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Identity, language and place: reassessing macabre and funeral
places as sites of cultural promotion from dark tourism to the
interdisciplinary project ‘tutTO sotTO’

Abstract

This article aims to turn a critical lens on the connection between identity, language and place by looking at the idea of dark tourism and dark sites, in particular cemeteries, whose wealth of material and immaterial culture suggests a reflection on memory, and in parallel fuels a social and economic promotion of local communities. Such an argument stems from an interdisciplinary two-year research project entitled ‘tutTO sotTO’, which aimed to unveil some apparently bizarre aspects of Turin’s heritage to encourage a rethinking of the overlapping between identity, territory and memory. Drawing from different disciplines such as tourism, cultural studies and discourse analysis, the paper examines the emergence of dark tourism, identifying its theoretical context, linguistic strategies and inner tensions, and then focuses on the specific case of Turin’s Monumental Cemetery, discussing some of its complex narratives, from the tombs of WWI English soldiers, the mausoleum of an Anglo-Italian poet to the grave of an Ethiopian princess dating back to the colonial time.

1 Introduction: dark tourism, language, identity

This article offers a preliminary look at the idea of cultural plurality of urban space by considering key words such as memory, territory, and identity with regard to a very sensitive area of study, namely macabre and funeral discourse, also known as dark tourism or ‘thanatotourism’ (González Vázquez, and Mundet i Cerdan 2018; Light 2017; Maddrell and Sidaway 2016; Kornstaje 2011; Seaton 2002; Stone et al. 2018). Here I aim to review such an apparently ‘bizarre’ field and illustrate its main articulations with reference to an interdisciplinary two-

year research project (2017-19)¹ named ‘tutTO sotTO’ (‘Tracciati Urbani Tenébrosi nella città SOTterranea’), organised by the University of Turin, which aimed at unveiling some hidden, marginal and outlandish sides of Turin’s tangible and intangible culture (Amatuzzi and Trincherò 2017; Adami et al. 2021). Specifically, I discuss the third section of the project,² which was devoted to the entangled themes of macabre and funeral discourse as exemplified by death places and signs, such as cemeteries, underground burials and other gloomy sites, which are currently undergoing a process of promotion as evidence of cultural heritage, but also of reconceptualization of their social meanings. The notion of “deathscape” proposed by Maddrell and Sidaway (2010), for example, offers a possibility of rethinking ontological questions in a dialogic relationship between the living and the dead through material elements (e.g. places of burial) and immaterial objects (memories, narratives and practices). In the light of the complexity of the topic, my approach will be explicitly interdisciplinary to benefit from theories, notions and frameworks drawn on disciplines such as tourism, cultural studies and discourse analysis.

It is worth pointing out from the very beginning that the exploration of such type of cultural discourse concerns a double dimension, concrete and abstract, because it regards not only those arenas tied to tragedy, suffering and death, but also the wealth of stories, memories and identities that permeate, and are evoked by, physical spaces. Clearly, there are specific ethical implications in this field of study, and consequently a critical evaluation and a serious reflection are necessary to approach it, given its sensitive features because,

¹ The interdisciplinary project ‘tutTO sotTO’ (<http://www.tutto-sotto.unito.it/>) has run over the period 2017-2019 and was organized by the Departments of Humanities and of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Modern Cultures, University of Turin, with the financial support of Fondazione CRT (Cassa di Risparmio di Torino), with the collaboration of private firms and tourist operators. The research team was composed by Esterino Adami, Antonella Amatuzzi (project manager), Laura Ramello and Cristina Trincherò, and some postgraduate students and scholars as well.

² The other two work-packages of the project respectively concerned 1) the controversial and plotting figure of Christine of France-Savoy, as emerging from records and archives, and 2) the uncanny representation of Turin through crime novels, journals and other texts written by Italian and foreign authors. For an introduction to the project, its goals, methods and scope see Amatuzzi and Trincherò (2017). Some of the findings of the final project conference are contained in Adami, Amatuzzi, Ramello and Trincherò (2021).

across human cultures, death is usually regarded as a taboo topic. Utilising dark tourism to investigate cultural manifestations means that a rigorous and scientific method has to be set up, implemented and followed, and this also extends to the linguistic resources and forms to use. The point at stake is not to dwell on morbid themes or on a disturbing sense of voyeurism, but on the contrary to elaborate a discursive frame for the comprehension of death, and implicitly an elaboration of memory and meaning of life through sights, practices and traditions. The development of funeral discourse and its metamorphosis as dark tourism over the last twenty or thirty years can serve as a trigger for the promotion and transformation of a specific territory, but it also exhibits a capacity to reflect on the very identity of that area. It should also be added that, historically, dark tourism is not a new type of recreational activity because dark sites have always attracted visitors, or have surfaced in other cultural experiences, such as the pilgrimage to the tomb of saints or other religious places, in a mediation process between the self and death (Olsen and Korstanje 2020). Very often, the label ‘alternative’ attributed to dark tourism has the potential risk to evoke pejorative connotations as immoral or deviant, but in reality the term does not do justice to the genuine motives behind this type of experience, which rather than being entrenched in a voyeuristic willingness are more about rediscovering the past, and ultimately questioning the sense of existence. In the words of Young and Lights (2016, 63), “if we continue to see them as ‘morbid’ or associated with trauma, if we can only think of them as weird or freakish, exceptional, ‘Other’, ‘alternative’ or something to keep at a distance, then we lose a wealth of avenues for exploring a set of spaces which are actually fundamental to life”.

