

Travel Journalism: Europe imagining the Middle East

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Like international news, travel journalism draws upon and perpetuates the “home” nation’s collective imagination of different parts of the world (Fursich and Kavoori, 2001). In keeping with the hierarchical nature of news genres and the academic attention they garner, travel journalism has tended to be overlooked in favour of the “hard” news of political reporting. Nonetheless, given its long history of representing “other” peoples and “other” places, travel journalism is an equally important site for the study of transcultural encounters.

This paper focuses on the ways in which travel journalism represents the Middle East in three British Sunday broadsheets; The Sunday Times, The Independent on Sunday, and The Sunday Telegraph as well as Amman to Wadi Rum, a programme broadcast by the pan-European network, the Travel Channel. The rich cultural and political heritage of Europe’s relations with the Middle East provides an ideal context to examine how travel journalism frames “others”. Specifically, three primary considerations will be addressed: how does this journalism construct cultural frames for the peoples and places of the Middle East?; to what extent do these cultural frames draw upon Europe’s colonial past?; and is this representational trope constitutive of a European imagining of the Middle East?

Keywords: travel journalism; travel writing; Orientalism; Middle East; representation; consumerism

Introduction

The term “European journalism” suggests a sense of commonality and community. It implies the possibility of widely held ideological and professional values as well as a potentially emergent pan-European public sphere. The validity of such associations is dependent on the comparative evaluation of professional practices, journalistic modes of representation, as well as ownership structures and the political economy, across Europe. Consideration of these issues – many of which have been undertaken elsewhere in this special edition – necessarily focus inwardly on Europe. However, it is also important to consider the ways in which these commonalities – the “European-ness” of European journalism - are informed by “the global interconnectedness of media” (Zelizer, 2002, p.21).

Clearly, the ways in which European journalism might be informed and influenced by the broader cultural, political, technological and economic “scapes” of global capitalism (Appadurai, 1997) are numerous and multifaceted; too much so to fully address here. Rather, in focusing on travel journalism, this paper seeks to contribute to this discussion in relation to one “scape”, in particular – the cultural. Specifically, the intention of this paper is examine the representations of the Arab world in a selection of travel journalism; to explore whether there appears to be a “characteristic” trope for imagining the Middle East and, if so, consider the implications of this for European travel journalism.

As Fursich and Kavoori (2001) have noted, travel journalism, in common with international news, draws on and helps perpetuate the identity of the “home” nation, as well as its collective imagination of different parts of the world. As such, it is an important site for the study of transcultural encounters. Moreover, its construction of cultural frames for “others” often makes reference to Europe’s colonial past with the readership encouraged to recall or even re-enact earlier journeys/explorations, often through “constructs of authenticity” (Fursich and Kavoori, 2001, p.157). Given its significant heritage as “Westerners’ oldest destination of travel” (Melman, 2002, p.105), the focus here on the Middle East is apposite in respect of both the study of cultural frames for ‘others’ and the ways in which travel journalism engages with Europe’s colonial past. It is also important to consider how older, established discursive constructions of the Middle East interact with, and are employed by, travel journalism in its modern context of commercialisation and individualised consumption. As primary sources, this paper will focus on a selection of articles from the travel supplements of British weekend newspapers, including *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Independent on Sunday*, as well as a programme broadcast by the pan-European television network, the Travel Channel. The programme is from the Travel Channel’s *Global Nomad* series and is titled *Amman to Wadi Rum*.¹

A historically significant source of travel journalism, most British weekend broadsheet newspapers have had close associations with a number of critically acclaimed travel writers. Most notably perhaps, Eric Newby was the travel editor at *The Observer* from 1964-1973.² Similarly, writers such as Jan Morris, William Dalrymple and Colin Thubron, amongst many others, have all written for the travel supplements of British broadsheet newspapers.³ Not only is this revealing in terms of the literary origins of travel journalism but it is also indicative of some of the representational and stylistic influences on the genre. Owned by Discovery Communications, the Travel Channel is a satellite and internet (subscription) based provider, broadcasting content in 14 languages across Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The Travel Channel describes itself on its website as “the largest pan-European TV channel dedicated to the world of travel” (www.travelchannel.co.uk/aboutus.htm).

In examining the representational tropes for imagining the Middle East, the use here of both British (newspaper) and pan-European (satellite television) based sources also allows for the exploration of the trajectory of tropes across these “texts”. Specifically, this is dependent on two principal concerns. Firstly, what representational strategies are deployed in travel journalism on the Middle East and are they constitutive of a European imagining of the Middle East? Moreover, to what extent do these strategies make use of older, colonialist frames of reference? Secondly, it is important that these representational concerns are considered in terms of the commercial context in which they are produced. Specifically, in what ways does the representational strategy of authenticity function in locating aspects of the past in the present? How does the deployment of past discursive formations serve the modern, commercial context in which they are being produced?

