



Centre for Ethnicity & Racism Studies



## Orienting 'Italy':

*Italian Identity and the Culture Industry  
in Captain Corelli's Mandolin (2001)*<sup>1</sup>

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### Recasting Corelli

The suggestion that cinematic and literary production are prone to fashion is not new. One could argue, however, that the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century culture industry exceeds the expectations of readers and viewers, in so far as literary fiction has become an organic part of cinematic production. It is well known and commented on that the current trend in filmmaking involves the adaptation, if not recreation, of best-selling novels (Dudley, 1992: 421; McFarlane, 1996; Stam, 1992; Bordwell, 1988). This practice has been radicalised by a Hollywood that popularised classical novels, marketised pocket fiction, and increased the fame, or revived the market, of already widely acclaimed literary works.

The present paper is concerned with a case that belongs to the last category of Hollywood reproduction. I refer to *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1997) by Louis de Bernières, a novel that appeared on the big screen in the fall of 2001. In terms of plot, there were many (and striking) differences between the book and the film, which upset

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<sup>1</sup> Aspects of this paper were discussed in "'Casting' the Neohellenic Other: Tourism, the Culture Industry and Contemporary Orientalism in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001)", *The Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 3 (2), Sage, 2003 in relation to Greek identity. A paper discussing similar themes was published in *Studi Culturali*, 1(1), Mulino, 2004. For a more up-to-date analysis see chapter 4 in *The Cinematic Tourist: Explorations in Globalization, Culture and Resistance* (Routledge, ILS, 2007).

readers, moviegoers, political parties and many more. The novel was concerned with the less explored histories of the Second World War, especially the Axis Occupation of the Greek island of Cephallonia, the development of communist resistance of EAM/ELAS (National Liberation Front/ Greek People's Liberation Army), the civil war that followed Greek liberation and the anti-communist response. De Bernières claimed that he derived his anti-communist version of events from extensive archival search. However, he also insisted that the novel's ultimate message was peaceful, emphasising the power of love in harsh times. Indeed, the foreground of the novel was the enduring relationship between an Italian soldier and a Greek Cephallonian woman.

As often happens with Hollywood blockbusters, the love story became the driving force of cinematic narrative, and famous actors were recruited for the starring roles. The film was set on the island of Cephallonia in 1940, shortly before Italy's invasion in Greece. Dr Ioannis (John Hurt), who provides us with melancholy reflections on the shadowy past of the island, is the father of Pelagia (Penelope Cruz), an educated Cephallonian beauty. Despite her father's protestations, Pelagia, who is in love with a local fisherman, Mandras (Christian Bale), decides to get engaged with him. But when Mandras leaves the island to fight for the Greek cause the bond begins to wane. This is accelerated by the arrival of Italian occupation troops on the island. Then Pelagia meets Captain Antonio Corelli (Nicolas Cage), whose peace-making attitude and musical skills intrigue her. Corelli settles in Dr. Ioannis's house and despite first impressions and prejudices Pelagia finds herself deeply in love with him. Mandras, who returns to become leader of the communist resistance on the island, accepts the breaking of their engagement. When the Italian-German alliance falls apart and the Germans become the sole occupiers who disarm and execute Italians, Mandras even cooperates with Corelli against them. Corelli's life is hanging on a thread during the executions, but Carlo Piero Guercio (one of de Bernières's humane creations whose homosexual love for Corelli is

never mentioned in the film) saves him by taking the fatal shot. Corelli manages to escape and leaves the island with the promise to return for Pelagia after the end of the war. Indeed, after liberation he visits Cephallonia and the lovers are reunited with the blessing of Ioannis under a blasting Mediterranean sun.

The transition from literary work to cinematic genre is never even and uneventful –even more so, when a novel is so burdened by politics and history. To begin with, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (henceforth *CCM*) was shrouded in layers of Hollywood machinations: there were rumours that de Bernières was shunted aside by the film's director (John Madden), that he detested the casting of Nicolas Cage as Captain Corelli, and that he was disappointed by the scriptwriter's (Shawn Slovo) adaptation (CNN, 22 May 2001). Certainly what upset de Bernières most was Hollywood's decision to ditch the complexity of his historical narrative and repress the story's edgy political subtext. In the end, the venture was not very successful, and many agreed that Madden, known at the time as the great auteur of 'such beloved films as *Mrs Brown* and *Shakespeare in Love*,' could not 'go away unscathed' (CNN, 3 May 2001): *CCM* was judged by critics to be yet another expensive Hollywood flop.

Despite (or, perhaps because of) the *CCM* controversy in the world of critics and later in popular on-line film databases, the film was watched by hundreds of thousands. War films still attract history-lovers, and quite a few make millions of dollars. Epics such as *Pearl Harbour* (2002) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) relied on the formula of wartime plot that their directors and screenwriters enriched with a love story in the first case, and patriotic overtones in the second case. Likewise, *CCM* drew on the German-Italian confrontation on Cephallonia and the massacres of Italian soldiers when German troops took possession of the island. Unlike *Pearl Harbour* and *Saving Private Ryan*, however, the screening of *CCM* miraculously transformed this episode, so central to Cephallonian history, into an international attraction. As will become evident below, *CCM* produced a

tourist industry on Cephallonia. The price for this development was not small: *CCM*'s makers employed a series of narrative and filmic technologies to *represent* Greek, Italian and German identities that reduced these identities to stereotypical ideas.

The Italian case will become the focus of the present study. It will be argued that *CCM*'s version of the 'Italian character' is akin to appropriations of the *topos* of 'Italy' that we encounter in orientalist discourses. These discourses divorce Italian identity from its controversial wartime history and transform it into an idyllic product ready to be consumed by tourists and film viewers alike. To understand how Italian identity enters the world of commodities with *CCM* a discussion of these 'orientalisms,' as well their affiliation with contemporary consuming practices, will follow.