The implementation of dark tourism has generated a number of results and products, such as guided tours to cemeteries and other places connected with death, visits to dark sights of various natures and themed journeys to macabre locations. Naturally, the range of places and sites to be taken into account is large and diversified, and it also poses questions regarding the level of ‘authenticity’ of the place, so that for instance it is possible to distinguish between entertainment dark tourism, which to a certain extent coincides with a dark/gothic version of ‘traditional’ attractions for tourists, thus often detached from historically relevant locations, and educational dark tourism, which aim to make visitors reflect on the stratified meaning and (hi)stories of the area in question. Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis, for example, Powell

and Iankova (2016) demonstrate that most of London's dark places of interest, in reality, turn out to be part of a carefully organised entertainment project rather than a real promotion of cultural heritage.

Dark tourism manifests itself also via the creation of associations and groups, operating at local, national and international levels. Considering the focus of this article, it is sufficient to mention the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE, <http://www.significantcemeteries.org/>), whose aim is to give visibility to the artistic and cultural wealth of important burial grounds, including some located in Italy such as Genoa's Staglieno, the English Cemetery of Florence, and the Monumental Cemetery of Turin, which I deal with later on. From a social, cultural and anthropological perspective, the evolution of the cemetery can be viewed as a sort of barometer of human attitudes toward life. Initially, in the west, places of burial were a central component of villages and towns, built around or close to the parish church (hence the etymology of the term 'graveyard'), but then they underwent different transformations, sometimes becoming secluded spaces, bordered by fences and walls to mark the border between the living and the dead, and other times being surrounded and incorporated by the developing city that annexed them into its everyday practice.

The immaterial dimension of the cemetery pertains to the linguistic domain too because, although the stylistic patterns that are utilised on epitaphs and tombstones tend to be formulaic, in reality, they are also revelatory of attitudes and feelings of individuals and communities towards death, and identity more in general. Headstones habitually bear some conventional elements such as personal information about the deceased, with name and surname, sometimes foregrounded via capitalisation, and details about occupation, date of death, as well as other items such as quotes from the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer or other holy texts (Yorke 2010). Moving between sacred and secular forms, the language of epitaphs –similarly to that of obituaries– turns out to be not neutral or crystallised in time as it evolves, either adopting or discharging a certain stylistic formality, with the possible inclusion of more personal details, in order to construct the persona of the deceased. One of its most striking features, however, concerns a tendency to employ euphemistic metaphors that substitute the lexeme 'death', i.e. the 'unmentionable' word par excellence, with other terms (e.g. 'journey'), and from the angle of cognitive linguistics this is particularly salient. The strategy of euphemism in

fact is not a mere lexical replacement because it actually stems from a process of conceptualisation: in other words, “euphemism helps to understand how taboos are conceived in cultural groups and what beliefs are accepted or rejected” (Crespo-Fernández 2013, 103). Thus, such a linguistic realisation is set to exorcise, or mitigate the negative load of the term through a new type of image, that of the ‘journey’, which implies ideas of movement, transformation and dynamism, unlike the psychologically unbearable notion of ‘death’ as end of existence.

The stylistic manifestations of gravestones constitute a relevant pool of linguistic data that can be used to investigate how society builds ideas about rituals, memory and identity. By adopting a quantitative/qualitative approach to study a corpus of epitaphs from three Liverpool cemeteries from the 19th century to the present, Herat (2014) for example demonstrates how, in a diachronic perspective, the linguistic repertoire of tombs still clings to traditional fields such as religion, although its power of consolation, indexed by certain lexical selections (e.g. references to God or quotes from biblical passages), somehow seems to be reduced, in particular when observing the messages that appear on children’s tombs. Moreover, the choice of a particular language in bilingual or multilingual territories can be an indicator of sociolinguistic tensions, as Vajta (2018) argues by discussing the scenario of Alsace, a region historically split between the influence of Germany and France, whose cemeteries with their inscriptions in French, High German/Alsatian German and other languages spell out social transformations, convey feelings of national belonging and become components of the surrounding linguistic landscape.

