing her time between London and Cairo, crossing national boundaries and occupying multiple locations. She is one of a number of Arab authors who moved to Europe in the second half of the twentieth century and who, from their adopted homes, attempt to describe their encounters with cultural otherness. Consequently, she is inevitably caught in the net of power relations that govern interactions between East and West.*

during the colonial period as well as in the present. Soueif is involved in revising the cultural impact of tourism within the genre of travel writing. She opens up a critical discussion that exposes the workings of the Western mechanisms involved in the production of stereotypical representations that produce an "inferior" perception of otherness. One example of this is her review of William Golding's *An Egyptian Journal* (1985) also included in *Mezzaterra*. As she puts it, "Looking at my essays now I find that they are mainly concerned with the problem of representation, and that this theme was established with the 1985 review of William Golding's *Egyptian Journal*" (Soueif 2004: 4)². Even if Golding is writing in the 1980s, the stereotyped Western habit of representing the Other is still present. The author takes a critical position in the vein of Edward Said³, as she herself points out: "I have hoped to add my voice to that of Edward Said" (Soueif 2004, 10).

Soueif considers travel writing to be a very effective tool that has been successfully used to sustain imperialism. These literary works, that narrate the historical experience of colonialism, reveal themselves as simplifiers of the discourse of "negation" and "devaluation" that remained until the end of the twentieth century a powerful, ideological element of the West's consciousness of the people it tries to hold in subjugation (Pratt 1992). She uses it for her own purposes, that is, not only as an instrument that enables her to reactivate the past and to give a voice to those who didn't have one in the past, but also to call into question and to deconstruct the accounts of the Western traveller tainted by his/her clichéd gaze. She emphasises the cultural and ideological revitalisation of past images in the present and the consequent political implications that these rhetorical devices involve. Therefore such representations perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes which have roots in the colonial past, as Soueif herself puts it "they have a pedigree", in order to legitimize interventions and to justify them ideologically (Soueif 2004, 164). Hence, images of Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians can be and have been used for sinister ends, reinvoking, reinforcing and perpetuating stereotypes that have roots stretching back into the colonial past.

As Elio Di Piazza points out, such structuring devices have been adopted in the colonial period in [...] literature with a view to legitimise the Empire and to provide ideological justification." (Di Piazza et al. 2005, 5). According to Soueif it is exactly the presence of this colonial past that has made it so easy for the West to construct a powerful but untrue picture of the Islamic, Arab and Palestinian worlds.

The aim is to give rise to a narrative generated from the perspective of these people's specific historical and cultural experiences, via a process of *writing back*, which entails speaking out in conjunction with a revision-process that, through the re-reading of travel writing, calls into question the discriminating Western representative apparatus. For these reasons her works are defined as counter-narrative (Thieme 2001, Ashcroft *et al.* 1995). This definition characterises her approach to writing, in which she calls into question images of subordinates, pursuing these images via specific formal and stylistic strategies and tending to overturn Western narrative canons at the very moment of their re-utilisation (Tiffin 1987).

Soueif does not fall for the East versus West, or Arab versus European, formulas. Instead, she works them out patiently [...] Soueif renders the experience of crossing over from one side to the other, and then back again, indefinitely, without rancor or preachiness. [...] The fine thing, though, is that Soueif can present such a hegira [...] thereby showing that what has become almost formulaic to the Arab (as well as Western) discourse of the Other need not always be the case. In fact, there can be generosity, and vision, and overcoming barriers, and, finally, human existential integrity. (Said 2002, 410)⁴

2 Soueif, A. (2004), "Passing Through. William Golding, *An Egyptian Journal*", in Soueif (2004), trans. by D'Alessandro S. (2008), "Diario di un viaggio in Egitto".

3 His book *Orientalism* has drastically changed the way Western representations of the East have been analysed, theorized and problematised since its publication in 1978.

4 The Arabic term *hegira* means emigration.

These are the words of Edward Said, in "The Anglo-Arab Encounter", with regard to the writer Ahdaf Soueif. In fact, Ahdaf Soueif's fiction flits between various cultures and languages, crossing over representative and formal frontiers. Ahdaf Soueif proposes a possible trans-cultural exchange, where ethnic and racial (including sexual and gender) identities are continually (via attempts at negotiation and conflicting modes) called into question.