### **Consumption in film and beyond**

The theoretical debate upon film consumption is still haunted by Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the 'culture industry' (1991; 1993), commonly known as the post-WWII media industry. In their seminal study Adorno and Horkheimer explored practices of ideological manipulation that were initiated through mass cultural products, such as film. But the thesis explored the media industry at its birth and did not take into account that film does not simply reflect dominant ideologies. Consumers are not sponges that simply absorb the ideological subtexts of the films that they watch, but critical viewers who can resist those ideologies by rejecting or modifying them so as to fit their own needs and preferences (see Miller, 1987 and Kellner, 1989).

To contextualise these theoretical debates, I will first point out that the paper does not focus solely on *CCM*'s narrative. On a first level I will deconstruct representations of Italian-ness that we find in *CCM* in order to investigate the ways in which Italian identity becomes a commodity for consumption. But on a second level, the study will encompass an analysis of over 200 reviews of the film to look into the ways *CCM* viewers received the film's cultural messages. Finally, on a meta-level, the paper will

shed light on the general political debate that the film and the novel instigated, and the ways in which Hollywood agents involved in *CCM* responded. I will explain that *CCM*'s representations of Italian mannerisms exoticise the Italians of the story, dissociate them from the context of the war and transform them into pleasant and harmless forms of 'otherness'. This dissociation invites viewers to regard *CCM*'s Italian-ness as a tourist product and as agents of tourist consumption at the same time, or as part of an anodyne historical narrative that they can enjoy.

My reading of Italian cinematic 'otherness' originates in the work of Edward Said, especially his *Orientalism* (1978). Said argued that, historically, European colonialism was followed by the awakening of an interest in colonised cultures. European textual narratives of such cultures constructed an imaginary 'Orient' whose attributes became the binary opposites of an imaginary 'Occident.' By discussing 'Oriental' differences in essentialist terms, these texts ended up denigrating colonised cultures. What emerged as 'the Orient' in these European discourses was corrupt, uncivilised and disorderly – unlike the 'Occident' that was civilised, orderly and fit to govern Oriental cultures. Italian identity presents us with a case of 'orientalism' that is older than the idea of Italian culture itself. The way it re-emerges in *CCM*, its reception by audiences and the reactions of various parties involved in the historical record of the plot constitute different empirical aspects of the paper.

The examination of viewers' responses was performed through on-line film databases. I will draw on reviews from two of the most popular Internet markets, IMDB (the Internet Movie Database) and Amazon.com, sites that have their own discussion fora. Evidently, both are involved in the production/consumption chain of *CCM*, because they sell films. Furthermore, IMDB and Amazon reviewers are *viewers* - that is, *consumers* of the film. Therefore, their participation in Internet fora is significant for my thesis. As Rick Altman notes, fan sites may be products of commerce, 'but they also

produce new discourses that are not necessarily identical to the dominant ones' (1999: 102). This means that the reviews may point to the way that *audiences understand CCM's 'orientalised' Italian culture*. Finally, I will draw on other Internet sites, preferably those mentioned by IMDB and Amazon viewers, to illustrate the wider reception of the film, its relationship with a developing tourist industry on Cephallonia, and the uses of Italian-Greek history in this tourist industry. My approach transcends the postmodern focus on cinematic (inter)textuality and places *CCM* into contemporary cultural contexts and networks of consumption. This is so because my methodological premises involve a two-level analysis of internet resources: in a first instance, these popular film reviews and their referential networks (e.g. references by reviewers to other web sites) provide me with an *interpretative framework* for understanding practices of consumption of Italian identity through the experience of viewers. By *identifying recurring tropes* in these reviews, however, I also intend to shed light on hidden structures of understanding and consuming Italian 'otherness' in film and beyond (e.g. tourist milieus). The ultimate aim is to situate 'identity' within the theoretical debate upon consumption and Orientalism. The connection between the two is not self-evident if we do not consider the specific version of Orientalism that haunted Italian identity for centuries.

### **Italian Orientalism (Within and Without)**

Two forms of Orientalism are encountered in the case of Italy, an internal and an external. While the first dates back to the foundation of the Italian state and the making of the Italian 'nation', the origins of the second Orientalism are placed as far back as the Grand Tour. Because both versions apply to *CCM* in different ways, it is worth examining their trajectory.

Internal Italian 'Orientalism' was strongly associated with the divide between a rich North and an underdeveloped South. With the establishment of the Italian state in the 1860s, eminent politicians began to express reservations about incorporating

southern Italian provinces into the new state. The South was, according to them, exhibiting signs of backwardness and would certainly drain the resources of the productive and wealthy North. Soon the economic argument was coupled with a discourse on northern cultural superiority, which laid the foundations for a stereotypical image of the South as an Italian pariah, both demoralised and degenerate (Schneider, 1998). The origins of this discourse are traced in the 1860s in understandings of Southern brigandage that the Italian army was sent to repress in the southern countryside. In this conjunction of circumstances, 'brigandage' was constructed as 'uncivilised', a 'threat' to the Italian 'state' and the Italian 'nation' (Dickie, 1999: 148). Scientific research also supported the argument of economic underdevelopment by fabricating an almost Darwinian discourse of southern socio-biological degeneration. For example, the so-called positivist school of Cesare Lombroso, a proto-criminologist who became known for his craniometrical analysis and his criminal typologies (Melossi, 2000), provided a 'scientific' explanation for Southern backwardness and degeneration. Consequently, the Southern Italians were transformed into an exotic 'species' that, because of 'its' dark complexion, peasant mannerisms and supposed inclination to crime, was baptised African. The 'africanisation' of the South is also related to Italian expansionist visions in Africa where the state wanted to establish colonies. Italy's large-scale expansionist project in Africa was not crowned with success: the 1880s attempt to conquer Ethiopia did not bear any fruits, and the subsequent annexation of Libya from Turkey only drained state resources and dealt another blow to Italian imperialist aspirations. The African experience further enriched the repository of stereotypes on the South, as Southerners began to be likened to 'African species'. By identifying Southern Italian-ness with 'Africa', the North (and later the administrative centre of the state, Rome), were symbolically denying the recognition of the South as part of the 'nation'.