Naturally, the concrete aspects of dark tourism relate not only to the places that are the objects of visit or study, but also to the different publicity materials and texts produced in the research and dissemination phases since the linguistic and discursive strategies that underlie guidebooks, leaflets and multimedia resources mirror interpretations of the phenomenon itself as well as ideologies and viewpoints concerning the territory, and its often plural social and cultural identity. For example, discussing the links between the African American experience, difficult heritage places and social justice, González-Tenant (2013, 86) proposes a mixed methods approach that “highlights the experiences of descendants and other interested parties, provides tools for critically engaging with history and media, and offers researchers new techniques for crafting the way historical knowledge is accessed and interpreted by others”.

In other words, the stylistic techniques and rhetorical patterns through which dark tourism articulates its messages are of paramount importance as they allow the circulation and naturalisation of specific views about the sense of life and existence.

2 Dark Tourism: origins, attitudes and contexts

What does the label ‘dark tourism’ indicate? What is its scope? And what kind of features does it display? To answer such questions, we need to turn to the original definition coined by Lennon and Foley (1996, 48), in which the authors delineate a wide semantic perimeter since it designates “the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commoditized death and disaster sites”. The notion of dark tourism, thus, deals with places associated with the idea and representation of death, or more generally with negative, catastrophic and macabre events, and the interest of travellers to visit such sights. Seaton, in a similar vein, develops this notion by proposing a new label, “thanatotourism”, which from its very etymological root ideally builds a category for “a tourist motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death” (1996, 234). The growing interest in dark tourism and death studies also unpacks a theoretical reflection since it suggests a rebalance to the contemporary critical debate that foregrounds the live (i.e. active) body as central to the discourse of identity and society. The traditional conceptualisation of the dead body instead coincides with a sense of immobility, and implicitly a psychological removal or distance, but in this way it overlooks the interplay of memory and culture since the prototypical places of the dead such as the cemetery are instead expressive and partake in the social construction of meaning for human beings.

Interestingly, we need to bear in mind that the fascination with dark sites, although apparently morbid or even disturbing, is certainly not a contemporary tendency, but, on the contrary, it boasts ancient origins and takes up a range of many different forms (Stone et al. 2018). The idea of demise and its forms of darkness, in fact, spans a range of sites as diverse as the pyramids of Egypt, the Etruscan underground tombs, the monumental tomb known as Taj Mahal in India, but also the English and American cemeteries of Italy, Lenin’s mausoleum in Moscow, the battlefield of Waterloo or those related to

the American civil war, or the Imperial Crypt under the Capuchin Church in Vienna. Thus, the notion of cemetery or death place assumes a broader scope in our present era, and may include other unusual and perhaps even more distressing locations such as Chernobyl, with its sad memories of a world nuclear tragedy. However, the very nature of dark tourism stands out, in cultural and anthropological terms, as a form of spectacularisation and reproduction of a macabre event or tragedy, and thus it can be seen as a postmodern phenomenon (Seaton 2002), whose structure is articulated across a range of numerous sub-domains such as penal/prison tourism, fright tourism, genocide tourism, disaster tourism, favela tourism, and atomic tourism. Moreover, it is a field that can generate a positive impact and may also contribute to a general process of economic and social improvement for the local community (Cortese 2021; Powell and Iankova 2016).

Once again, I would like to highlight the ethical implications inherent in dark tourism since viewing death places as tourist attractions might be highly debatable and controversial: why should sites linked to physical and emotional pain be studied, preserved and even made available to the wider community? A possible answer is that, through the promotion of such locations, it is hoped that new insights into the progressive construction of culture and identity will be achieved, also developing an awareness of sensitive and ethical themes and beliefs, such as the ones about death and the end of life. Many of the contributions in *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*, edited by Stone et al. (2018), are in line with this view, for example. Unlike adventure tourism, in fact, dark tourism pivots around the presence of death as an inevitable element in the notion of human life and condition, and, at the same time, it contributes to the rediscovery of hidden narratives, often marginalised and obliterated by hegemonic discourses and ideologies in the official writing and recording of history.

In its postcolonial dimension, dark tourism can unravel and foreground stories of liminal subjects, saving them from the oblivion, as in the case of former slave plantations in the southern United States, or in the Caribbean islands, or penal colonies in Australia, now used as educational centres that strive to develop a critical gaze on dramatic and often neglected historical moments and beliefs. The juxtaposition between dark tourism and postcolonial studies is a fruitful one, as Carrigan demonstrates (2014), and also permits to tackle and deconstruct dominant ideologies, as in the case of the crumbling English colonial cemeteries in India, or the so-called ‘imprisoned graves’ of

the freedom fighters that struggled for the liberation of Cyprus in 1955-56. Clark, Dutton and Johnston (2014, 221) specifically explore the fields of post-colonialism and dark tourism through the notion of 'dark travel', which they define "as a set of cultural practices pertaining to the experience, and importantly, the discourse of travel in sites that are marked as 'dark' (i.e. traumatizing, disturbing, unsettling) either by dint of their history or their present commodification". Similarly, connections between dark tourism and postcolonial studies can bring to the fore the significance of the migrant experience by which diasporic individuals selected and adopted a country to settle in and transform into a new homeland. The Italian migrant community in Canada, for instance, has played a role in the shaping of the Westminster Cemetery in Toronto, which exhibits cultural traces in the guise of tombstones and funeral monuments (Palusci 2011).