Making a case for studying travel journalism

Within the profession, travel journalism has traditionally been perceived as much lower in status and level of importance than the “hard” news of politics and international relations. As Fursich notes, this is, in part at least, because the genre seems at odds with some of the core values of the profession: “objectivity, editorial independence and public relevance” (2002, p.61). Travel accounts are usually based on personal experience and, in this sense, travel journalism is often seen as subjective and associated more with the literary genre of travel writing than “hard” news. This perception of travel journalism is further muddled by the genre’s close relationship with advertising - most forms of travel journalism include advertising features or sponsored articles. This further blurs the issue of objectivity and adds to the perception that travel journalism lacks the critical distance associated with other genres, such as political or financial journalism. However, such a view of travel journalism overlooks some important considerations. Most significantly, the travel and tourism industry is the largest in the world (WTTC, 2000, p.8). Indeed, as Urry notes:

There are 698 million international passenger arrivals each year, compared with 25 million in 1950 – with the total predicted to be one billion by 2010 and 1.6 billion by 2020 (2002, p.5)

Furthermore, in the UK, for example, travel accounts for approximately 40 percent of available leisure time (Williams and Shaw, 1988, p.12). Allied to the shortening of working hours over the last thirty years, travel and tourism are no longer the preserve of the middle and upper classes. Indeed, tourism is also becoming a more global and less predominantly western activity (Urry, 2002, pp.5-6). In addition to the long established tourist industry in the west, sustained economic growth of countries such as China, Russia and India has led to the emergence of new tourism markets catering for the growth in aspirant middle and upper classes who travel internationally.

The growth of the global tourism industry has been matched by an expansion in travel journalism. The origins of this genre – the travel sections of national newspapers – now compete with general and specialist travel magazines, as well as the emergence of travel-related internet sites, forums and blogs. Mainstream broadcast media in the UK, for example, also produce a large volume of travel-related content including celebrity travel shows (such as the BBC’s Holiday programme), current affairs/travel programmes (Radio 4’s Excess Baggage and From our own Correspondent), buying holiday homes abroad (Channel 4’s Homes in the Sun), cookery/travel (BBC’s Hairy Bikers, Jamie Oliver or Rick Stein’s programmes). In addition, several satellite/internet-based television channels dedicated to travel have emerged. Examples are the “Travel Channel” (owned by Discovery Communications and available throughout most of Europe and the US), “Travel Television International”, as well as the French travel channel, “Voyage”.

Clearly, the perception of travel journalism as less important or of lower status than other journalistic genres does not take account of the massive expansion of the social phenomenon on which it is based (i.e. tourism). Consequently, several media critics such as Allan (1999), as well as Sparks and Tulloch (2000), have suggested that the traditional, hierarchical view of

journalistic genres with the hard news of politics and international relations at the pinnacle, is in need of re-evaluation. Indeed, they and others, such as Spurr (1993), have also questioned the traditional view of the journalistic professional values of objectivity, editorial independence and truthfulness – attributes travel journalism is often perceived as lacking. For example, Fursich suggests:

...media globalization undermines the national frame of reference of journalists.

Moreover, the increasing profit expectations and competition in the news business have led to a blurring of boundaries between information and entertainment. At the same time, technological developments such as the internet threaten the agenda-setting position of journalists in the public sphere. Overall the traditionally secure and privileged position of journalists in public discourse has become increasingly vulnerable. This situation urges scholars of journalism studies to re-evaluate many tacit assumptions and rituals of professional praxis. (2002, p.59)

Yet, whilst these assumptions have been evaluated in relation to other genres of journalism, academic attention has tended to overlook travel journalism. Nonetheless, it is significant to note that in keeping with international news, travel journalism provides an important function in presenting different parts of the world to the “home” nation (Spurr, 1993, p.19). Like international news, travel journalism also has a long history of representing “other” peoples and “other” places to its readers, viewers and listeners. With reference to our collective knowledge of Europe’s colonial past, travel journalism often recalls or even re-enacts earlier journeys and explorations. Whilst the latter places considerable emphasis on immediacy as a primary reporting criterion, as well as the currency of events, “hard” news seems to place an increasing emphasis on the future. Travel journalism, by contrast, is considerably more far reaching and varied in remit with the emphasis more on evoking the past. In this way, whilst immediacy is a primary signifier of “hard” news, authenticity is a principal representational strategy of travel journalism (Fursich and Kavoori, 2001, p.157). It is a strategy often mobilised in the endeavour of presenting aspects of the past, for example, the cultural, architectural or artistic heritage of a travel destination, to the tourist-consumer. Thus, in this commercial environment of lifestyle advertising and individualised consumption, the representational strategy of authenticity is a particularly significant characteristic of travel journalism: not only does it act as a conduit to older, often colonialist discourses, it is frequently the principal means by which the travel experience is constructed in a personalised, rather than mass, and unique, rather than homogenous, manner.