One may argue that this is a piece of historical scholarship that has no impact upon present Italian self-perceptions. But is interesting that a structurally similar (but not directly derivative of the nineteenth-century example) discourse of Southern ‘otherness’ informed the agenda of the secessionist Italian party *Lega Nord* (Northern League). Although this political discourse lacks the anthropological grounding of the nineteenth-century debate, and simply highlights the economic aspects of ‘Southern underdevelopment’, the idea that the northern provinces are ‘superior’ to the southern is still present. What went unnoticed in *Lega Nord*’s headquarters was also ignored in nineteenth century Italian politics: the denial or denigration of southern Italian-ness calls for a radical re-definition of Italian (or even Northern ‘Padanian’, in *Lega Nord*’s terminology) identity (Mason, 1988: 131-132). *Lega Nord* emerged as a political party at the beginning of the 1990s, when a series of economic and political problems threatened the economic structures of the North. It is significant that, although *Lega Nord*’s power declined in the second half of the decade, especially when the party replaced its federalist agenda with a secessionist Northern ‘Padanian’, the party never stopped arguing that even the Italian state had ‘undergone a process of “Southernisation” since its creation, implying that Italian identity is actually a “Southern Italian” identity’ (Giordano, 2002: 175). This is a subtle form of internal Orientalism, which is based on the association of economic underdevelopment with the South, the South with the Italian state, and both with a contested Italian identity. This argument lost its appeal and support, especially after the party’s decision to participate in the 1994 *Polo per la libertà*, the national political coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi. On the whole, *Lega Nord*’s discourse on Southern Italian-ness is now marginal, and although ‘Northern superiority’ is still stereotypically present in public discourse, it does not carry the weight that it used to on a national level.

Some of the characteristics of Italian Orientalism are so strikingly similar to those of its ‘external’ counterpart, that one suspects a hidden affiliation. For example, as

opposed to their problematic relationship with their state, Italians express a deep appreciation and pride for their culture, their medieval and Renaissance past, national arts and the natural beauties (Huysseune, 2002: 220). Likewise, eighteenth and nineteenth-century western travellers visited the country to admire its architecture and arts, and to enjoy the magnificent scenery. Today, central to the question of Italian identity is modernisation *as westernisation* – a model of progress that identifies modernity at the heart of U.S. and Western Europe politics (Agnew, 1997). The question that Italy kept asking itself before becoming a full member of the European Union was how European it was. Italian European-ness is also a universal question today, considering the dysfunctional state machine of the country and the stereotypical trope of southern difference. The discourse of modernisation was also omnipresent in accounts of the Grand Tour and later in travels to Italy. Western travellers considered the Italians uncivilised peasants, cutthroats and beggars who spoiled the aesthetic experience of travel; the country, with its beautiful ancient Greek and Roman ruins, was far better without them. The desire of the Grand tourist and later the nineteenth-century traveller to see modern Italians disappear from the Italian cultural and natural plain is significant: in the western European imagination, especially in countries such as Britain, Italian modernity was to be rediscovered in the Roman heritage, not in the coarse manners of the peasants. Rome was, after all, a model of legislation and governance for the vast British Empire (Jenkyns, 1980: 334).

*CCM's* and the reviewers' versions of 'Italian-ness' present us with intricate combinations of these two orientalist discourses: on the one hand, the exoticisation of Italian characters in the film resembles the political 'othering' of Italian South. On the other hand, the erasure of the fascist historical context and its replacement with a version of imaginary Italian civilisation is akin to nineteenth-century travel practices. It may be useful to highlight the link between nineteenth-century travel and contemporary tourist

experience, because I will proceed to argue that *CCM*'s sanitised version of Italian-ness becomes both an accomplice to, and a product for tourist consumption. Like travellers of the past, tourists of the present read alien cultures to discover what John Urry called 'pre-established' signs (1990: 12). Hence, the romanticisation of the 'Italian character' *in* the film, and even more so *by* viewers, is just a group of pre-established signs, stereotypes that please the consumer. But the difference between contemporary tourism and eighteenth-century travel is also significant: tourists express longing to escape the restrictions of everyday life, unlike past travellers who constantly pursued knowledge of the 'other'. Travel experience was transgressive and destabilising, unlike modern tourism that operates as 'a system for managing pleasure and keeping danger and destabilisation at bay' (Chard, 1999: 208). Only when we find ourselves well into the nineteenth century do we notice changes in practices of travelling that mark the shift from the sublime experience of the eighteenth-century Grand Tour to the safe organisation of tourism. Nineteenth-century travellers in the Mediterranean region were more inclined to play the role of the 'educational subject' who 'tames' foreign cultures by recording and classifying – subjecting them to a disciplinary understanding that makes them less 'alien' (Tzanelli, 2003). The commodification of Italian-ness through stereotyping (which promotes fixity and homogeneity) in *CCM* should also be viewed then as an indispensable aspect of the tourist experience that rejects excitement in the form of transgression and marries pleasure with conventionality. To be more precise, *CCM* produces artificial cultural difference (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1993), because Italian 'others' appear to be identical to the 'Mediterranean' or non-European ones of holidaymakers.

To explore this form of artificial difference, I will first turn to an analysis of the most obvious traits of cultural difference that in *CCM* orientalise Italian identity and set the stage for tourist consumption: language, accent and mannerisms. In the second part I will move on to discuss two contrasting, yet ultimately complementary, roles that Italian

identity plays in *CCM* and the reviewers' reception of these roles. In the last part of the paper I will focus more on the fate that history has in this particular context of consumption. I will also look into practices of resistance to, or acceptance of, the types of manipulation that the historical record suffered in the process of *CCM*'s production.