Her writing takes its place within the theoretical and critical apparatus representative of post-colonial feminism, and what emerges is an assertive, and not at all placid, reflection on the building of identity on the part of the Egyptian (middle-class and intellectual) protagonists, who find themselves hovering between two cultures, in an "in-between" area of conflict (Bhabha 1990)⁵; this complex contact zone (Pratt 1992)⁶ is called "mezzaterra" by the writer. The term "mezzaterra", as Soueif explains in her preface to the homonymous collection of essays, refers to a "common ground", to a "theoretically constructed" territory, where different cultures can peacefully co-exist, can combine their knowledge and ideas and learn from each other, rather than clash in the name of cultural dominion. It is to this "mezzaterra" that the author alludes in projectual terms, whilst referring to processes of productive symbiosis that in other ages marked the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean ("A few Westerners inhabited it too: Lucy Duff Gordon was one, Wilfred Scawen Blunt another") (Soueif 2004, 6). Furthermore, for the purposes of Soueif's critical discourse, it is important to stress the author's utilisation of the Italian term "mezzaterra", which stemmed (as explained by Soueif herself in an interview⁷) from the fact that, in Italy, she noticed forms of Mediterranean "synthesis" between Europe and the Middle-East. Consequently, Soueif's texts are essential for both, a precise analysis of the discursive variations with regard to literary representations of "otherness" as well as for their aim, on a textual level, to establish sounder relations between East and West.

In fact, ever since her collection of stories⁸, Soueif has been examining the complexity of the continual process of identity construction of de-colonised subjects in contexts far removed from their place of origin. One of the principal aspects of her writing is the conscious attempt to use her characters to create multi-sided figures (i.e. subjects characterised by differences of gender, race, ethnic group, sexual orientation and class), who counter those culturally, ethnically and racially defined subjects present in the Western tradition (according to the modellisation spotlighted by Said). On the one hand, these characters proclaim their marginalisation, whereas, on the other, we see them emerging from this marginalisation in a quest to build up a life for themselves.

Therefore, in her intent to critically deconstruct these representative mechanisms, and in accordance with

5 Bhabha H. pinpointed the existence of this interstitial space in the work by Fanon F., in the preface to the English edition (1986) of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, which appears in the Italian version, "Ricordare Fanon. L'io, la psiche e la condizione coloniale", in Corona D. (2002). As regards Bhabha's interpretations of the processes of hybridisation, Di Piazza E states his case regarding Fanon's ideas, re-reading and opposing Fanon's theoretical position to Bhabha's reformist vision, for which it is sufficient to "rely on a process of revision of the colonial pact, take possession of the infinite succession of interstitial spaces, without ever affecting the relationship of "subordination". Fanon's position does not attribute the overcoming of colonialism to a "negotiation" between colonized and coloniser, but to "the overturning of the principle of distinction"; since, in the words of Di Piazza "those negotiations (...) root the awareness of the impossibility of crossing over frontiers even more deeply into the conscience [...]" Di Piazza (2002, 96).

6 The term was used by Pratt M. L. with reference to inter-cultural meeting-places, usually in colonial contexts. The "contact zone", conventionally situated between the centre and the outskirts, was subsequently relocated to the outskirts by Boehmer E., in her analysis of "trans-national" exchanges between, on the one hand, nationalist and anti-imperialist movements, and on the other, writers and nationalist and anti-imperialist leaders. Boehmer (2002).

7 "Ahdaf Soueif", interview given to D'Alessandro S. (2007).

8 In 1992, the novel *In the Eye of the Sun* came out as a follow-up to the collection of stories *Aisha* (1983), a finalist for the "Guardian Fiction Prize" and *Sandpiper* (1996) winner of the prize "Cairo International Book Fair Best Collection of Short Stories". It was however *The Map of Love* in 1999, a finalist for the "Booker Prize", that brought her international renown. She has recently translated *I Saw Ramallah* (2005) by Mourid al-Barghouti. The collection of stories *I Think of You* came out in 2007. Soueif also writes for prestigious newspapers including the English *Guardian*, and the Egyptian *Al-Ahram*.

the denunciatory methodology of post-colonial *writing back* and the practice of revision influenced by Western feminism (Rich 1971), the author deliberately falls back (especially in *The Map of Love*) on literary genres (e.g. travel writing) from the Western tradition, with the aim of de-constructing stereotypes present in nineteenth century English travel-writing, such as representations that tend towards the exotic depiction of the Eastern woman. Revision of travel writing and specifically travel writing by nineteenth century Englishwomen, has as its primary objective the re-examination of the relationship between this literary form and the modalities of cultural imperialism; its secondary objective is the re-examination of the specific role of English women-travellers' written works in relation to levels of complicity with imperialist ideology or resistance to it (the latter having been examined as "critical" expressions) (Chaudhuri *et al.* 1992). These aspects are clearly emphasised by Soueif herself in an interview:

There's a genre that I really am very interested in, which is travel writing, done by women, English women, mostly Victorian, and of course they are very varied, from people with very set, very colonial attitudes, to people who were very broad-minded and opened themselves up to the culture that they were coming to see, like Lucy Duff Gordon who ended up living there until she died. (Soueif 2000, 102-03)⁹

In *The Map of Love*, the reference to travel writing (Wilfred Scawen Blunt), and especially travel-writing by nineteenth century English women-travellers (Lucie Duff Gordon and Anne Blunt), seeks to highlight the forms and role of this writing about "otherness", which contributed so crucially in the nineteenth century to the spreading of "orientalising" clichés (of feminine erotization); this **is done with the aid of orientalist painting**, which materialises in the novel through the works of John Frederick Lewis. Travel-writing about Egypt was subsequently critically recomposed in *The Map of Love* by a twentieth century Egyptian, and for Soueif's female figures (together with Lewis' orientalist paintings), these works become multi-sided, superimposed mirrors of their own personal and ethnic identity. Through these multiple mirrors, the Egyptian woman re-interprets her own image, and the way this was constructed and conveyed to her, whilst, at the same time in this act of critical re-reading, searching for a more conscious identity relocation. The protagonists are constantly redefining themselves in the comparison and friction with those external, imposed images; however they never manage to see themselves, in the various contexts, as integrated subjects (in a relationship that is always either denunciatory or critical, of both Western imperialism and its new forms of neo-colonialism, and of their place of origin).

Soueif addresses the cultural role of the travel-narrative as an important representative modality supporting imperialism; on the one hand she employs it in order to profitably overhaul the past and, thus, once again give voice to those who had no place in the historic transmission, and on the other, to call into question the discriminating representative forms that endure in the present:

Appeals to the past are among the commonest strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeal is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty whether the past is really past, and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. (Said 1994, xi)

This is Soueif's intention in *The Map of Love*; in fact, in the novel, in order to show how the effects of the colonial period have endured into the modern era, she compares contemporary events with those from the distant family past, via a bi-partite time structure. In her novel the forms of past discrimination are those passed on from the travel-diaries of the nineteenth century English protagonist and seen as "imperial archives" (Spivak 1985). It is therefore necessary, through the archives of the imperial authorities, to retrieve the discourses (Foucault 2001) and representative and literary models (structured on power relations) and proceed to deconstruct them (Corona 2005). Soueif re-examines them and turns their cultural significance

⁹ On the role that Lucie Duff Gordon had in relation to imperialist ideology cfr. D'Alessandro (2007).

upside down in order to provide the Egyptian women with their own voice, so that it is they (in the shape of female Egyptian subjects) who tell their own stories, rather than continue being represented in line with homologating clichés from the Western cultural tradition. The author gives the Egyptian women the role of critical, post-colonial observer; on the one hand, this highlights the involvement of Egyptian society side by side with the disruptive effects of English colonial policy, and, on the other hand, goes back over the historical facts and re-constructs the hushed-up and subordinate, Egyptian cultural tradition. The stylistic and linguistic symptoms of this cultural retrieval are also interesting. From epigraphs based on Arabian poetry to Arabic terms, various stylistic elements are used throughout the text; these elements acknowledge the cultural and linguistic tradition of the community of belonging, which, as Said emphasizes, survives in an “amphibious” manner (in the writings of Soueif) but also contaminates it (Said 2002, 409).

Soueif’s actual fiction is analysed as a sort of palimpsest of identity, in the sense that it represents a space to be crossed that is imaginatively aware of the historical and colonial relational modalities (including those between English and Egyptian women, in both their complicity and their forms of “resistance”). Thus, troubled female protagonists all from upper/middle class backgrounds, travel across the centuries back and forth from London to Cairo, from the East to the West; then (critically aware of the consequences of colonialism), at a ripe age, they return to their countries of origin with an image of themselves that has altered but hovers in a position of instability. Soueif’s challenge lies in mapping out the complex conditions of querying oneself and the possible processes of transformation stemming from them (with their limits and their projectual tensions). Her novels are, in this sense, considered terrain for the narrative representation of the Egyptian female raising of consciousness, both conflictual and identity, in which the protagonists perceive themselves as subjects bereft in a no-man’s land between two cultures (one of which is beloved and reclaimed as an expression of one’s ethnic group of belonging, and the other denounced because of the practice and effects of colonisation).