Analysing travel journalism

Given the literary origins of travel journalism it is perhaps not surprising that amongst the few academic works specifically on the genre, most make use of analytical methods derived from the field of travel writing studies. For example, in their article, titled “Mapping a critical framework for the study of 5

travel journalism" (2001), Fursich and Kavoori suggest there are three contextual frameworks in which the study of travel journalism is located: periodization, power and identity, and experience and phenomenology (2001, pp.154-155). Periodization is identified in terms of modernity and postmodernity. This provides a basis upon which the cultural and social development of both travel and tourism can be contextualised "within the historical development of western societies" (2001, p.155). The issue of power and identity is addressed through the concept of cultural imperialism and, in particular, Mary Louise Pratt's work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). Pratt focuses on questioning how "travel writing produced 'the rest of the world' for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory?" (1992, p.5). This emphasis on the discursive construction of travel writing is of particular significance for Fursich and Kavoori in so far as it provides the methodological basis upon which to posit the development of an understanding of "the representational practices of travel journalism" (2001, p.161). Lastly, Fursich and Kavoori identify experience and phenomenology as a form of research which provides a means of analysing and categorising the "dynamics of tourist and host interactions" in order to formulate "typologies of tourists/tourism and tourist experiences" (2001, p.164).

Whilst it does not focus solely on travel journalism, David Spurr's book *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (1993), adopts a similarly discursive approach in order to map the development of colonial discourse across a range of texts. This necessitates the identification of specific rhetorical modalities; what Spurr refers to as "a range of tropes, conceptual categories, and logical operations available for the purposes of representation" (1993, p.3). The mapping of these modes of representation crosses generic boundaries between travel writing, newspaper journalism and government documents on colonial administration. This enables Spurr to organise a genealogical structure "in which the repetitions and variations of these [representational] tropes are seen to operate across a range of nineteenth and twentieth-century contexts" (1993, p.3).

The emphasis in the works of both Fursich and Kavoori, and Spurr on examining the representational intentions of travel journalism and their location within broader discursive contexts, builds on the paradigm developed by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978/1991). Focusing on a wide range of "texts", this approach enabled Said to find in their representational structures "a similar intent, and a similar effect" and, on this basis, to argue that they are indices of Orientalist discourse (1991, pp.2-3, 22-23, 94).

Whilst this paper's examination of the modes of representation deployed in travel journalism on the Middle East must take account of the ways in which it might be perceived as "Orientalist", it is not possible to simply apply Said's methodological position in its entirety. In part this is because, as a number of critics have suggested, Said's view of Orientalism as an unchanging discourse whose "unity [is] derived from a common and continuing experience of fascination with the threat from the East" is problematic (Williams, 1994, p.152). This view is premised on Orientalist discourse being homogenous in structure, and, as such, deviates from the

Foucauldian methodological approach Said claims to deploy. It also, as others, such as Ali Behdad's work *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (1994), have shown, does not accurately account for the "complexities of its micropractices...strategic irregularities, historical discontinuities, and discursive heterogeneity" of Orientalism (1994, p.13). In terms of the intentions of this paper, there is an additional problem with Said's approach. Whilst it would undoubtedly prove effective in locating any Orientalist characteristics in travel journalism's discursive production, it does not facilitate consideration of the broader context of leisure consumption and commercialisation in which it is produced.

In this respect, whilst the focus of Behdad's study on late nineteenth century European travel writing on the Middle East is not of direct relevance, his refiguring of the Saidian paradigm is particularly apposite. Behdad argues for a "genealogical understanding" that treats "discourses and events as discontinuous practices...by addressing the micropolitics of Europe's relations to its Others" (1994, p.13).⁴ This involves viewing discourse as an uneven exchange of power, whereby the critic who deploys this approach is able to examine the variation and disjuncture within a discursive formation. This perspective takes account of the epistemological influences that bear upon discursive formations, as well as the broader context in which they are produced. Thus, Behdad's approach is well suited to addressing the two principal concerns of this paper: the representational strategies of travel journalism and their engagement with older, colonialist discourses, and the implications of this, given the commercial context of their production. The notion of authenticity is particularly relevant here. It acts as a conduit between travel journalism's engagement with older, colonialist discourses, and the highly commercialised environment of individualised, lifestyle consumption in which it is produced. Indeed, given the ways in which representational strategies of authenticity connect these two contexts, the intention here is to organise the analysis thematically. Thus, consideration of the first context – the use of colonialist discourses – will be examined in terms of the ways in which representational strategies of authenticity are often deployed in order to position the Middle East as pre-modern, exotic and other. The second context – the consumption of these lifestyle experiences – will be examined in terms of the ways in which referents of authenticity are used in order to present the tourist experience as individualised and unique.

The broadsheet newspaper articles under consideration here are: "My kind of town: Aleppo" by Greg Malouf (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 21/05/2007), "Jordan: Hike Bedouin-style for an authentic experience" by Jeremy Head (*The Independent on Sunday*, 02/09/2007), "Yemen: Mountains and desert, tribes and tradition in the Middle East" by Ginny Hill (*The Independent on Sunday*, 19/05/2007), "Bedouin and board in the Sinai" by Christine Toomey (*The Sunday Times*, 28/01/07), and "Petra's grand secret entrance" by Jeremy Seal (*The Sunday Times*, 12/11/07). All of these newspapers feature extensive travel supplements on both Saturdays and Sundays. Typically, their readerships are affluent and aspirational and tend to invest above average cultural and financial capital in their travel and leisure time.