### **Consuming *habitus*: Italian 'character' as Mediterranean**

Speech formulas are an element of *CCM* that may assist us to recognise the film as an Orientalist venture. These formulae are manifested in the director's uses of foreign accents, languages and mannerisms. Language and accent demarcate cultures, whereas mannerisms denote social and cultural status. It may be worth recalling Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of *habitus*, a group of dispositions that originate in our social upbringing, and which we unconsciously cultivate throughout our lives (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu discussed *habitus* in relation to social power and classified it as 'cultural capital', a form of symbolic capital that can be exchanged with other capitals (including money). Thus, *habitus* joins the world of commodities, as it ceases simply to be what it is (to have what Marx called *use value*) and becomes just one item in a chain of constant exchanges – in other words, its *use value* subsides in favour of its *exchange value* (Bourdieu, 1998: 34). In *CCM* *habitus* translates language, accent and mannerisms into a valuable cultural commodity: their plausibility transforms them into cultural capital that generates profit for the makers of the film. At the same time, *CCM*'s representations of Italian and Greek *habitus* are complicit with the America socio-cultural order in which they were born. It is true that Cephallonia was a multicultural plateau during the Italian and German occupation out of necessity. However, in *CCM* this multiculturalism is celebrated through the use of accented communication, giving the Greek island the ambiance of U.S. suburbia. Hollywood films are always anxious to narrate American multiculturalism, which has become synonymous with the way America dreams itself (Alba, 2000).

Filmmakers present this American self-image as ‘real’ and incontestable – they translate it into *doxa*, to use Bourdieu’s terminology – because it is plausible to its consumers.

*CCM* designates cultural identities in an orthodox Hollywood manner. The actors are divided into two categories, the foreground (the protagonists) and the background ones (characters of secondary importance). In the foreground Cage, Cruz, Hurt and Bale speak in accented English. In the background, Cephallonian villagers and Italian or German soldiers speak in Greek, Italian or German respectively. When background characters move to the foreground, they always switch to accented English. The babelic technique has crystal-clear objectives: it grants the starring actors with a false cultural specificity, while at the same time it folklorises background actors, integrating them into the Cephallonian landscape. This ‘naturalisation’ (Barthes, 1993) of background speakers is homologous to the ‘orientalisation’ of the characters that they personify. Put simply, the way Greek villagers and Italian soldiers are cast divests them from life and reduces them to mere cultural caricatures.

Richard Dyer has explained that stars work as signs in film because their career and fame precede their casting of particular roles (Dyer, 1982). In *CCM* stars are consciously used as signs, because the characters that they impersonate become more ‘authentic’ thanks to the actors’ actual cultural backgrounds. Hollywood’s *doxa* exploits the actual *habitus* or cultural affiliations of actors to grant their acting with verisimilitude (Neale and Krutnik, 1990: 3-4). Penelope Cruz is cast as Greek Pelagia because she is a brunette who already has a foreign ‘Mediterranean’ accent. Nicolas Cage, the focus of attention, tries to fake an Italian accent. Because he is of Italian descent, it is expected that he will be more plausible as ‘Corelli.’ Contrariwise, John Hurt’s ‘Britishness’ is covered under a thick ‘Greek moustache’ that we nowadays find only in sepia pictures of the 1940s.

Cage's performance is a striking example of the way in which Italian *habitus* is subjected to 'orientalisation'. His Italian-ness is symbolised through frenzied 'gesticulation' of the type that only pasta advertising would employ as two witty film viewers remarked. In fact, Cage's entrance in the film is followed by an awkward 'Ciao Bella!' he shouts at Pelagia – a clear association of Italian identity with carefree attitudes that western tourists may find vaguely amusing. Unfortunately, *CCM*'s project of multiculturalism often backfires: a third of the IMDB and Amazon reviewers (215 in total) commented critically on the uses of accent and language in the film. Only 18 viewers, most of them English native speakers, endorsed Hollywood's representation of Italian language, claiming that in *CCM* accents were believable. The fact that these viewers spoke English as a first language may be important: their encounter with accented English is more frequent than their familiarity with Italian. Even those, however, were quite aware that accent was only a metonymy for authenticity,<sup>1</sup> and they unconsciously placed more emphasis on Italian mannerisms in the film. An Italian American commented that 'the Italian members of her family' assured her that '[Cage's] accent was good' (IMDB, 4 February 2002), whereas a Californian assumed that Cage 'was going back to his roots as an Italian' (IMDB, 10 May 2002). The 'authenticity' of Italian accent (and, by extension, of Italian identity) was also the focus of criticisms. 'Penelope Cruz is Spanish, John Hurt is English and Nicolas Cage is American,' says an annoyed British reviewer. 'Although they all try to affect the appropriate accents in the film, it just isn't convincing and, especially in Nicolas Cage's case, just ends up becoming an annoying distraction' (Amazon, 10 April 2003). 'Cage in possible his worst role, seems to be hamming it up with a terrible comedy accent' claims a Londoner, whose review is classed amongst the most popular of the site (Amazon, 23 November 2002). Other viewers were furious with American filmmakers who never seem to 'stop making the actors do fake accents to represent them [as] Italian' (IMDB, 16 September 2003).

The dissatisfaction that many viewers expressed with the film's representation of Italian speech can be located in the cinematic narrative's deliberate conflation of small and large cultural categories. It is true that in *CCM* Italian and Greek languages are understood and treated as 'Mediterranean'. This oversimplification of identity, the erasure of specificity, and its subjection to the needs and demands of American filmmaking and consumption is similar to Orientalist oversimplifications of identity and history (Said, 1978: 21). In fact, the dissociation of identity from its history activates stereotyping - a vital element in the consumption of Italian-Mediterranean otherness in the film. This de-contextualisation of Italian-ness and Greek-ness was, to some extent, premeditated: its role was to enable viewers to take pleasure in the cinematic narrative in anodyne ways. Yet, the practice also had other, unexpected consequences, as the following analysis suggests.

### **Tourism and Otherness: 'Italy', Consumption, Film**

In this part, I would like to examine the nature of *CCM*'s Italian 'othering' alongside that of Greek 'othering'. I will note in advance that the account that *CCM* gives on Italian-ness is interlocked with the function that Italian identity has on the film's meta-level. Not only is this function multiple, but it also holds together cinematic representations of consumption practices that are performed within the context of the Mediterranean tourist industry. We will notice below that although film viewers respond to this challenge in various ways, they still recognise the meaning and implications of Italian representations.

