

REPRESENTING HYBRIDITY AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES IN IVORY'S

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In 1980s Britain, during the Thatcher decade, a cycle of cinematographic productions called “Raj films”, which included titles such as *Gandhi* (Attenborough, 1982), *Heat and Dust* (Ivory, 1982), *A Passage to India* (Lean, 1984), *Kim* (1984), *The Far Pavilions* (1984) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984), tackled the issue of the representation of historical and cultural relationships between centre and margins. On the one hand, these films seem to build a portrayal of the British identity through a nostalgic approach to the imperial past in which whiteness and patriarchy were the key elements that set the basis for the social norm while relegating “other” identities to the periphery. On the other hand, a close analysis of these productions reveals that special attention is also paid precisely to those characters inhabiting marginal spaces. This is the case of Ivory’s *Heat and Dust* (1982), which focuses on the problematic relationships between characters belonging to East and West, past and present, centre and periphery. Basing my analysis on the theories by Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha and Richard Dyer among others, I will try to demonstrate how *Heat and Dust* proposes hybridity as the bridge that brings the gap between centre and periphery.

Stuart Hall, among other critics, focuses on the excluding process at work in the construction of identity as the root cause for the ongoing problematic of race and gender relationships in post-colonial Britain (1997: 4). The key theme of a typically British group of films of the 80s, known as the “Raj Revival films” (Hill, 1999: 99) centres precisely on the difficult relationship between East and West in Britain’s Imperial past while indirectly showing that the same inter-racial conflicts persist in contemporary Thatcherite society. On the one hand, these films seem to build a portrayal of the British identity through a nostalgic approach to the imperial past in

which whiteness and patriarchy were the key elements that set the basis for the social norm while relegating “other” identities to the periphery. On the other hand, a close analysis of these productions reveals that special attention is also paid precisely to those characters inhabiting marginal spaces. In Andrew Higson’s words, these films “very often seem to move marginalized social groups from the footnotes to the narrative centre (1996: 244).

The aim of this essay is to analyse how Ivory’s film *Heat and Dust* (1982) tackles the issue of identity construction through the portrayal of two women from different epochs, the 1920s and the 1980s and how these female characters’ relationship with Indian men opens the threat of hybridity question when both of them become pregnant of half-cast babies. To this purpose, I shall rely on the theories of Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Robert Young and Richard Dyer (among others), to demonstrate how *Heat and Dust* proposes hybridity as the means of bridging the gap between the two cultures.

Based in the homonymous novel by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust* presents the story of two women, one in the present, other in the past. Anne (Julie Christie), an Englishwoman in the 80s, decides to do some research on her great-uncle’s first wife, Olivia (Greta Scacchi). In doing so, Anne unveils Olivia’s scandalous and silenced story. In the 1920s, Olivia followed her husband Douglas (Christopher Cazenove), a district collector, to India. There, she becomes part of these world of the memsahibs,¹ yet she never manages to adapt to this type of life. In her attempt to escape from the constrictions of the British community, she falls in love with an Indian prince (Shashi Kapoor). She gets pregnant and decides to abort. However, she is discovered and consequently, expelled from the English society. She ends up living alone in the mountains, where she is occasionally visited by the Nawab. In order to learn all the secrets of that story, Anne travels over to India. During her stay in the new ex-colony, she goes through roughly the same experience of her great-aunt: she too has an affair with an Indian man and gets pregnant.

Past and present are thus closely related through the two female protagonists. At first, the two heroines seem to represent an evolution towards a relaxation in the former rigid barriers that separate different cultures. However, this movie also shows how those boundaries have not completely disappeared, especially in the context in which this cinematic production was released, during the so-called “Thatcher decade”.

Thatcher’s New Right economic policies came together with a “moral crusade” which consisted in an intense emphasis on individualism, the recovery of Victorian

¹ “Memsahib” was the name the Indians gave to the European ladies who accompanied the “Sahibs”, that is, the European men (Hand 1993: 153).

moral values, nationalism and a kind of patriotism that was tinged with the wish to recover Britain's outstanding position in the world (Savage 1990: 5-6). The globalization of the economy, together with the increasing presence of immigrants from the ex-colonies, entailed continuous contact with foreign countries and cultures. This fact produced a threatening effect for the maintenance of traditional national identities and the unity of the country. The result was an attempt to emphasize certain images of a unified "Britishness".²