The *Amman to Wadi Rum* programme is part of The Travel Channel's *Global Nomad Series*, which comprises of six programmes on the Middle East and six on China. The series is presented by Irish travel documentary maker, 7

Manchan Magan (www.manchan.com). In addition to its pan-European satellite and internet delivery, The Travel Channel also produces a “mirror” site in Polish, accessible at; www.travelchanneltv.pl. Here Polish viewers can access the same range of videos as UK viewers with the content dubbed into Polish. Given its wide availability across Europe, the Travel Channel is clearly a significant source of travel journalism for the European region.

Authenticating the past

In considering how travel journalism presents the Middle East as other and exotic, as well as ancient and traditional, what is apparent is that it tends to make use of representational strategies that have their origins in 19th century European travel writing. In particular, variations of two specific representational strategies can be found in the selection of material sampled here. These two strategies are deployed as a means of conveying what is presented as two key aspects of the Middle East travel experience: the people, principally, the Bedouin, and the landscape, principally, the desert. It is significant to note that these representational constructs have a long, established history in European travel writing on the Middle East (Cocker, 1992; Tidrick, 1989). By the mid-late 1800s these representational motifs began to take hold with the emergence of a specific genre of travel writing on the Arabian peninsula.⁵ This cohered around the publication of Richard Burton’s *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1856), Anne Noel King Blunt’s *A Pilgrimage to Nedj, the Cradle of the Arab Race* (1879) and Charles Montagu Doughty’s *Arabia Deserta* (1888) (Melman, 2002, p.113).⁶ This was, however, by no means a solely British genre of travel writing, nor had it become a solely British representational framework. French works such as Francois-Rene Chateaubriand’s *Itineraire de Paris a Jerusalem, et de Jerusalem a Paris* (1810-1811), Gerard de Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient* (1867) or Gustave Flaubert’s *Voyage en Egypte* (1849), in common with much European travel writing of this period, made use of the same basic representational paradigm (Said, 1991, pp.166-197). As Melman (2002) also notes these strategies became the de facto means by which Europe imagined the Middle East.

Re-workings of this representational strategy can be found in all of the material sampled here. For example, Jeremy Head’s article for *The Independent on Sunday* “Jordan: Hike Bedouin-style for an authentic desert experience” (02/09/2007) follows very closely the 19th century model for representing the Bedouin. The article is an account of an eight day walking holiday where tourists trek across the sands and dry river valleys of the desert to Petra. Given the subject matter, it is perhaps not surprising to find numerous references to the Bedouin and the desert landscape. For example, Head writes of camping out in the desert in the tents of their Bedouin guides:

The fire crackled, and the odours from the pot were fat and sweet. Our Bedouin team sang evening prayers together, their voices echoing around the valley. After dinner Yamaan fired up his sisha water pipe and showed us how to puff its scented smoke. The long bubbling draft was surprisingly mild. I drifted off to sleep to the gurgle of the pipe and the Morse code of crickets (02/09/2007)

Without wishing to enter into a discussion on the extent to which Head's writing constitutes an objective account of his actual experience of camping in the desert, it is significant to note that what we learn of the experience here calls on our collective imagination of past adventurers in Arabia – perhaps, most popularly, T.E. Lawrence. In so doing, the experience, as it is presented to Head and, presumably, to other tourists, appears to be based on re-creating a highly mythologised and iconic aspect of European travel in the deserts of Arabia: sitting around a campfire with one's Bedouin guides under a star-filled desert sky. Beyond the actuality of his experience, what is significant is that, in his writing, Head makes use of a set of signifiers that are redolent of travel writers such as Lawrence and his predecessors. The language used to describe the food cooked on a "crackling" fire, producing "odours that are fat and sweet" is rich and romantic. Moreover, imagery, such as the Bedouin whose voices in prayer echo "around the valley" and the "long bubbling draft" of the water pipe, strongly evoke the mythologised dynamics of the European traveller and his Bedouin, a recurring theme of 19th century travel writing on the region. By way of illustration, Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* (1959) provides an example of this dynamic. Here, as with Head's article, the campfire scene is described in rich, romantic prose. The sense of community and camaraderie are strong – the desert sands are barren yet beautiful, with the Bedouin revered for the simple, timeless, purity of their existence.