The first role of Italian identity in the film is that of a 'consumer participant' – a tourist. To explain what I mean it is necessary to examine the Italian soldiers' behaviour in the film. It is true that Corelli's fellow soldiers look more like a bunch of young men who enjoy their summer holiday than as occupiers. In various scenes we watch them swimming in the clear waters of the Ionian Sea and flirting with half-naked local

prostitutes. Even the promotion campaign of the film stresses the element of enjoyment: we learn from the VHS summary of the plot that the ‘harsh reality of war ultimately crashes upon the idyllic shores of Cephallonia.’ What matters is not ‘war reality’ but the ‘idyllic shore’, as the official *CCM* website with its numerous picturesque photographs and sentimental descriptions informs us (<http://www.thefilmfactory.co.uk/corelli/home2.html>). The picture on the VHS cover reinforces the point that we deal with an ‘unspoiled’ natural setting... even though a crew of actors, cameramen and large groups of tourists infested the island at the time of the filmmaking. Over 20 reviewers noticed this rather unusual representation of military life, and quite a few found these scenes ‘heretical’ because they distort the historical record. As an anonymous viewer mentioned ‘[the actors] didn’t act how Italian soldiers would have acted while occupying a country’ (IMDB, 18 October 2002). Another, Greek, commentator remarked that

Watching the film you can hardly believe that there is a war going on: It seems that Greece had no problems during the occupation [...], since Italian soldiers were here happy to enjoy the sun. Thanks God that Germans arrive on the island and we start to remember that we are during a war. [...] It seems as if Italians fought for the sake of Greeks while the later were enjoying the Italian music (IMDB, Athens, 31 August 2003).

Indeed, the Greek ‘folk’ in the film also have a blithe and amiable demeanour spending most of their time signing and dancing. With regards to the ‘Greek character,’ the film attempts to ‘folklorise’ the Cephallonian peasants, making them attractive commodities for virtual or actual tourists. Their friendly conduct matches the postcard shots of Cephallonian landscape and serves as an excellent advertisement for the natural beauties of the island, as several viewers noted. It is no coincidence that many reviewers, who are ‘educated’ to consume such commodities, recognised the correspondence between the film’s landscape and photography. A viewer from Atlanta commented that the film’s ‘visual images come from photographing these majestic locations in varying light’

(IMDB, 10 March 2002) and another claimed that ‘Capt. Corelli takes place on picture postcard beautiful Cephallonia’ (IMDB, 18 August 2001). Other reviewers proceeded to make more explicit connections between the culture and tourist industries. According to an English viewer ‘this [film] can be used as an advert for tourism in the Mediterranean.’ (IMDB, England, 10 June 2001). Another Briton noted that ‘the film does have one good thing [...] and that is the photography which is stunning. The Greek Tourist Industry will be anticipating a rush on Holidays to it’s [sic] island this summer’ (IMDB, 4 May 2001). All these commentators, and many more, come from two countries with developed tourist industries. U.S. and U.K. tourist itineraries are very likely to end in Greece on a sunny summer day. These reviewers draw on the standardised tourist imaginary and often reflect critically on it to discuss the film. The growing tourist industry around the island followed the same strategy: various holiday-makers constructed web pages on Captain Corelli’s ‘unspoiled Cephallonia,’ in which they reproduced the cinematic landscape. Shores, clear waters and Cephallonian folk decorate the special Cephallonia web page of *Tapestry Holidays*, ‘experts of uncommercial Greece and Turkey’ (<http://www.tapestryholidays.com>). *Cahypso*, a Greek tourist site, has a special web page under the title ‘Filming of Captain Corelli puts Kefalonia on the global map.’ The article describes the ‘Ionian Paradise of crystalline blue waters’ and depicts it above a photo of Penelope Cruz and Nicolas Cage. The same strategy is followed by the *Greek Tourist Information* site, which invites visitors to book luxury village houses ‘near where the true story of Captain Corelli’s Mandolin was filmed.’ (<http://www.info-world.com/tourist.info/listings-greece.php>). We could add numerous examples here, but it is better to compare the ones below with free wallpapers that appear in *CCM*’s Hollywood site: they are identical. Ironically, representations of Greek identity in *CCM* produced a massive tourist industry on the island. If that is so, a question begs an answer:

where did the 'Italians' fit in Hollywood's clever narration of production and consumption of Cephallonian Greekness?

Production and consumption of cultural 'goods', including holiday resorts, have become a major source for our pleasure (Featherstone, 1990). We could place the construction of holiday locations in film in the same longitude as the production of holiday brochures by the tourist industry – in fact, in the case of *CCM* we could claim that the former is more successful than the latter. As Chris Rojek explained, tourism involves 'an indexing of representations' that 'frame the sight' in question (1997: 53). This pre-conceptualisation of the site, so prominent in the case of *CCM*, does not necessarily guarantee that tourists will not be frustrated when they visit the place. The almost 'mythical' proportion of any tourist representation can become a recipe for 'disenchantment': upon arrival at the dreamed resort, we often discover unpleasant crowds, dirty beaches or irritatingly disorganised hotels. I will argue that *CCM* resolves this problem by *recreating the whole tourist experience*. More specifically, not only does Madden offer us a ready-made holiday product in the form of Greek folk authenticity and Cephallonian natural beauty, but he also gives us directions on how we are to take pleasure in it. This is so because on a meta-level the Italians of *CCM* cease to be soldiers and *begin to represent tourist consumers*. Unconsciously, some reviewers acknowledge this 'Italian' meta-role in *CCM* by making comments on their 'happy-go-lucky' attitude.

At the same time, however, viewers are invited to consume aspects of Italian identity alongside *CCM*'s artificial Cephallonian Greekness. Then Italian-ness becomes the object upon which the tourist industry acts, a product of consumption. This happens when 'Italian history' assumes in film reviews the role of a secondary assistant in the development of the Greek tourist industry. For example, some viewers drew upon the episode on which de Bernières based his narration of the Italian executions on the island

during the war as a potential tourist attraction. One of them even made a connection between the film, the book and the Cephallonian tourist industry explaining that

If you want to know more about the historical incident upon which the movie is based, just search on the Internet for Cephallonia. It is one of the [six] Ionian Islands, which also happen to be the birthplace of Greek philosophy. Today, the Greeks have a shrine there for the executed Italian soldiers.