From this angle, and to some extent, dark tourism is akin to the broader field of heritage tourism as it examines places and narratives of the past in order to extrapolate cultural meanings, although the very expression 'heritage' keeps engendering a heated debate about its actual meaning (Harmann et al. 2018; Young and Duncan 2016). The visitors' motivations that sustain dark tourism operate as different forms of positioning, or elements affecting the construction of a national or local identity, for example in the case of battlefields (which in crude words are open-air cemeteries), or the constitution of a specific community, for instance with the notion of patriotism tied to military graveyards, as illustrated by the secular pilgrimages of Anglo-Saxon visitors bound for the military site of Gallipoli, in Italy (Çakar 2020). For Seaton, the contemporary emergence, articulation and diversification of dark tourism stem from "a much wider international, re-evaluation of practices surrounding death, not as a subject of marginal and morbid interest, but as central to the understanding of many other aspects of societies" (2002, 77). Thus, it is plausible to observe funeral sites in a semiotic perspective, namely as meaningful signs, texts and discourses that bespeak of identity and its plural manifestations within and across the territory.

Experiencing dark tourism takes up a variety of forms and maps out the ways in which visitors approach dark places via different modalities such as physical, introspective, cognitive, affective and so on. The understanding of these sites is rather complex as it pertains to a number of cultural and psychological domains and, to a certain degree, make them comparable with Foucault's notion

of heterotopia (2006), i.e. a counter-place or localised utopia such as gardens, brothels and jails that encapsulate particular social meanings. As Young and Light (2016, 64) point out, “Foucault identifies the cemetery as a form of heterotopia since it is a space that is connected to, but is unlike, ‘ordinary’ spaces”. In this sense, places of burial represent sensitive and ambiguous palimpsests of meaning. However, dark sights are also characterised by a concrete nature since their transformation, promotion and management function as development of a certain area, and its identity, in tandem with wider heritage projects. But dark sites are not merely attractions for general visitors to include in tourists’ maps and guides because, as Light underlines, “the otherness associated with death also creates challenges for managers that are specific to places of death or suffering” (2017, 290). Thus, questions pertaining to restoration, usability and organisation of services have to be treated adequately, i.e. tackling the ethos of such pregnant places with their stories and memories. Yet, it is also true that, to a certain degree, dark tourism can function as a microsegment of the general field of mainstream tourism, for example if we take into account sites such as New York’s Ground Zero or concentration camps in Germany, which typically attract large numbers of people, motivated by different interests.

As already pointed out, dark tourism sites can be of different nature, but a very typical example is represented by significant monumental cemeteries, since not only are they a testimony to the history, culture and identity of a specific place, but over the last decades they have undergone processes of promotion thanks to which they now draw visitors and tourists. Tombstone tourism, in fact, is a peculiar, innovative and increasing form of sight-seeing, for which a number of public and private bodies now activate strategies and plans. In the UK, for instance, there is now a full-fledged tendency “to prevent the neglect of cemeteries, encourage their rejuvenation and make best use of their amenity and greenspace value (whilst respecting their role as places of burial)” (Young and Light 2016, 65). In fact, according to Pécsek, “cemeteries as ritual meeting places of the living and the dead have become an integral part of urban tourism supply” (2015, 44), and it is worth remembering that the UNESCO World Heritage List (2014) comprises a range of officially registered sites, including ancient or modern cemeteries, burial grounds and memorials, for example the Stockholm cemetery known as Skogskyrkogården, which was created between 1917 and 1920.

Generally, there are three main typologies of cemetery, referring respectively to the Romance tradition (e.g. in Italy, France and Spain), the Anglo-Saxon

or Nordic canon (with countries such as Britain, Germany and Sweden, which are characterised by the notion of landscaped cemetery or lawn cemetery), and a third kind that presents features of both (for instance, Central Europe). The most important cities and towns of Europe, for example, boast monumental cemeteries, or in other case ‘national’ cemeteries, which celebrate important political, military or scientific figures of the country. London’s so-called “magnificent seven” (Kensal Green, West Norwood, Highgate, Abney Park, Nunhead, Brompton, Tower Hamlets) were originally created as private sites in the Victorian era (Curl 2001), whilst Paris too has a range of impressive burial grounds like Montmartre, Montparnasse, Pantin, and Saint-Vincent. Notable grand cemeteries are also present in Italy, for instance Staglieno in Genoa or Verano in Rome, whilst another interesting type is represented by the so-called English cemeteries, which during the 18th and 19th centuries were actually set up and used by all non-Catholic communities, sometimes including members of the orthodox church as well. Examples of such category can be found in Lucca, Florence or Naples (Santa Maria della Fede), or in Rome, with the Cimitero Acattolico, especially famous for the tombs of the romantic poets such as Keats and Shelley.