Since the seventies, post-colonialism and its feminist components have been tackling the various questions posed on various levels by Eurocentric thinking and its representative models on the critical and literary plane. As Polezzi emphasises these studies question concepts of ‘innocence’ or ‘transparency’ of representations of other cultures, putting travel writing under “the microscope of cultural critique” (Polezzi 2007, 13).

Soueif’s alternative writing tends to interrupt the linearity of the flux of Western literary production, by sparking off a polyphony of previously ignored or neglected voices of local people that emerge from the shadows of the “periphery” and re-write their own languages, stories and cultures, whilst critically re-examining the stereotyping Western gaze as exemplified in her review of William Golding’s *An Egyptian Journal*.

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CROSS-CULTURAL POST-COLONIAL SYMBIOSES IN BERNARDINE EVARISTO'S NOVELS AND LITERARY TOURISM: TOWARDS A NON-EUROCENTRIC REDEFINITION OF LOCALITY

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Abstract

Informed by the theoretical paradigms of cultural, postcolonial and tourism studies, my paper aims at illustrating that fostering a peculiar kind of literary tourism, centred on works imbued with post-colonial issues, might act as a political practice able to reshape the self-fashioning of Western European cultural heritage in non-essentialized terms and, consequently, to help promote cross-cultural exchanges. In this respect, the first two novels of the Anglo-Nigerian writer Bernardine Evaristo prove relevant literary media.

Although its roots are ancient, it is not until the last two decades that literary tourism has acquired visibility as a field of study centred on the convergence of literature and tourism as well as on the mutual influences between writing and spaces. These interconnections become evident when both tourism and literature – in the light of a cultural approach – reveal themselves as cultural practices able to (re)produce symbolic representations of social groups and places.

Against this theoretical backdrop, if it is true that until recently the hegemonic political/economic role played by Western countries has engendered an exclusivist gaze whereby people and places of host countries have been exoticized with respect to a Western Self replicating Euro-American ethnocentric representational practices, it is imperative to underscore that both gender and post-colonial studies have foregrounded the latter's nature of socio-cultural constructs, so casting light on the possibility of their deconstruction.

In this context, literary tourism, in its interconnection with contemporary post-colonial literature, may challenge monolithic representations of the Western Self and stereotyped figurations of the 'Other'. Consequently, the insertion within touristic tours of places and attractions associated with Evaristo's first two novels may result in the promotion of an innovative multicultural image of Britain and Western Europe.

Evaristo, indeed, from her perspective of a London-born author of mixed origins, intervenes in the process of self-fashioning of the British national character in order to contest – "from within" – traditional British/Western European representations of essentialized identities.

Thus, the mixed-race protagonist of *Lara* (1997) lays claim to a citizenship which is English and, simultaneously, complicated by further multilayered ethnic/cultural belongings inscribed in her Irish-Nigerian-Brazilian family past and recuperated through her multiple travels. Lara draws her personal cartographies of a multiethnic London and, when travelling to Turkey, on the Mediterranean coasts, in contact with the lively expressions of the local culture and benefiting from the symbiosis she establishes with Turkish environment, she starts remoulding her personal sense of self so that she now perceives her national belonging in hybrid relational terms.

Set in Roman Britannia, her subsequent *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), through Zuleika, a woman of Sudanese origins living in "Londinium", testifies to an English (and, consequently, European) past characterized by racial plurality and long obscured by official history. In foregrounding the early presence of Black people in Britain, the novel proves a further opportunity to recast traditional national identities and to highlight not only competing ones, but also the diasporic movements behind them, movements criss-crossing the Mediterranean and involving transcultural exchanges.

In conclusion, Evaristo's representational strategies pave the way to alternative interrelational forms of transmission concerning the European past and acting as the premise for the delineation of projective cosmopolitan contexts where cultural boundaries are made permeable. They also hint at a potential (re)construction of a cultural fabric between Euro-Mediterranean peoples on the basis of the common awareness of a shared historical past and mutual influences which have helped to build an international cultural tradition. It is in this context that the role of those operating in literary tourism becomes that of fostering further these revised narratives of the European/Mediterranean space implementing the promotion of those attractions which allow tourists' insight into multivocal cultural/historical representations of local identities.

Key words: Literature; Tourism studies; Cultural studies; Cross-cultural identities; Euro-Mediterranean cultural interactions.