(Amazon, New Jersey, 12 June 2002)

Indeed, the comment appears in many virtual tourist guides, among them the official web site of the *Greek National Tourist Organisation* (<http://www.geocities.com/gotocaphallonia>). A site maintained by tourists that is rated as a ‘popular internet search’ also mentions the historical incident and advises future visitors to enjoy the scenery alongside its past (<http://www.kefalonixirin.com>). I would suggest that such uses of Italian and Ionian Greek history comprise an innovative form of economic *appropriation*. More specifically, the combination of Cephallonian-Italian history with the prospect of holidaymaking generates a ‘surplus’ of meanings of Cephallonia. Not only do these meanings become for the *Greek Tourist Organisation* and various travel agencies ‘selling points’ but they are also ‘consumed’ by virtual and actual tourists of the place.

The consumption of ‘Italian-ness’ is also assisted by forms of Italian ‘internal othering’. To clarify the point: like the Cephallonians of the film, Italians are often cast as ‘the folk’, splendid survivals of a social structure that tourists encounter only in picturesque Sicilian villages. I will suggest that the ‘folklorisation’ of the Italian ‘character’ in the film is achieved through implicit references to stereotypes of Southern Italian attributes. For example, Captain Corelli’s group of fellow soldiers (the so-called ‘La Scala’ group of amateur signers) is composed of his childhood friends. The social cohesion that this group displays is likened in the film to that of a ‘family’, as Corelli himself exclaims – a clear reference to Southern ‘clan’ attitudes that we encounter only in gangster films

such as *Godfather II* (1974, dir. Francis Ford Coppola). To this example we could add the casting of Carlo Piero Guercio, whose homosexuality is erased from the film and replaced with an act of self-sacrifice that only a Southern Italian man would have displayed for his kin.

*CCM's* implementation of the 'language' of kinship in representations of Italian-ness is structurally identical to a recent revival of post-war American academic discourses on southern Italian backwardness. The movement originates in the work of Edward Banfield, an anthropologist whose study of village life in Southern Italy nurtured generations of English-speaking students. Banfield argued that southern Italian mentality was governed by 'a-moral familism', the unconditional support of familial interests against those of the community and the state (Banfield, 1958). It is clear that Banfield's observations shrouded Italian-ness in a mixture of nostalgia and loathing. Southern village life was thus considered a 'drag' to the machine of Italian progress, which was taking place elsewhere, in the North. The argument figures today in the famous book of the political scientist Robert Putnam *Making Democracy Work* (1993), a fine specimen of an American equivalent to internal Italian orientalism. Not only did Putnam endorse the argument on the South's economic dependency upon the North, but he also traced it in the medieval history of the regions - a history that presumably favoured the civic and economic modernisation of the North, but not that of the South. According to Putnam, the inefficiency of administration on a regional and national level made the Southerners more inclined to defend the interests of their family than those of the state. The aetiological explanation for this 'difference' was based on patterns of civic involvement and social solidarity that ultimately predicted the regions' economic (under)development (1993: 157). This cultural determinism (civic culture determines economies) was then used to explain the presence of 'functional' democratic governing in general. What is interesting, is Putnam's idealisation of the Italian North, and the similarities that this

bears to past Western political uses of Roman and Grecian-Italian civic culture in the modelling of Western governing. Putnam himself confessed in an interview that, ‘as a scholar of Italian politics’, what ‘he was finding out’ about Italian culture ‘was connected to what worried him as an American citizen’ (AAHE, 1995) – namely, the state of civic engagement in America. Little attention was paid by Putnam to the 1992 exposure of political corruption among all Italian businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats and officials, regardless of their regional affiliations – a rather unfortunate counter-example of universal fraud, which activated processes that brought *Lega Nord* to life. Worse, Putnam’s ‘civic society’ argument was based on the regional mobilisation of ‘social capital’ (networks, active sharing of resources, trust, norms) that enables collective action – a ‘capital’ that is presumably ample in the Italian North, and scarce in the individualistic and familial South. It does not take much to realise that Putnam’s division between the South and the North is central in a geometrical arrangement of binary opposites (barbarity vs. civilisation, underdevelopment vs. development etc...) on which too much ink was spent by Edward Said while discussing the deterministic nature of Orientalist discourse.

Bearing in mind the trajectory of these academic debates, the argument that *CCM*’s version of Italian-ness derives its discursive power from internal and external versions of Italian Orientalism becomes even more plausible. However, the thesis may remain incomplete if we do not consider the relationship between the ‘folklorisation’ of Italy in this particular film and representations of Italian identity that we come across in other films. One should never forget that *CCM* is a Hollywood product, and as such, should be examined alongside other American film *genres* that debate Italian identity. The most prominent of those is the gangster film whose emergence in the 1930s and development in the next decades narrated the story of ethnic urban lower-class ambitions to climb up the American social scale (Munby, 1999). Francis Ford Coppola’s more

recent *Godfather I* and *II* further debated the ethnic element of gangster crime by stressing the Sicilian roots of the Italian-American mafia. One could argue that the criminalisation of Italian-ness in these films is homologous to the folklorisation of Italian-ness in *CCM*, as in both cases Italian identity is represented as ‘marginal.’ The savage South of gangster movies is transformed in *CCM* into a ‘tamed’ and benevolent form of ‘otherness’, like any other tourist destination.

One may argue that representations of Italians in *CCM* as a tourist product *and* as active consumers of tourist products re-narrate Italy’s peculiar place in the contemporary geopolitical map. Considering the contexts of internal and external understandings of Italian-ness, we may safely argue that the film is less politically innocent than it may initially appear to be. The next part will place the politics of *CCM* in a wider historical context, that of WWII and its hold on contemporary imagination.

### **War vs. Civilisation, or How to Forget Your History**

One cannot ignore the fact that *CCM* was based on a story that so much stresses the various historical legacies of the Cephallonian island and opened wide the wounds of WWII. But the fate of history in consumption practices is well known: events cease to exist in their own right and stories are re-invented or simply repressed. The finished product is never identical to what is handed down to us in historical records or personal accounts. Indeed, the making of historical epics in Hollywood is never far away from the politics of history making (De Certeau 1986:200). In this part I will further consider *CCM*’s take on WWII history with particular reference to Italy, examining at the same time reactions by audiences. In addition, I will try to do justice to those aspects of war history that John Madden and Shawn Slovo chose to pass over in silence, revealing thus an assemblage of political agendas behind the production of the film.