Over the last years, cemeteries and other dark tourist sites have also attracted academic attention, and currently there is a plethora of such scholarship emanating from disciplines such as tourism, cultural studies and architecture (see bibliography), in particular in the English-speaking world. However, evidence of a growing attention to cemeteries today also comes from a number of publications covering cultural, historical and architectural aspects of death discourse, and its broad popularisation, from books dedicated to the main cemeteries of Europe and the world, either more informative (e.g. Giovannini 2000; Avondo 2016) or more rigorous (e.g. Malone 2018), for example focusing on famous sites, such as Paris’ Père Lachaise (Giampaoli 2010) or London’s cemeteries (Meller and Parsons 2021). Some of them instead tackle the less known and abandoned graveyards of specific regional territories, such as Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria in Italy (Lobbia and Bettolla 2018), or elicit restoration activities, such as the Fiorano project, which allowed to narrativise memories of aristocratic and peasant deaths, including the casualties of the Spanish flu of the late 1910s (Capra 2005).

Moreover, there are also volumes about the sepulchres of poets and writers given their romantic and literary connotation, as shown among others by

the volume of Nooteboom (2015), which textually and photographically documents the tombs of artists in various parts of the world. These materials belong to a wide spectrum of genres and text-types, with different purposes, but nonetheless they are significant as they enrich the discussion of an apparently uncanny area, and thanks to their paratextual elements, for example photographs, images and tables, they provide important references for dark tourism too, and invite readers to reflect on the many shades of the phenomenon, perhaps also encouraging an active and pragmatic reaction, i.e. promoting the real visit of the sight they deal with, and therefore expanding the theory and practice of dark tourism.

3 Investigating and reassessing macabre and dark aspects of Turin: the Monumental Cemetery

The third segment of the interdisciplinary research project ‘tutTO sotTO’ was specifically concerned with the dark, macabre and funeral imagery of Turin and intended to turn an analytical lens on the textual and iconic signs of death, and its metaphors and symbols. Therefore, it took into examination a number of objects and cases, in particular graveyards but also funeral chapels, slabs, and crypts, along with their memento mori or carpe diem messages. In spite of its apparently distressing nature, in fact, the idea of the macabre can be read as an expressive means for the broader cultural and social representation of identity. The city of Turin used to have a certain number of burial grounds, some of which now do not exist anymore or have been converted into public spaces, e.g. the so-called San Pietro in Vincoli, but the ones that are still operational provide a wealth of narratives and memories, intertwining elements of material and immaterial cultural.

I have already hinted at the emblematic value and function of the cemetery, of course not only in cultural terms as a site connected with the development of a certain community, but also in the construction of symbols and meanings (Yorke 2010) that cumulatively constitute a kind of grammar for the language of death. First, graveyards proliferate with architectural details that, in reality, work as semiotic systems that make up a specific code, with its restricted terminology exemplified by peculiar lexical items such as cenotaph, columbarium, epitaph, and hypogeum, which are not always semantically transparent. Sec-

ond, the architectural elements that appear in cemeteries trigger a network of cultural references too, e.g. the dove, the winged skull or the broken column, that embroider different epochs, traditions and references. A detailed system of correspondences in fact feeds the iconic representations of death that embellish tombs and sepulchres, and construct, circulate and establish social meanings. To provide a handful of examples, we can see how in this light the ermine is the animal representing Christ, the dragonfly is the emblem of vanity and the oak evokes immortality, but a much wider taxonomy could be cited here. The symbolic sphere of cemeteries also covers natural elements such as plants and flowers, typically associated with death and remembrance such as chrysanthemum, ivy, and boxwood, although for reasons of space I am forced to skip this aspect.

Moreover, Seaton traces the symbolic connotation of the landscaped cemeteries (of the English tradition) by examining both their linguistic and architectural dimensions, thus acknowledging not only the toponomastic procedures utilised for burial grounds, but also the evocative styles selected for the building of tombs and funeral monuments:

the picturesque rural image sought for cemeteries as gardens of rest was implicit in their location and naming – ‘lawns’, ‘grooves’, ‘woods’ and ‘hills’ suggesting an Arcadian or classical landscape, an impression that was augmented by archaic architectural styles – also found in England and France – derived from Roman, Greek or Egyptian originals (2002, 74).