INTRODUCTION

Informed by an interpretative framework where the theoretical paradigms of cultural studies, gender studies and postcolonial studies – together with tourism studies – inextricably interweave, my paper aims at suggesting that fostering a peculiar kind of literary and cultural tourism, centred on authors and works mainly imbued with post-colonial issues, might reveal itself as a political practice able to reshape the self-fashioning of Western European cultural heritage in non-essentialized terms and, consequently, to help promote cross-cultural exchanges. In this respect, *Lara* (1997), *The Emperor's Babe* (2001) and *Soul Tourists* (2005), the first three novels by the London-born Anglo-Nigerian writer Bernardine Evaristo, appear to be extremely relevant literary instances.

Although its roots can be traced back to a long time ago, it is not until the last two decades that literary tourism has acquired certain a visibility as a vibrant academic field of study centred on the convergence of and the mutual influences between literature and tourism as well as between writing and spaces. These interconnections are particularly evident when we consider that both tourism and literature – if analyzed in the light of a cultural approach – reveal themselves as socio-cultural practices able to produce and reproduce symbolic representations of the national character, and, more specifically, of social groups and places.

Against this theoretical backdrop, it is imperative to highlight that until recently the hegemonic political/economic role played by Western countries has engendered an exclusivist gaze which, in turn, has contributed to replicate Euro-American ethnocentric representational practices. In the deriving Manichean economy¹, people and places of non-Western countries have been inferiorized and/or exoticized with respect to a Western ethnocentric Self that over the centuries has posited itself as normative.

However, with the advent of postmodernist theory it has been possible to underscore the socio-cultural nature of such constructs and, consequently, their being historically determined products. Within this theoretical context, gender and post-colonial studies, have cast light on the possibility of their deconstruction. Moreover, during the last four decades, these two bodies of study, which can be both considered as filiations of postmodernism itself, have also provided effective theoretical tools to subvert traditional gender- or race-biased identity figurations. As a matter of fact, both deriving from coherent political movements developed between the late 1960s and late 1970s in Britain and in the United States feminist theory and (post-)colonial studies – within the academia – are informed by a common concern, ¹ Frantz Fanon's theoretical elaboration of "Manichean economy", eventually expanded by Abdul R. JanMohamed (see Abdul R. JanMohamed's *Manichean Aesthetics*), conceptualizes the colonized subject as irremediably trapped within the symbolic axis of Otherness and was originally applied to the colonial context. My choice of mentioning such category here is motivated by the undeniable persistence of neo-colonial forms of conditioning within current political and/or economic relations between countries

that of dismantling the phallogocentrism of Western discourse and the (symbolic) hierarchies pervading the binary oppositions on which it is constructed.

As stated before, one of the major factors which have to be held responsible for the persistence of hierarchical stereotypical models is arguably the economic one. As a matter of fact, over the centuries colonial and neo-colonial economic practices have revealed themselves as the main rationale behind the reproduction of national or ethnic stereotypes. In this context, tourism acts as a commercial machine which often manipulates or even exploits official culture to maintain hierarchical relations between countries.

In fact, tourism cannot be considered a mere economic phenomenon exclusively entailing fluxes of people and capitals. On the contrary, it actually intervenes within the realm of discursive practices through the production of those imaginative projections – relating to national or foreign identities – that it itself engenders. In this sense, it intervenes in the construction of knowledge as it offers specific interpretations of reality, events and places (Simonicca, 2004). The multiple relations between tourism – and especially heritage as well as ethnic tourism – and historically specific notions of the national character have been widely explored, among others, by Susan Pitchford in her recent study, significantly titled *Identity Tourism. Imaging and Imagining the Nation* (2008), where she scrutinizes “the role of tourism in the construction of national identity” (Pitchford, 2008, 1). In her attentive analysis, while drawing a detailed distinction between ethnic and heritage tourism, she also argues for the affirmation of a kind of tourism able to undo unbalanced identity representations within and between nations.

As a matter of fact, although in the last decades terms such as “multiculturalism” and “inter-culture” have become real buzzwords pervading official discourse, what is true is that they are far from referring to actual socio-political conditions. This is because our contemporary multi-ethnic societies are still dominated by gender- as well as by race-biased practices, which means that authentic multiculturalism – that is to say, mutual respect between groups identifying themselves with different value systems and an equal access to economic resources both on a national (and transnational) level – is anything but a mere projection.