A cold wind blew in gusts across the desert, charged with a fine spray of sand; the stars were very bright... The others were busy in the firelight – sewing a buckle on a cartridge belt, patching a rent in a shirt, seeing to a saddle, cleaning a rifle, or plaiting a rope. (1959, p.108)

It is also possible to find in the material sampled here instances where the landscape is represented in ways reminiscent of 19th century travel writing. Principally, these relate to representations of the desert, but accounts of other landscapes and spaces are often also presented in ways that imagine a rich Arabian past. For example, Ginny Hill's article "Yemen: Mountains and desert, tribes and tradition in the Middle East" in the *Independent on Sunday* (19/05/2007), as the title suggests, places considerable emphasis on the possibility of encountering the authentic and unchanged past. It includes an account of a visit to the town of Sana, which focuses on the town's market place, the Souq Al Milh. Like the practice of sitting around the campfire with one's Bedouin, the souk holds a similarly iconic and mythical status in the history of Europe's imagining of the Middle East. Here, as with Head's article, people and spaces are surveyed for signifiers that provide links to an imagined Arabian past. Hill writes in a highly romanticised way which affirms that traditions are unchanged and the past is alive and accessible today. For example, the souk provides:

enough enchantment...to believe for a fleeting moment that you might yet find a magic carpet, hidden between the antique muskets, honeycomb and sticky dates (19/05/2007)

Freya Stark's *The Southern Gates of Arabia* (1936), like Hill's article, is also written on the Hadramaut region (Yemen) and makes use of a similarly romantic style when describing buildings and villages; one where antiquity is also prized over modernity. Here, for example, Stark gives an account of arriving in the city of Al-Qatn:

The city gate of qatn was opened to our passing. We drove into the hot afternoon and the emptiness of the valley, fringed now almost continuously on its southern side with palms. Here and there was a white siqaya; a camel or two, pitched along with spout-like neck and half-closed eyelids...We passed wells and solitary house-forts, with four corner towers they were old or otherwise with plain and naked walls....(1936, p.185)

More commonplace than descriptions of towns and dwellings are descriptions of the desert. Again, the travel journalism sampled here predominantly deploys representational strategies that bear a strong resemblance to those found in 19th century travel writing. For example, Christine Toomey's article on camel trekking in the Southern Sinai, "Bedouin and board in the Sinai" in *The Sunday Times* (28/01/07) contains several descriptions of the desert terrain. It emphasises the barren beauty of the desert: "The sun washed the sandstone cliffs pink before setting, leaving the deep basin where we sat a metal grey" (28/01/07). Moreover, the article also makes use of a further aspect of this representational strategy, one in which this aestheticisation of the desert is presented as cleansing the self and returning it to a space safe from the complexities and stresses of the modern world: "as we moved on the following night to camp in a dry wadi, where sand dunes swell like waves against rock cliffs, I realised this was a rare time of shared peace" (28/01/07). In this way, Melman's view that 19th century travel writing on Arabia drew on "the late Victorian penchant for barren and wild landscapes, as well as on earlier Romantic concepts of the 'Great' in nature" is reflected in Toomey's article (2002, p.114).

This kind of imaging of the landscape is significant in that it not only calls into being a particular view of the past, the authentic Arabia, but also avoids notably the other landscapes of the contemporary Middle East. With the possible exception of Dubai, it is very difficult to find examples of travel journalism which make references to the modern, city landscapes of the Middle East. For example, an article in *The Sunday Times* titled "Where to find authentic Dubai" searches for the signs of traditional cultural practices beyond this "Disney in the desert" (08/09/07). In this way, most representations tend to adhere to what Melman refers to in the context of 19th century travel writing as a position in which the traveller/author is the "keeper of the pristine Arab way of life and the true and pure Arabia" (2002, p.116).

In the pan-European context of *Amman to Wadi Rum* we are not are presented with an entirely "pure" Arabia. There is, nonetheless, a distinct emphasis on unearthing the unchanged and authentic of which the presenter, Manchan Magan, is not so much the "keeper" as the guide. Even in a medium which, unlike newspaper-based travel journalism, has little historical association with travel writing, there are instances here where the traditional

means of representing the Bedouin and the desert landscape are relied upon. A particularly explicit use of these referents occurs during a sequence in which Magan is travelling in the Wadi Rum. Accompanied by images of the dry river beds and sands of the Wadi Rum, Magan's voiceover tells us there are "no cars, banks, shops or running water here", emphasising the other worldliness of the place. The commentary continues by describing how Magan happens to meet a Bedouin man who is on his way to visit an uncle who still lives as a nomadic tribesman in the desert; Magan is invited to join him on this 20 mile journey by camel. Accompanying images of the vast, yet beautiful, desert, the voiceover comments that the "desert is the realm of the Bedouin" and that they have lived there for "over a million years". In this sense, the programme has much in common with what Behdad, in the context of 19th Century travel writing on the Middle East, refers to as:

...a positivistic urge to find an 'elsewhere' still unexplored by previous travelers, a place where a traveler could still become a pioneer, a heroic adventurer, and have an 'authentic' experience of otherness...(1994, p.93)