Turning to the history, culture and identity of the Monumental Cemetery of Turin, and its meanings within and across the urban environment, calls for an interdisciplinary research and reflection based upon different areas and competences since it means to study a composite scenario covering a host of forms such as the engravings on gravestones and the symbols of mausoleums and ossuary, but also the philological analysis of archives and documents describing the cemetery, and its activities and management across epochs. This type of investigation has the purpose to uncover the different layers of meaning of the cemetery as a significant cultural site, but also to contribute to its wider recognition, promotion, and accessibility from a humanistic perspective, i.e. a specific form of heritage and its relations with the surrounding territory that condense various connotations and that can also be employed for sustainable cultural tourism.

It is necessary to provide some background information about the Monumental Cemetery of Turin, whose first site was opened in 1828 and was built on the so-called 'parco delle mezzelune' ('half-moons park'), i.e. an extension of the wider estate of a Savoy palace, called Viboccone, that does not exist anymore. Subsequently, the cemetery was enlarged with eight expansions and new sections were increasingly added. Among the most famous architects who worked at the Cemetery, we can find Davide Calandra, Vincenzo Vela, and Odoardo Tabacchi, and, thanks to its architectural richness and eclecticism, it is now part of the ASCE network. In recent times, various publications, campaigns and initiatives have emerged to give prominence and new value to the Cemetery by using a plurality of formats and genres, such as leaflets, guided tours, informational books (Vetrano 2017), but also new interactive resources such as the implementation of a tracking tourist app that provides information and customised tours (ARTour). It has even become the subject of university dissertations, especially in Architecture (Melis 2017). Working along with a wide range of social actors and stakeholders, including public associations and private firms, over the last years the Monumental Cemetery authorities have launched various promotional and educational initiatives aimed to show its cultural, historical and architectural patrimony, as well as the recognition of a valuable biodiversity and environmental richness. Santoro (2017) for instance documents some of these activities and events that address different kinds of public, from soccer fans interested in the tombs of famous players to art enthusiasts, who wish to admire the sepulchres that exemplify a particular style or period. Furthermore, the collaboration between the Cemetery authorities and academic departments working with different disciplines (in particular humanities, agricultural sciences and architecture) keeps growing and generates new events and dissemination of knowledge.

Clearly, the Monumental Cemetery is the most important one of the city, both historically and artistically. However, a constellation of other funeral sites (Vetrano 2017, 69-74) were utilised in the past, for example Crocetta (closed in 1862), Lingotto (closed in 1788), Lucento (closed in 1970-71), Madonna del Pione (closed in 1896), Mongreno (closed in 1896), Pozzo Strada (closed in 1851), Reagle (closed in 1951), Santa Margherita (closed in 1895, but used for family tombs until 1925) and San Vito (closed in 1951). The other main burial ground of Turin is called Cimitero Parco, which opened in 1972, but other small graveyards of ancient origin are still present on the outskirts and in more peripheral areas such as Sassi, Abbadia di Stura, Mirafiori, and Cavoretto.

Many important figures, including politicians, scientists, and writers, lie in the Monumental Cemetery (Vetrano 2017) and suffice to mention names such as Vincenzo Gioberti, Galileo Ferraris, Primo Levi, Arturo Graf, Cesare Lombroso, Rita Levi-Montalcini, Mario Soldati, Carolina Invernizio, Fred Buscaglione, Francesco Tamagno, and Rosa Vercellana. There is also a tomb to commemorate the Superga air disaster (1949), in which the entire soccer team of Grande Torino died as well as other notable monuments such as the one dedicated to the Partigiano (built between 1946 and 1948), or the Garden of Rest (2003), the memorial stone for the Victims of the Statuto cinema fire, which took place in 1983. It is evident therefore that, from different angles, the Monumental Cemetery of Turin constitutes a kind of metaphorical quarry from which it is possible to extract narratives, references and symbols, not only those related to the official history, but sometimes also pertaining to apparently marginal, and yet meaningful, moments and names that can be used to interrogate and understand the sense of a place. What really matters here is the interest shown towards these and other tombs because, as already suggested, the experience of dark tourism is not motivated by morbid interests, but rather by a desire to understand and reflect on the past and its multiple values.