In the context of tourism industry, hierarchical dynamics between countries are also at play. Paradoxically, this can be partly accounted for by the fact that local cultures, especially in the case of the so-called “developing countries” often become themselves accomplice to the persistence of stereotypes, as these come to be contradicted only by marginal voices which do not usually obtain enough visibility to subvert the status quo. In this respect, Pitchford contends that among the different strands of tourism, the one known as ethnic tourism, which plays a major role in building images of the nation, is responsible for determining an orientalizing of countries. In its turn this also entails a continuous process of internal homogenization which silences marginal diversity and its history. As she suggests:

- Much of the tourism that shapes perceptions of national identity is captured by the concept of ethnic tourism, but with its emphasis on exoticism and suggestion of remoteness, it can miss the identity-building effort of minority groups within core societies. Further, its emphasis on the performance of living culture misses those attractions that focus on history, and the importance of how history is interpreted in determining how people see themselves and are seen by the others (Pitchford, 2008, 2).

The erosions of history that Pitchford alludes to are put into practice not only at the detriment of the cultural heritage of non-western countries, where sometimes accomplice local cultures “sell” and advertise cultural landscapes in stereotypical terms, but also within hegemonic nations where expressions of internal differentiation are often obscured. Thus, in such cases, in the imaginative process of nation building the multiethnic character is concealed so as to create a national image where its previous presence is deliberately unrepresented. In contrast, it may also happen that when diversity is given visibility it is to insert it within a binary opposition where it comes to be subordinated to what is posited as the norm.

In the processes resulting in these imaginative dynamics, tourism reveals itself as a vehicle through which tradition – be it historical or cultural – is sold along the nets of the global market. However, tourism is

but one of the discursive arenas where notions of identity are moulded. In reality, among the scopical regimes our lives are deeply embedded in, literature needs to be singled out as one of the most effective realms where figurations of the national character are shaped in compliance with specific socio-political requirements.

Although through different modalities and each with a different degree of intervention in the epistemological systems of Western societies, both literature and tourism share a remarkable influence in the shaping of national or international imageries. The initial interconnections between the two realms – if not their convergence – are particularly old and one might locate them in the early forms of travel-writing. Recently, such conjunction and, in particular, the academic interest it has been able to arise in the last few years have been scrutinized by Nicola J. Watson who contends that, following the remarkable development of the tourism industry, “Scholars of British and American travel-writing have shifted towards examining the ways that tourism constituted national and international subjectivities” (Watson, 2009, 5). With respect to this imaginative forging, Edward Said, who is universally reckoned as one of the founding fathers of (Post-)colonial studies, has foregrounded the exclusivist nature of the European travellers’ gaze and its substantially manipulative intervention in the definition of that multilayered cultural construct that Said has defined as “Orientalism” and by which he has meant “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (Said, 2003, 1). In particular, in his seminal study titled *Orientalism* (1978), the theoretician argues that “even as Europe has moved itself outwards, its sense of cultural strength was fortified. From travelers’ tales, not only from great institutions like the various India companies, colonies were created and ethnocentric perspectives secured” (Said, 2003, 117).

Against this theoretical background, it is my contention that if Said’s position according to which literature has played a fundamental role in the epistemological construction of “Otherness” is associated with the major tenets of British cultural studies, and particularly with its emphasis on the urgency of studying communities’ cultural expressions in relational terms, such productive conflation can help identify the analytic tools apt to interpret an emerging literary counter-discourse intended to deconstruct traditional identity figurations as elaborated within Western culture. Built on specific generic choices including the one known as “re-writing” – which implies the deconstruction of conventional race and/or gender power relations at play in canonical Western texts – and also on anti-canonical stylistic choices, this literary current, which has been defined as (Post-)colonial literature, is interspersed with theoretical tenets and is often linked to political projects aiming to obtain civil equality between different ethnic groups on a national level as well as on an international one.

Following Mike Robinson and Hans Christian Andersen, although they refer to a more extended discursive context, it can be suggested that, within post-colonial narrative production:

- Literary expressions of places, sites and landscape can gain us greater insight into the social, economic, and political order of the world, together with an understanding of identities, the constructions of culture, and the dynamics of landscape change. (Robinson and Andersen, 3)

In the light of what has been argued so far, I believe that the promotion of a kind of literary tourism or, more generally, of cultural tourism able to significantly exploit interconnections with a contemporary literary production imbued with post-colonial issues, may challenge monolithic representations of the Western Self as well as stereotyped figurations of the so called ‘Other’. In its turn, this would pave the way to an ethics of equality which may result instrumental to the promotion of profitable transnational exchanges both on a cultural level and on an economic one.