In spite of these discourses advocating national identity and unity, the government's aggressive economic policy brought about unavoidable divisions within the country. Marginal groups suffered from unemployment and poverty. Besides, black citizens also had to face aversive racism, implicit in the discourses in which Britishness was associated with whiteness, and which, therefore, always excluded them, even though they were second-generation immigrants. Paul Gilroy notices that: "This new [aversive] racism was produced in part, by the move towards a political discourse which aligns "race" closely with the idea of national belonging and stresses cultural difference rather than biological hierarchy". It is from this perspective, he adds, that "blackness and Englishness appear as mutually exclusive attributes" (1992: 190).³

This social imposition of preservation of cultural boundaries renders it difficult for those who want to penetrate "the other's" culture. This obstacle is first portrayed in *Heat and Dust* with a lack of psychological depth the characters present, which prevents the spectator from knowing their feelings and the true intentions of the characters' acts (Furness 1983: 132). This fact enables the audience to distance themselves from any character's position, no matter their cultural background. Thus, it is not easy to know whether the Nawab is really in love with Olivia or whether he is just using her as an instrument of revenge on the British colonizers. Likewise, it is difficult to know what Anne's feelings for Inder Lal are, what she thinks about her situation as a single mother and about her future. The same occurs with respect to Olivia, even though the letters to her sister give clues as to her thoughts, they do not provide a full explanation of her inner life. Besides every access to her mind stops after the miscarriage.

² An example of the image of a unified "Britishness" is the constant allusion to the idea that Britain had to be "Great" once more, as when it was an Imperial power (Hall 1990: 30).

³ Unemployment and poverty, which affected marginal groups most particularly, as well as the racist attitudes towards black people are the root causes for violent riots in poor areas by in large inhabited by immigrant communities: St. Paul, Bristol (1980), Brixton (April 1981), Toxteth, Moss Side (July 1981), St. Paul (January 1982), Notting Hill Gate (April 1982), Toxteth (April 1982 and July 1982), St. Paul (June 1983), Handsworth, Birmingham (9-10 September 1985), Brixton (23 September 1985) and Tottenham (October 1985) (Taylor in Hill, 1999: 10-11). These riots also showed the strained relationships between the police and black youth. As Stephen Savage remarks, these events "were to an extent the result of bad policy and an element of racism in the [police] force" (1990: 92).

This cinematic device exemplifies the frustration felt when there is a lack of communication between people, especially when there is a will to cross the bridge into another culture. By thus deliberately rendering it difficult for the spectator to empathise either with the British, or with the Indian characters, the film thus shows that both cultures are equally complex and difficult for an outsider to understand.

Olivia and Anne are the characters who best represent this difficulty of “crossing the bridge” into “otherness”. Olivia’s story is presented through a spectacular past of grandeur and exotic palaces, princes and adventures. Through its magnificent scenes of the past, *Heat and Dust* partakes of other Raj revival films, the nostalgia for the British Imperial past, also reflected in the visual aspect of the text. Walter Lassally, the cameraman, explains that as a means of visually contrasting both historical periods, filters were used in the shooting of the 1920s scenes in order to soften the colour, and as a means of rendering the pictures “more gentle and more pastel”. In contrast, the lighting and the camera movement for the modern sequences were “somewhat more strident in both color and movement” (Lassally 1984: 48). In this way, scenes of the past become more pleasurable for the spectator than those set in the 80s. As Hill reports, “The grandeur which was associated both with the Nawab and the English colonialists has ended and been replaced by the noise, bustle, and turmoil of modern India” (1999: 102).

In the same way, Michel Chion analyses the effect on the spectator of the different style in 20s and 80s sequences:

L’*époque* passée est évoquée, en général, avec un certain lustre, une image léchée et nimbée, tandis que pour l’*époque* moderne, la photo se fait plate, terne, fonctionnelle. Avec pour conséquence que le spectateur ressent comme une sorte de punition, de corvée, les retours à la période moderne, s’impatiant de retrouver les belles images, les belles demeures, les belles toilettes du passée (1983: 55).

It could be said, then, that the present is just there to provide a window to the past because it is thanks to Anne’s research that Olivia’s story is recovered from oblivion. Thus, the very film *Heat and Dust* appears as a synecdoche for heritage films in general. In this respect, Anne symbolises the research made by the directors of such films intending to provide a faithful approach to the past. In the same manner, rather than conventional stories ideologically committed with the dominant culture, the heritage films portray figures that had something different to tell, precisely those that were most often silenced. For instance, films such as *Maurice*, *Another Country*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *A Room with a View* or *Howards End* all present characters who confront the conventional rules of the society in which they live.