Dressed traditionally, the Bedouin speak very good English. One comments: "to an outsider the desert looks like sand, sand everywhere, but to the Bedouin they understand what there is, what it is worth". This does not appear to be a reference to the desert's potential as a source of financial income but rather its natural worth as a provider of a way of life for the Bedouin. Next to the two men sits a young Bedouin boy playing with a mobile phone. He features in many of the shots in this section of the programme and, as a result, contributes to the impression that *Amman to Wadi Rum* is trying to convey a sense of the interaction between the traditional and the modern. The overriding impression here is that the past is still accessible, that Bedouin living by traditional means can still be found. In this way, the portrayal is very much in keeping with the elegiac 19th century descriptions of the Bedouin as "noble" whose traditional cultural practices have remained unchanged by outside influences (Tidrick, 1989, p.199). As the conversation continues, the women of the camp begin to prepare a meal and, in keeping with tradition, this involves the killing of a goat in honour of their guests (the presenter and camera crew). Here, again, the inclusion of the preparation and serving of the meal adds to the impression that the programme is seeking out instances where traditional life continues to survive. The graphic way in which we see the goat being killed and every stage of its meat being butchered compounds the sense of otherness conveyed by the images of the Bedouin tents. However, the otherness of these images is countered to an extent by Magan who comments that:

...whilst the butchering of a goat might seem barbaric and whilst the Bedouin's use of parts of the goat that we, in the West, would not ordinarily eat, in fact the Bedouin are simply making use of their resources in a way that our ancestors would have a few generations ago (*Amman to Wadi Rum*)

The impression of this footage of the meal being prepared and its accompanying commentary is one of reassurance: that it is possible to still encounter Bedouin who live by traditional means, and, in so doing, experience something beyond our cultural field of experience, but that this otherness is fundamentally “safe” and non-threatening. The sequence ends with the Bedouin men singing a traditional song while the sun sets and their children laugh and play with Magan. This contrasts with the next sequence in which Magan visits a small town and comments that “the luxuries of modern life are a magnet to us all; whole families begin that slide [from nomadic] to settled living”. There is a sense here of the tension between the past and present: a tension in which, as the use of the word “slide” suggests, the traditional is prized over the impact of global capitalism. As such, the programme reveals something of the “schizoid discourse” Behdad found in 19th century travel writing:

The emergence of a schizoid discourse that simultaneously affirms and exposes the ideological discrepancies and political predicaments of [post] colonial hegemony...an intricate interplay of repetition and innovation, orthodoxy and nonconformity, affirmation and subversion. (1994, p.14)

Tourist experience and lifestyle choice

Whilst the trope of authenticity serves as a means of evoking representational modes typical of 19th century travel writing, in today’s commercialised environment it also serves as a means of individualising, of making unique, the tourist experience. Referents of authenticity are used as a means of constructing the tourist experience as personalised. In this respect, it is important to consider this representational strategy in the broader context of the cultural practice of tourism. This has been characterised by critics such as Culler (1981) and Urry (1990) as being premised on the dynamic of looking, where the tourist experience is subject to a form of “semiotic cataloguing” in which the final meaning ascribed to each “moment” or “instance” of our holiday experience is determined in the context of what we had previously imagined this experience to be. Thus, if the practice of tourism is premised on a dynamics of looking – the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990) – then authenticity in this context functions as a way of mapping out and sharpening up the tourists’ focal lens. The travel journalism sampled here is instructive in terms of indicating to the potential tourist-consumer where and what to look at. Moreover, this is presented to the tourism-consumer in an appealingly personalised way. The use of this trope of authenticity as a means of presenting the tourist experience as individualised seems to function in two ways. Firstly, at a more general level, we, as the readers or audience, are positioned in terms of lifestyle choices; secondly, the tourist experience is presented as offering the potential for unique and personalised cultural encounters.

Jeremy Seal’s article, “Petra’s grand secret entrance” in *The Sunday Times* (12/ 11/2006) contains an example of this first, more general, use of authenticity. Like Head’s article in *The Independent on Sunday*, Seal’s is an account of a walking holiday in Jordan organised through the same tour company, *Walks Worldwide*. It includes the sub-heading “You can just turn up

at Petra, buy the T-shirt and clear off, but Jeremy Seal knows a much better way to do it". Here, a distinction is made between how the mass tourist might arrive at and "see" Petra, and how the more considered individual might do so. Interestingly, Head's article also contains several examples of this use of authenticity where the reader is interpellated directly:

Although one of the Middle East's most mystical places [Petra], even on a quiet day the narrow gully that leads to it is busy with people, horse-drawn carriages, and camels. But now you can walk five days across the desert, through gorges and over mountain passes and arrive, dust-spattered and sweaty, on the far side of the complex with hardly a soul around. You feel like Indiana Jones. (02/09/2007)

The reader of these articles is therefore positioned as having made, or having the potential to make, the lifestyle choices required for this kind of tourist experience to have some appeal. As such, there is a form of flattery implied here; the reader is flattered at being distinguished as an individual who would appreciate the unique tourist experience a walking holiday in Jordan offers. The premise of such interpellation is that the individual who chooses to go on such a holiday will encounter a unique, personalised experience.