Within the British context, the abovementioned recasting of cultural heritage is particularly at play in a peculiar example of contemporary literary production, designated as Black British writing. Initially born as a filiation of (post-)colonial literature, it is now largely acknowledged as an autonomous literary

strand.² Among the authors generally included in such literary category is Bernardine Evaristo, critically acclaimed as one of the most interesting and complex voices of contemporary English literature. What makes her production particularly relevant in the context of the present analysis is that, from her author's perspective of a London-born woman writer of mixed origins, Evaristo's narrative intervenes "from within" in the process of self-fashioning of the British national character in order to contest and recast – traditional British as well as Western European representations of essentialized identities.

Moreover, Evaristo's work shows a renewed emphasis on the trope of travel, which also has deep links to her personal experience. In her production physical as well as imaginative journeys become occasions to overcome ethnocentric perspectives as well as exclusivist notions of European identity. While exploring the interconnections between her travels and her own literary production in her essay "The Road Less Travelled", she herself affirms:

- When travelling I relied on osmosis rather than copious note-taking. I soaked up the atmosphere and paid attention to landscapes, peoples and cultures so far remote from my own London one that the impact, which I aimed to recreate, was visually vivid and sensorially potent. I became aware that travelling brings alive the senses and that sensory detail brings alive literature (Evaristo, qtd. in Bernard, 124).

At this point of the analysis in order to show how the insertion within touristic circuits of places and attractions associated with her novels can result in the promotion of an innovative transcultural image of Britain as well as of Western Europe it is necessary to briefly explore the major motifs pervading Evaristo's first three novels.

In her first novel, *Lara* (1997), its young mixed-race eponymous protagonist lays claim to a citizenship which is English and, simultaneously, complicated by further multilayered ethnic/cultural belongings inscribed in her Irish-Nigerian-Brazilian family past and recuperated through her multiple travels. At the beginning of the novel, as a victim of an identity split due to her being a mixed-race girl, she travels to certain London areas previously unknown to her in order to draw her personal cartographies of the multiethnic metropolis so as to attempt to overcome her initial identity cleavage. Later on, she travels to Eastern Europe as well as to Brazil and Nigeria, two countries – both with a colonial past – where Lara attempts to retrace her paternal family's background as she feels this recuperation is necessary to acquire self-awareness. Thus in the novel, the trope of travel proves crucial in the process leading to Lara's acquisition of identity wholeness. However, the latter is far from being characterized by a monolithic nature. As a matter of fact, when, as a young woman, Lara travels to Turkey, on the Mediterranean coasts, in contact with the lively expressions of the local culture and benefiting from the symbiotic invigorating relationship she establishes with people and the environment, she starts remoulding her personal sense of self so that she now perceives her national belonging in hybrid relational terms. As Koye Oyedeki contends, in a dense essay where he analyses both Evaristo's *Lara* and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996):

- It is in her travels, in crossing borders to territories neutral to her like Turkey, that [Lara] feels Britain offers her some sought of home and at the same time becomes less aware of the race politics. [...] As a tourist she is born anew, a reflection on the notion that it is only as cultural tourists, constantly in transit that we do not have to deal with the problematic of identity (Oyedeki, 2005, 358).

Set in Roman Britannia, her subsequent *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), through the figure of Zuleika, a woman of Sudanese origins living in "Londinium", testifies to an English (and, consequently, European) past characterized by racial plurality and long obscured by official British and European history. The novel acts as an attempt to demonstrate, as Steve Martin suggests, that "you can throw a dart in any area of London and find a black contribution to its history" (Martin, qtd. in Lima, 2004, 51). Consequently, since it foregrounds the early presence of Black people in Great Britain, the novel, reveals itself as a further opportunity to contest traditional national identities and to highlight not only competing ones, but also the diasporic movements behind them, movements criss-crossing the Mediterranean area and involving its inhabitants in transcultural exchanges.

² See for the interesting distinction drawn between (post-)colonial literature and Black British literary production the volume edited by Kadija Sesay, *Write Black Write British* (Hertford: Hansib, 2005).

In *Soul Tourists* (2005), Evaristo's third novel, the deconstruction of 'race' as a discrete and homogenous elaboration is extended to the whole of Europe and embraces multiple time levels. The novel enables Evaristo to unveil and subvert those discursive dynamics which have obscured the symbolic figurations of ethnic Otherness through deliberate omissions and historical erosions. Significantly enough, the novel is centred on the black Britons Stanley Williams and Jessie O'Donnell's voyage across Europe and as far as the Middle East, a route Evaristo herself has travelled along. Again, the trope of travel and displacement plays an important role in the novel and it also acquires existential connotations. In this respect Louise Bernard suggests that:

- Evaristo's third novel, *Soul Tourists* (2005), continues her investigation of the connections between travel and transformation, both at the level of metaphor and in the relationship between literary form and content (Bernard, 125).