If Anne had really wanted to search for her roots as a means of reasserting her white British identity in a post-colonial multicultural world, she would most probably have

looked into the life of Douglas's second wife who was her direct relative. However, her interest clearly lies in what happened to the first wife, the one who was silenced, marginalised and sent out of the community for committing the worst possible crime: miscegenation.

The parallelism between Anne and heritage cinema, therefore lies in the fact that both her character and these films represent a window to the past, a past that is inevitably looked at with nostalgia. Nostalgia can even distort the images by softening the colour and smoothing the movements, to put an example. However, by the same stroke of hand it also brings to the present the pomposity, superiority and racism of the ruling whites, together with the people who were silenced and marginalised at that precise historical moment.

This metaphor between the modern woman and nostalgic visions of the past is clearly reflected in one of the last scenes of the film, where Anne looks at the window of the house where Olivia lived after her divorce. Though this symbolic window, Anne sees images of the happy days spent by Olivia and the Nawab in the mountains. Yet, in this window, Anne's image is also reflected and it is mixed up with Olivia's. This is relevant because it offers a clear connection between the past and the present. Anne, as a living symbol of the heritage films, not only recovers the past. She is a testimony of how present and past have a reciprocal relationship. Anne's life is affected by Olivia's, at the same time that the 1923 story acquires more meanings if compared with the 80s. There is a clear parallelism in what one and another woman goes through. Both have a problematic relationship with an Indian man (in both cases, one member of the couple is married), both get pregnant and think of having an abortion, finally both end up living in the mountains.

This point highlights how heritage films become more meaningful when compared with the time they were produced. In *Heat and Dust*, the most important issues relating past and present are those concerned with gender and cultural barriers. The presentation of the credit sequence at the very beginning of the film symbolically portrays the paradoxical relationship of mutual fascination and separation between cultures by classifying characters according to time and space. As a means of rendering the relationships between past and present easier to understand for the spectator, they are introduced in chronological order. Thus, the characters of the 20s, living "in the Civil Lines at Satipur" are firstly presented to the sound of a waltz. In the background, there is an old drawing of a bridge half in ruins. Afterwards, the soundtrack changes to Indian music and the characters introduced are those "at the palace in Khatm". The background image is a different one, more similar to a door, that is, a threshold which leads to the exotic otherness, than to a bridge. Finally, the characters in the 80s appear with the same kind of Indian music but the drawing changes again to a bridge in ruins, similar to the one at the beginning, but seen from a different perspective.

The crossing of bridges is thus immediately presented as an important symbol for the union of different cultures, the entrance into the space of the Other. However, the bridges in the credit sequence are in ruins, portraying the great difficulty that both heroines come up with when crossing them due to the heavy weight of cultural impositions. Yet, as stated above, the drawing against which the characters of the 80s are introduced is seen from a different perspective. Now, crossing the bridge, even though difficult, seems to be possible.

The film's apparent conservative and nostalgic portrayal of the past is disrupted by the character of Olivia. Olivia is introduced as a loving young wife who becomes an outcast in the world of the memsahibs. Olivia's husband works all the time and her confinement at home constrains and bores her. Treated by everyone (her husband included) as a precious ornament to be admired and protected, all she can do to fill her days is write letters, play the piano and look out of a barred window.

At one point in the film Douglas notices Olivia's irritability and is convinced that her change of mood is due to the Indian climate, the heat and the dust: "No Englishwoman is supposed to stand this weather", he states. However, her answer is that: "The only thing I can't stand is the Englishwomen, the memsahibs". The reference to the weather is important since, as Bhabha stated, the English weather is a sign of differentiation and identity, especially when contrasted with the weather of the colonized countries:

[The English weather is] the most changeable and immanent signs of national difference. It encourages memories of the 'deep' nation crafted in chalk and limestone [...] the quiet cathedral towns, that corner of a foreign field that is forever England. The English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: the heat and dust of India; the dark emptiness of Africa; the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of civilizing mission (Bhabha 1994: 169).

With this in mind, Olivia clearly places herself as an outsider of her own community. Unlike the other memsahibs, she *can* adapt to the heat and dust of India, yet she cannot stand the role that has been imposed on her. Olivia wants to discover the "real" India. However, the only kind of "formal contact" with the natives is boring, with endless banquets and ceremonies adapted to an English audience. For example, in one of the sequences at the beginning of the film, Olivia attends a ceremony with the Nawab where there is a musical band of Indians playing "God Save the Queen" and "Tea for Two".