In the previous section I noted that both Cephallonian Greek and Italian identity are orientalised in the film. However, there are also parts of the cinematic narrative that

re-integrate Cephallonian and Italian folk culture into Western 'civilisation', this time coinciding with the winners of World War II. The verbal and visual depiction of German, Italian and Greek cultures serves to realise this aim. German officers are characterised by reservation, rational planning, emotional repression and cruelty. Greeks and Italians live a 'happy' life, characterised by singing, dancing, emotional self-expression and ample gesticulation (Amazon, New Jersey, 12/6/2002; IMDB, Los Angeles, 17/8/2001). Gesticulation, which once upon a time was regarded by evolutionists as the language of the European savages, (Herzfeld 1987:136-137) becomes here a signifier of warmth, humanity and civilisation. In this instance, German rationalism is juxtaposed to Italian and Greek emotionalism.

The logic of this stereotyping is the product of post-war European history in which the rational Germans represent the dark side of humanity, as many viewers noted. Contrariwise, the depiction of the Italians and the Greeks 'as educated and cultured [becomes] a compliment to an educated and cultured civilisation' (IMDB, Anonymous, 7/6/2002). Italian fascist ideology and the brutal Greek-Italian conflict on the Albanian frontier are conveniently written out of the scenario. The most striking example of this de-historicisation is Mandras's collaboration with Corelli against the Germans in the film. Not only do the communists appear to supply the Italians with ammunition when the latter are disarmed by the newly arrived Germans, but they also wish good luck to each other! 'Stupid, stupid stupid!' exclaims an irritated viewer, who cannot believe that Mandras and Corelli decide to 'become buddies' (IMDB Message Board, 26 August, 2003). 'I agree!' adds another one in the same chat room (IMDB, Message Board, 2 September 2003). But these voices are very few, as opposed to the ones that found the depiction of the Cephallonian war realities accurate. The background of the Italian occupation 'was quite realistically portrayed,' claims a viewer. 'The portrayal of the Italian troops also struck me as believable. The Italian army was never enamoured of their

German ally' (IMDB, Canada, 11 August 2002). 'The main reasons that make me like the movie were the growing appreciation of the Greeks and the Italians for each other's cultures [...] and [...] the contrast between the Latin culture of the Greeks and the Italians on the one hand and the Teutonic culture of the Germans on the other,' states a Californian (IMDB, 4/10/2001; see also Amazon, Texas, 17/1/2002). Here it is not the story's actual agents who interact, but whole cultures. Again, the reductionist principle of the reviewer's comment replicates the stereotypical narrative of German culture as different. The uses of the terms 'Latin' and 'Teutonic' are historically erroneous, but their function is to set Greek-ness and Italian-ness apart from German-ness. Thus the viewers consume a cluster of signs that misrepresent history, but are in accordance with post-war prejudices, in which German-ness represents rational viciousness and lack of civilisation. These prejudices are not based merely on cinematic artifacts, but also correspond to specific WWII histories of Greek-Italian encounters. As Nicholas Doumanis noted, Dodecanese perceptions of Italian occupation (1912-1943) were strikingly positive. One of the reasons why the Dodecanese Greeks remember Italian rule with nostalgia, is the Italians' attachment to their ancient Greek heritage (especially regarding the colonisation of the Italian South). Contrariwise, the German occupation, which started in 1943, was viewed by locals in a more negative light. In contrast to the Italians, the Germans were regarded as disciplined automata, people devoid of emotions (Doumanis, 1997: 193) - just like their stereotypes in *CCM*.

We could argue that that the very uses of the terms 'Latin' and 'civilisation' in reviews, as well as a conflation of Greek and Italian identities, suggest a return to the discourses of the Grand Tour. These discourses constructed an enduring image of Italian and Greek cultural perfection that did not correspond to contemporary Italian and Greek realities. The imaginary Hellenic and Roman 'civilisations' acquired in Western collective imaginations the role of an appropriated past, an ideal that the West cherished ever since.

It is interesting that in this context *CCM* engages in a game of ‘cultural amnesia’ that quite a few viewers endorse. As David Lowenthal noted, an ever-expanding past may have enabled an increasing awareness of our roots, but it also activated a war against its preservation (Lowenthal, 1985). It is interesting that reviews happily recall the long-forgotten past of the Grand Tour alongside the whole debate upon the preservation of the two poles of the European past (Roman and Hellenic culture), but at the same time they favour the repression of the more recent histories of WWII.

This repression is consistent with recent self-perceptions of Italy in the European arena as purified from WWII acts of violence. We need only recall the incident that took place in the European Parliament in the summer 2003 when Italy was presenting its priorities during its six-month EU presidency. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, responding to the criticism from a Socialist member of the EU Parliament, Martin Shulz, daringly urged the latter to ‘take a movie role as a Nazi concentration camp guard’ (*International Herald Tribune*, 2 July 2003). The Italian Prime Minister refused to take his comment back, and was unanimously condemned by all EU members for harassing Shulz and insulting his country. What Berlusconi did in effect, was to ‘write out’ Italy’s involvement in these dark pages of European history. By calling a German MP a ‘Nazi’ he was aligning his own country with the winners of the war, foreclosing any discussion of Italian fascist history. What was, of course, silenced, was Berlusconi’s alliance with the neo-Fascist *Alleanza Nazionale* party after the 1994 national elections, and his rumoured continuous ‘relationship’ with these circles.