This use of authenticity is not confined to titles and sub-headings but is a key narrative element in the material sampled here. For example, *The Sunday Telegraph* recently featured an article titled "My kind of town: Aleppo" (21/05/2007). The premise of this feature is that a celebrity and/or travel expert writes about their favourite places to visit. In this case, Greg Malouf, a "Middle-Eastern cuisine specialist" discusses the locations he likes to visit in the Syrian town of Aleppo. Aleppo is a relatively unknown place to visit by people from the UK, indeed, Syria itself is considerably less well established as a holiday destination than other countries in the Middle East such as Egypt, Jordan, and Oman. Throughout the article the emphasis is on revealing to the readership the ancient, and hitherto unknown, pleasures of visiting Aleppo. This is made immediately apparent in the sub-heading which proclaims "Aleppo has retained a magical unspoilt feel". The main body of the article makes reference to Aleppo's "sprawling medieval souk", "exquisite Ottoman buildings" and "the legendary Syrian hospitality". Whilst there is an emphasis here on the past, this in itself does not constitute the predominant discursive mode. Rather, references to the past are deployed as a means of distinguishing Aleppo from other holiday destinations in the Middle East. Again, the implication here is that in visiting Aleppo the tourist will encounter something unique and markedly different from, what on the face of it, might appear to be similar destinations. In framing the destination as different and special, the tourist is positioned as embodying a specific set of lifestyle choices. Thus, the particularity being attached to the destination implies a similar degree of particularity (or the potential for) in the tourist.

However, whilst Aleppo is distinguished as different, we also learn that its other worldliness can be experienced safely and in a non-threatening way. For example, Syria is "one of the friendliest and least hard-work Arab countries to visit", whilst Aleppo itself is "safe and virtually crime-free" and

does not “have the same drink or drug culture as many large Western cities. Nor does it have the same hassle as, say, Morocco or Egypt”. Similarly, following somewhat gung-ho claims of high adventure, Head’s article ends with a description of how his trek finished with a night in a “plush” hotel. Head signs off with: “I ordered the coldest, sharpest beer I’ve quaffed in years. Sometimes civilisation isn’t so bad” (02/09/2007). It is in statements such as these that the constructed nature of both the destination’s difference and the tourist’s distinguished individuality is most visible. The reader is ultimately assured that different and unique are not threatening and dangerous. In this way, it is possible to see the commercial imperative of this use of authenticity, for, in reality, the appeal of visiting somewhere new and unique, yet safe and non-threatening, is arguably very broad.

Indeed, in terms of the second function of authenticity in this context – as a means of marking out the tourist experience as offering the potential for unique and personalised cultural encounters - the Travel Channel’s *Amman to Wadi Rum* programme contains several examples. Here again, in this pan-European context, authenticity is used as a representational strategy for marking out the tourist experience as extraordinary rather than typical. For example, in one section of the programme, Magan visits some 7th century hunting forts built by the Ommiad people, one of the first of the “great nomadic tribes of Arabia to settle”. Built in the desert, Magan speculates, that their hunting forts perhaps provided a space “where they could forget the trials of empire building and return to their desert heritage”. Following a section in which Magan is filmed driving through the desert passing numerous oil tankers, there is a sense of past surviving in modernity. Indeed, as with the examples from Head and Seal above, in evoking the past, the intention is to personalise the experience. We are assured that it is possible to get beyond the trappings of modernity and, if we take these visual images at a literal level, simply happen upon the ancient and traditional.

The section in which Magan visits the Bedouin at their desert camp makes use of a similar representational structure in which the viewer is positioned as an individual who will, should they follow the presenter’s example, be involved in a unique cultural encounter. Clearly, this section of *Amman to Wadi Rum* is significant in terms of the way in which it deploys authenticity as a representational strategy for evoking the past. However, this section is also significant for the way in which it interpellates the viewer on the basis of their cultural experience and lifestyle choices. The way in which the section is filmed and its accompanying commentary, suggest, as with the visit to the Ommiad dwellings, that this tourist experience was very much happened upon. Magan appears to happen upon meeting a Bedouin man, who by chance, is visiting an uncle who lives by traditional means in the desert. In telling us that whilst the desert “appears at first as barren and hostile [it] is in fact fruitful and welcoming”, it is made clear that this apparently unplanned and spontaneous cultural encounter with the Bedouin is not as difficult or as dangerous as it might seem. In assuming this to be the intended meaning, a degree of cultural capital is implied for the viewer: we too could experience such a unique and memorable cultural encounter.

Conclusions

Firstly, it is important to make two general points about the nature of travel journalism. Fundamentally, travel journalism has to be alive to the cultural expectations and experience of its consumers. If, as Urry suggests, the tourist gaze “presupposes a system of social activities and signs which locate tourist practices”, it follows that travel journalism must presuppose – at least to some extent – its audiences’ preconceptions of a place or region (2001: 1). In this respect, as Spurr notes, the travel journalist is always “on the lookout for scenes that carry an already established interest for a Western audience, thus investing perception itself with the mediating power of cultural difference” (1991: 21). On this basis, the cultural representations in travel journalism can be seen as cyclical in character - in affirming (at least to some extent) the cultural preconceptions of its audience, the degree of change at a representational level is inevitably gradual. Thus, travel journalism necessarily produces a degree of representational consistency. In this way, the high level of representational consistency in this study’s selection of travel journalism is perhaps to be expected. However, what is surprising is that the representational frames deployed in contemporary travel journalism clearly have their origins in 19th century European travel writing on the Middle East. As Behdad notes, 19th century European travellers to the Middle East were making use of modes of representation deployed by earlier travellers, modes that were in many respects no longer accurate referents of the realities of their travel experiences. He argues that “the discursive practices of these belated orientalists are therefore split, for they are inscribed within both the economies of colonial power and the exorcist desire for the disappearing Other” (1994, p.14). Clearly, the deployment of these modes in contemporary travel journalism is in a context far removed from their 19th century colonialist origins – a context from which they were, as Behdad notes, already at one remove. Given the degrees of separation here, the historical association between travel journalism and travel writing cannot in itself wholly account for the use of these modes of representation in travel journalism.