The following paragraphs touch on some of these peculiar cases. The first one concerns a number of tombstones in memory of sixteen English soldiers, who died during the First World War and who, for various reasons, were buried in Turin's main cemetery. Following the conventions of Commonwealth military cemeteries, the gravestones are simple memorial stones, with some information about the deceased, such as name, surname, matriculation number, date of death, the regiment they belonged to, e.g. Royal field artillery, Imperial camel corps or Royal engineers, and some formulaic patterns such as 'He fought for peace, honour and love. Rest in peace'. All the tombs present a synthetic iconographic apparatus referring to the symbols and mottoes of the various brigades, displaying for example crowns and coats of arms. These tombs, which superficially might refer to a minor episode, in reality, signal the dynamics and configurations of history. During the various initiatives dedicated to the centenary of the end of WWI, they received attention and visibility: a local secondary school teacher of English from Turin worked with her students on a research project dedicated to this forgotten story, and eventually they discovered the presence of the English young soldiers. The journalist Andrea Parodi (2018a, 2018b) adds that, during the first decades of the 20th century, the city even had an English

hospital, in the district called Pozzo Strada, where the wounded soldiers were first treated. Even ‘minor’ narratives can help us decipher the past, but we need to recognise that they might risk a total annihilation, if they are not studied and unveiled to the public attention through projects and research.

The unfolding of this story also allows to see how the cultural echoes and trajectories of the Monumental Cemetery intermingle in a dialogic relation and interrogate the sense of the territory’s identity as well as that of memory because “human beings are prone to learn from accidents and tragedies, and they need to erect marks that remind them of the traumatic events” (Korstanje 2011, 426). Funeral heritage discourse contributes to gaining insights into the rediscovery of the liminal and marginal subjects and (hi)stories, juxtaposing, and interweaving, a cultural immaterial legacy with material sites and archival texts. Incidentally, military tombs are often considered part of a broader vision that rescues the weight of history and, if we look at the Anglo-Saxon context and culture, we should remember that the Commonwealth War Grave Commission (www.cwgc.org) is in charge of the conservation and restoration of English military graveyards around the world, thus reinforcing a specific kind of dark tourism, i.e. one tied to the military domain.

Although Turin does not claim primary contacts with English culture and its communities, a careful scrutiny of its main cemetery can reveal some connections that bespeak of movement and migration, for example with the figure of Giuseppina Franco Tall, a poet born in Turin in 1887 and now almost totally forgotten. Married to an Englishman, Cyril Tall, in 1921, she can be viewed as an Anglo-Italian author who lived in a complex historical period, marked by two world wars and the rise of fascism in Italy. With her husband and her daughter Marion she moved to Britain in 1936, where she lived until her death in 1952. Her writings and her lyrics oscillate between an intimate gaze on the idea of introspection and some issues of her time and life experience, whereas a bilingual edition of her work is still available today (Franco Tall 2011), translated by her daughter and edited by Ornella Trevisan. Interestingly, Giuseppina Franco Tall’s tomb is in Turin’s Monumental cemetery, as part of the family mausoleum. It is a peculiar funeral monument, located in the cemetery’s third expansion, because it has an Egyptian design, which continues to attract students of Egyptology and antiquity. The epitaph is based on a traditional structure, bearing some essential personal details including the family provenance (“Pina Tall nata [née] Franco”) and a three-item descriptive list, which reads “sposa madre poetessa” (‘spouse mother

poet'), in order to gain symbolic completeness. Of course, the order in which the three lexical items are placed is indicative of the values of the time when the author lived, namely a patriarchal context that first of all recognised a woman's identity in relation to a man and a family, thus a spouse and a mother, and only subsequently the artistic position of a poet. The inscription also includes a brief quotation from her poem 'Commiato' ('Farewell').³ As Anderson et al. (2011, 360) affirm, "headstones stand as photographs of the culture of the day, leaving behind a record for future generations to interpret". Incidentally, the Egyptian style for tombs testifies to the imagery of cemeteries between the 19th and 20th centuries: sphinxes, for example, suggest the idea of the enigma, perhaps the end of life and the prospect of afterlife, and as such frequently appear in graveyards and tombs to mutely ask visitors and passers-by eternal questions.

Another particular tomb in the Monumental Cemetery of Turin that permits to uncover a process of oblivion and revisionism evokes the figure of the princess Romanework (also spelt Romane Work; in Italian Romaneuorh), the firstborn of the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, who was deported to Italy during the war period and who died there at the age of 27 years, in 1940. The fascist regime of course classified the entire episode as strictly confidential to avoid political tensions, and tried to silence this sad story of colonial aggression: the tomb inscription originally read "a una madre" ('to a mother'), namely a rhetorical, vague, and almost anonymous epitaph, produced by a dictatorial society. Both this burial niche and the adjunct one, used for her first child Ligg Chetacceu (who died in 1944), were later modified with a new inscription in both Italian and Amharic (Vetrano 2017, 165-166). The visitor at first glance might be puzzled by the dates of the princess' birth and death that appear rather defamiliarizing and synchronically illogical (respectively 1940 and 1935), but of course they make sense in the Ethiopian solar calendar, which shares some elements with the calendars used by the Coptic Church and other Christian churches of Africa. Because "grave inscriptions are intended to immortalise the deceased" (Herat 2014, 127), the presence or lack of information determines the discursive construction of identity, unveiling ideological positions too in fore-