Even for the Greeks the past would better have been left alone. In this case, however, it was the distortion of Cephallonia’s involvement in WWII that became responsible for the development of local Greek resistance to Hollywood’s initial agenda. For the Cephallonian islanders the problem with *CCM* was never the subsequent tourist invasion (of which they took advantage to develop their own tourist industry), but the

‘slur’ on their patriotic honour – namely, de Bernières’ harmful depiction of Greek communist resistance to the Axis Forces. Initially, the whole issue of Hollywood’s use of Cephallonian history in the movie focused around de Bernière’s anti-communist plot in which Mandras is slowly brutalised through his attachment to E.A.M./E.L.A.S. and communist ideals. Because of de Bernière’s problematic treatment of resistance history, a Cephallonian committee was set up to ensure that the film would not touch upon the controversies of the era. The mayor of Cephallonian Sami, Gerásimos Artelánis, stated firmly that if Hollywood turned the book into a political film, they ‘would take measures.’ ‘You can be sure we will take the issue to the international court of justice at The Hague,’ he said (*The Sunday Times*, 4 July 2000). Dionísios Georgátos, elected Governor of Cephallonia, carefully proceeded to negotiate the terms under which Madden could shoot the film on the island. Although when Madden threatened to move his crew to Turkey the locals conceded to participate in some scenes (<http://www.aimpress.org/dyn/trae/archive/data.200009/00924-005-trae-ath.htm> 2000) the Cephallonian veterans never stopped complaining. ‘We are at war with Louis de Bernières’ claimed a 72-year old former Cephallonian journalist and campaigner against the novel, adding that the war is defensive because ‘it was declared on them’ (<http://sicilianculture.com/news/corelli.htm>). The campaign also criticised the involvement of Shawn Slovo in the making of *CCM*, stressing that she is the daughter of murdered anti-apartheid activist Ruth First and former communist and African National Congress Leader Joe Slovo. The anti-*Corelli* movement was joined by other communist societies around the world (see for example <http://praxisinternational.tripod.com/MediaHP.htm>) that expressed a concern over the ways in which media become sources of popular historical knowledge.

Perhaps the comments that all these parties made were not wide of the mark. We need only mention that de Bernières’ Corelli character was based on the war adventures

of a 90-year-old Florentine veteran Amos Pamploni. Pamploni, who participated in the tragic revolt of the Italian soldiers against their former German allies in 1943, disclosed a number of events to de Bernières. These events were subsequently matched with accounts that we find in the recently discovered diaries of a German war veteran, Alfred Richter (*The Guardian*, 11 April 2001). But quite a few controversial aspects of these accounts never made it to the cinematic narrative, or were simply shunted aside by the ‘casting’ of Italian occupation as a holiday experience. The distance between Madden’s frenzied editing and de Bernières’ meticulous (if partial) narration of events led to a conflict between the two men (*The Sunday Times*, 19 August 2001). Hollywood demands for a commercial success eventually won over an appreciation of personal histories. The critical viewers did not appreciate that and protested. On IMDB there is currently a short message that issues a reminder of this protest: ‘Wondered how much of the story was true, here’s a pointer for anyone interested’ (IMDB Message Board, 17 June 2002), followed by a hyperlink to the *Guardian’s* very critical analysis of the film. What was also discussed in several reviews was the nonsensical alliance of Corelli with the communist Madras after the German invasion. It is an interesting ideological device, considering current Italian self-narration: not only is Italian fascist history is not discussed in the film, but it is also ‘covered up’ with the idea that the ‘good’ Italians were closer to the communist cause than we would ever imagine! This ideological repression is perfectly consistent with the polarisation of Italy’s part-war political discourse which was haunted by memories of the Resistance, and the battle of communism with a neo-fascist movement (Ferguson, 2002: 124). The concept of ‘civil war’ is often used to describe Italian post-WWII history but also the political terrorism from the late 1960s to the early 1980s from which the shadowy ‘communist’ *Brigate Rosse* emerged.

In conclusion we may argue that *CCM* should not be viewed as an innocuous love story, but as a film that turns artificial innocence into a political project. The erasure

of the contested and politically dangerous aspects of de Bernières' story; some reviewers' concession to the project that represents Italy as a non-participant in WWII Axis history; and the furore this attitude provoked in Cephallonia, remind us that a-political stances are the best way to make politics in Hollywood.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was multiple: first, it debated the orientalist origins of *CCM*'s representations of Italian identity. Second, it tried to highlight how *CCM* assisted in the development of a tourist industry on the island of Cephallonia, the plateau of the cinematic narrative. It was argued that Italian identity had a double role to play in *CCM*'s tourist industry: on the one hand, it enabled filmmakers to replicate the tourist experience in the film. On the other hand, like Cephallonia and its history, Italian identity became a 'good' to be consumed by viewers and virtual tourists. The third aim of the paper was to explain how the specific histories of Italian occupation and Cephallonia joined the world of commodities through *CCM* and what kind of reactions this commodification instigated on the island of Cephallonia. Mainly, however, the third part of the analysis debated how Italian identity was dissociated from its wartime history and became an innocuous product that viewers can enjoy. The practice of divorcing Italian identity from its fascist past is, I argue, both a result of post-war prejudices that demonise German Nazism (but forget Italian fascism) and the 'Grand Tourist' appreciation of Italian-Roman heritage. The fourth aim of this paper was to examine the reactions of *CCM*'s audience. It became obvious that the reception of the film was not always uncritical, but presented nuances that betray a form of critical consciousness. In its second year of availability in VHS and DVD formats, *CCM* has not ceased to attract online commentary. Corelli's opera singing still covers the whispers of historical memory, issuing a reminder of the fate that identity and history have every time they enter the universe of consumption.

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<sup>1</sup> I use here the notion of authenticity in the way that Dean MacCannell debates it in his work (1973, 1992). MacCannell discussed the notion of 'staged authenticity' (1972) as a simulated, 'faked' presentation of local social life and culture for purposes of tourist consumption. He argued that tourists are presented with a front social stage in the places that they visit, which they consume as 'real'. In his subsequent work he claimed that this practice is grounded on an exaggeration of 'difference' by the performers themselves, leading to a form of alienation, a detachment of the locals from their real culture and a loss of identity (1992: 168-169). *CCM* uses the technique of 'staged authenticity' in an interesting way: it applies it to accents and mannerisms, because it 'stages' them (it 'sells' them) as real, although they are not.