What purpose do these representational strategies serve in this contemporary context? Whilst these discourses originated in a very different, (that is, colonialist) context, they nonetheless serve an important function in contemporary travel journalism. Removed from their original context, these representational strategies serve not only as a means of accessing and authenticating a pre-modern past, they also function as a primary locus of meaning for authenticating the modern tourist experience as unique and individualised. In some examples this is done explicitly. In some cases the concerns – fears even – of the individual are addressed by means of direct interpellation. For example, in Malouf’s article, the individual is assured that Aleppo is a safe city (you will be safe); whilst in Hill’s article, a visit to the souk promises an unforgettable experience (you will encounter something extraordinary). In other instances, the strategy of authenticity seems to be used more subtly or indirectly. For example, in *Amman to Wadi Rum*, Magan’s encounter with a group of Bedouin living a traditional lifestyle is presented as one of chance. The inference here is that we too could happen upon such an encounter. This is not to suggest that in evoking the past, the realities of the present – the modern, industrialised Middle East – are entirely disavowed. Rather, the selection of travel journalism studied here suggests that these

realities are rarely fully acknowledged. It would seem any attention given to the present is either passed over in favour of evoking the past or used as a counterpoint to emphasise the possibility of accessing this exotic and other past.

Thus, it is significant to note the discursive trajectory here, from 19th century European travel writing, via a European country's (Britain) contemporary travel journalism, to a pan-European context in the Travel Channel. An important effect of this striking representational consistency is that it affirms the Middle East as the "paradigmatic" non-European travel destination. Moreover, this discourse of authenticity is not as it might first appear at odds with the commercialised context in which it is produced, rather, it is very much as a constitutive element of it. Given the highly competitive European media environment, producing travel journalism in accordance with recognisable tropes is something of a financial necessity. Thus, whilst of lower status than the "hard" news of political reporting, travel journalism plays a significant role in the collective European imagining of the Middle East. In this way, the deployment of a discourse drawn from 19th Century European travel writing can be seen as serving both the cultural and commercial imperatives of contemporary European travel journalism.

Notes

1. The Travel Channel International Limited is an independent, London based company, launched in 1994. Most content is produced in English and then dubbed into different languages. Visitors to the UK website (www.travelchannel.co.uk) can take out a yearly subscription in order to access the Travel Channel's 'TCVOD' feature. Here viewers have access to 'A-Z of Programmes' in which approximately 64 travel programmes are available for internet based viewing. Considerably more content is available by selecting the regional buttons, 'Africa', 'Americas', 'Asia', 'Australasia', and 'Europe', with each region having several pages of programmes for selection. According to the website the 'TCVOD' feature offers 'a library of 500 hours of quality travel programming, giving you access not only to fantastic entertainment but also a world of inspiration and planning tips for the perfect holiday' (www.travelchannel.co.uk/aboutus.htm).

2. For a brief overview of Newby's career, as both travel writer and travel journalist see: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article609602.ece>.

3. For details on Jan Morris's career including her work for *The Times* see:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/profile/profile_jan_morris.shtml. Details of William Dalrymple's publications (travel writing and journalism) can be found at:

<http://www.williamdalrymple.uk.com/Pages/Links.html>. Colin Thubron also regularly contributes to *The Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Spectator*, for details of his publications, including travel writing, novels and journalism, see: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth117>.

4. Behdad's approach is more akin to Foucault's original conception of discourse than Said's problematic application of it in *Orientalism* (1994: 12-16).

5. Known as the 'Arabist' tradition, this genre of travel writing emerged in the 1870s and is generally considered to have continued up until the end of the Second World War. Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands*, published in 1959 but based on journeys undertaken in 1945-46 has been cited as the last of the 'Arabist' tradition (Melman, 2002: 117-118).

6. As Tidrick, amongst other, has noted whilst these representational strategies took hold in the 19th Century, they were in fact based on older travel accounts such as Laurent Chevalier d'Arvieux's *Voyages en Palestine* (first published in English in 1718) and Carsten Niebuhr's *Travels in Arabia* (first published in English in 1792). These works were received with an

'almost uncritical appreciation by European scholars' and therefore significantly substantiated the emerging representational format for portraying the Bedouin and the desert landscape (1989: 9).

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