³ The extract (in Italian) reads: "Visse da forte tra i turbini e la bufera, pianse, lotto, cercò fuggir l'errore. Credette al bene e sperò nel Signore" ('She lived as a strong woman amidst the whirlwinds and the storm, she wept, she struggled, she tried to escape error. She believed in good and hoped in the Lord').

grounding or neutralising historical memory. With the contemporary change of international relations, and a new attention to the reading of the past, the tomb of the princess was finally given visibility, and dignity, and an official ceremony to sanction this new awareness took place in 2006, with the intent to remember that turbulent historical era (see the Città di Torino-Ufficio Stampa webpage cited in Bibliography). Within the framework of postcolonial dark tourism, the burial niches for the princess and her son synthesise a series of preoccupations and issues concerning historical entanglements and racialized ideologies. They also epitomise the fact that a tomb is a final destination for a human being, but the right to move and travel was, and sometimes still is, not guaranteed to everyone, and becomes an illustration of asymmetrical power relations: “the mobility offered to ‘dispersal’, privileged subjects of empire was mirrored, unequally, by the displacement, re-deployment, and forced removal of those subjected to the force of empire” (Clarke, Dutton and Johnston 2014, 222). Unlike the diasporic dimension, however, colonialism dramatically re-drew routes and flows, impacting on the lives of millions of people, whose sad inheritance can be traced in cemeteries and places of burial too.

5 Concluding remarks

Given the scope of dense issues such as identity, language and place, this article has sketched out a first introduction to the theme of dark tourism by considering the specific case of Turin’s Monumental Cemetery through the interdisciplinary project ‘tutTO sotTO’, but naturally more research and work is needed in order to shed light on the overlapping of such complex questions. The rise of a novel interpretation of cemeteries and places tied to death and tragedy has to be situated within a broader reflection on cultural production and consumption, and such a postmodern tendency has “transformed their particularistic and originary function as memorials produced within local, communal systems, creating for them an increasingly universalistic currency in a wider panoptical economy of signs of the past that was potentially available to all within the new interpretive communities” (Seaton 2002, 76). The graveyard foregrounds the intersemiotic connection between the material and immaterial dimensions of culture, and, at the same time, it endorses its rooted presence in the urban milieu operating along with a plurality of languages, practices and

forms of identity. Dark tourism, in this perspective, aligns with the resources and modes by which the individual tackles some aspects of the macro-sphere of identity, and its ties with the surrounding territory, but it also fuels initiatives aimed to re-read and promote the ingrained value of places through their (hi)stories, echoes and memories, as demonstrated by Stone et al. (2018). Light, for example, encourages a further exploration of “the ways in which local communities are impacted by, negotiate, and respond to becoming the focus of tourist interest based on a particular instance of death or tragedy” (2017, 296).

The project ‘tutTO sotTO’ has tried to address some of these, and other, questions by examining evocative places and discourses, including macabre sites and death heritage viewed as signs that dot the geographical, artistic and cultural map of the city of Turin. The project thus should be considered against the backdrop of a wider current trend to validate locations for dark tourism, which “offers a selective voice and records tragedy across time, space, and context and, subsequently, can provide reflectivity of both place and people” (Harmann et al. 2018, 279). This is the spirit that reverberates in the promotional work launched by the Monumental Cemetery of Turin that, along with other social actors, is engaged in a plethora of cultural and educational projects (Santoro 2016). In parallel with robust scientific activities and publications, ‘tutTO sotTO’ has also disseminated and shared knowledge thanks to a series of public engagement events such as readings, literary competitions, and conferences, with the goal to explore, rediscover and enhance meaningful elements of the local territory, its identitarian manifestations and its opportunities in terms of sustainable tourism and educational potential. Not only has this type of collaboration brought out interesting and promising results, but even after the end of the project, it keeps growing, with new synergies, in the form of webinars⁴ and in the hope of a follow-up of the project.

4 Some of the research team of the ‘tutTO sotTO’ project for example have contributed to the series of online talks entitled ‘Frammenti sul web 2020. Arte, architettura, cultura e natura’, with a specific virtual seminar ‘Cimiteri: testi, memorie e immagini in un viaggio fra culture’, which included the following talks: ‘Parigi, la Rivoluzione e i Cimiteri’ (Antonella Amatuzzi). ‘Se i morti potessero parlare: storie di cadaveri abbandonati nella Torino fra Sette e Ottocento’ (Laura Ramello) and ‘I cimiteri anglosassoni: dall’immaginario romantico al re-taglio coloniale’ (Esterino Adami). A recording of this event is available online: <http://www.cimiteritorino.it/i-cimiteri/arte-storia-e-tombe-illustri/eventi/rammenti-sul-web-2020-di-arte-architettura-cultura-e-natura-per-approfondire-le-tematiche-cimiteriali/>.

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