Soul Tourists is intended to imaginatively recuperate those lost voices revealing the Africanist presence in the European past, a past which has been deliberately silenced within the official practices of History-making. Thus, along the voyage, Stanley – who shares with his now dead and beloved mother the uncanny power to perceive immaterial entities – meets, among others, Lucy Negro (William Shakespeare's Dark Lady), Louise-Marie, the Black Nun (that is Queen's Marie-Therese's daughter born following her presumed relation with a black man), Alessandro of Florence, Mary Seacole, Alexander Pushkin and, ultimately, Queen Charlotte Sofia (George III's wife).

However tenuous their links with the European past may be, as they are ghostly figures speaking from a marginal historical space, their voicing – albeit a fictional rendering – is nevertheless instrumental to Evaristo's contribution to the delineation of a "usable past for Black Britons of today" as suggested by Bruce King (King, 2002, 147). In the novel their presence works as a sort of guarantee for Stanley's right to belong, a motif pervading the narrative from its very start. In Bernard's words:

- As the receptacle for lost and reclaimed historical knowledge (information that he receives along with the reader), Stanley enjoys an understanding of what it means to be a different sort of traveler, or "soul tourist". (Bernard, 126)

In the light of this brief excursus, it can be said that Evaristo's production contributes to a new reading (albeit an imaginative one) of European as well as Mediterranean history. *Lara*, *The Emperor's Babe* and *Soul Tourists* are examples of a new historical novel intended to question the notion of modern Europe as the fruit of an exclusively classical – that is Roman and Greek – culture. Her new representational strategies pave the way to alternative interrelational forms of transmission concerning the European past and acting as the literary premise for the delineation of projective cosmopolitan contexts where cultural boundaries are made permeable. In addition, they also hint at a possible (re)construction of a cultural fabric between Euro-Mediterranean peoples on the basis of the common awareness of a shared historical past and of mutual influences which have helped to build an international cultural tradition. Briefly, as has been suggested, "her work throws into sharp relief the idea of "heritage" as a peculiar type of industry" (Bernard, 119). An industry, I would suggest, that, on the one hand, can be held responsible for the production of stereotypical identity models, but that, on the other, can also be productively revisited so as to offer a counter narrative as demonstrated by the literary intervention of post-colonial writers and – particularly in the context of Great Britain – of Black British ones.

On an imaginative level, the content of Evaristo's novels, through its foregrounding of the Black presence in Britain and in Europe at large, allows a revised exploration of contemporary British identities as well as of the European cultural heritage and demonstrates that its conventional expressions can be deconstructed and problematized. It is my belief that such narratives strategies can offer a symbolic underpinning which, in its turn, may be productively exploited within the project known as Integrated Relational Tourism, notably entailing a constructive kind of cultural dialogue between the countries belonging to the Euro-Mediterranean area.

As a matter of fact, processes of symbolic differentiation affecting traditional representations of groups (be they cultural or social) as homogenous, especially when the latter are inscribed into hierarchical relations, effectively contribute to subvert the oppositional nature of such binarisms. Deliberately and more markedly stressed by the hegemonic groups, these dichotomies are weakened when the porosity of their constitutive terms comes to be foregrounded. In its turn, the deriving cultural multiplicity, in so much as it contradicts preconceived ideas of separateness, enables a cultural dialogue within which local identities and their respective value systems are valorised and appreciated.

Far from exclusively triggering changes on a cultural level, these revised perceptions of Otherness also have reflections on economic transactions as they may help promote forms of effective transnational cooperation and egalitarian economic exchanges. In this arena tourism – because it entails not only fluxes of people but also dynamics of cultural perceptions – can play a major role and it is particularly in the present alarming context of “fortress Europe” that, I believe, those who operate especially within the industry of literary and/or cultural tourism are urged to promote the application of the “Integrated Relational Tourism” model and to foster further revised narratives of the European/Mediterranean space and history by implementing the promotion of attractions which may allow tourists’ insight into multivocal cultural and historical representations.

Finally, it is important to say that this revision of history and of symbolic practices should not be limited to the tourist sector only, but it should necessarily involve teaching practices and school curricula so that words such as “integration” and “multiculturalism” could start to designate real social phenomena rather than projective ones.

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