When analysing the role of the memsahibs in the British Empire, Felicity Hand concludes that:

the memsahibs have traditionally been blamed for the lack of real understanding between the British and the Indians during the Raj, and while it is true that their

presence put an end to all previous social intercourse, they were merely the victims of a male-oriented society (1993: 153).

This seclusion of women in British "spaces" reminds one of the Asian purdah. In other words, the lack of integration that Asian women are accused of in contemporary Britain is just a reflection of what the whites in India imposed on their own women in order to preserve cultural barriers (Hand, 1993: 158). Preventing contact between British women and the natives is crucial in a racist society and is directly related to sexual and racial issues. Robert Young explains that the issue of sexuality was at the centre of the very first pseudoscientific theories of race in the 19th century (1996: 97). The sexual unions between blacks and whites became an issue of debate because the hybridity resulting from miscegenation could destabilise the rigid structures of power that kept blacks and whites in positions of inferiority and superiority (Young 1996: 97-8).

In *Heat and Dust*, Olivia is attracted to the India that lies *outside* British conventions, even though she is constantly warned of the dangers awaiting her if she dares to trespass the threshold towards Otherness. In these warnings, the British characters often use the stereotypes traditionally associated with black people.⁴ Relating the notions of stereotype and colonialism, Bhabha explains that the stereotype:

is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. It is this process of ambivalence [...] that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive junctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces the effect of probabilistic truth and predictability (Bhabha 1994: 66).

Thus, in stereotypes fashioned by whites, blacks are associated with threatening sexuality. For example, in that scene that shows Olivia coming back from a walk on her own, she is met by Mrs. Crawford (Susan Fleetwood), a perfect example of the British memsahib, who advises her never to do that again because: "Spicy food heats their [Indian men] blood. There is only one thought in their head, you know what with white women". Blacks are also considered to be violent. From there, the scenes in the film dedicated to the Nawab's story of the attack of an Indian tribe or in

⁴ According to Richard Dyer, the stereotype is a form of ordering the complex and chaotic reality. Its function is "to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who clearly beyond it" (Dyer 1993:16). The stereotype provides a partial knowledge that helps to represent, appropriate and, therefore, control, the other (Baudrillard in Young 1995: 143). In other words, the stereotype is used to classify people belonging to the sphere of otherness according to a selection of traits which help to maintain hierarchical divisions.

Douglas's account of the suttee. According to Lola Young the whites feel the need to project on the Other –blacks– all the negative traits. In doing so, whites make themselves out to be the positive counterpart of civilization:

For Whites to see themselves as rational, ordered and civilised people, they have to construct a notion of irrationality, disorder and uncivilised behavior which is imposed on the object of their stimulus to anxiety. Elements of the culture which are repressed re-emerge in the despised culture (in Rutherford 1990: 193).

Although, as reflected in the above examples, British whiteness is clearly associated with order and Indian blackness with chaos, the stereotyping is sometimes tainted with an ironic hint. For instance, just after Douglas laments the woman's screams in her suttee—an example of black savagery and irrationality—there appears an image of the British ordering the shooting with firearms against a defenceless Indian demonstration.

Nevertheless, the general belief in the danger represented by blacks is not the only reason which prevents Olivia from “crossing the bridge”. Harry (Nickolas Grace) is also a British subject who accepts the Nawab's friendship. However, being a man, nobody forbids him from living in the Indian prince's palace. His behaviour may be criticized by the British community but not condemned. The reason why he can decide from himself and Olivia cannot, is a question of gender. In the background lies the fear of miscegenation. As Lola Young says: “It seems that inter-racial sexuality is an unmentionable act in the context of a racist society” (1990: 188). Moreover, she adds that:

The fear of portraying inter-racial sexual relationships contains within it implicit expressions of fears for the purity and superiority of the White ‘race’ which, as they relate to ‘miscegenation’ and ‘race-mixing’, are evocative of earlier pseudoscientific racist discourse (1990: 197).

Not only can heterosexual inter-racial sex “stain” “pure” and “civilizing” white race, but it also poses the terrible threat of producing hybrid beings. Robert Young gives a clear explanation of why the relationship between a black man and a white woman is the worst possible one from the point of view of whites. Given the fact that hybridization is not welcomed in a racist society because it means lowering the standards of the white “pure” and “civilizing” race, heterosexual relationships pose the terrible threat of producing hybrid beings:

Anxiety about hybridity reflected the desire to keep races separate, which meant that attention was immediately focused on the mixed race offspring that resulted from inter-racial sexual intercourse[...]. In this situation, same-sex sex, though clearly locked into an identical same-but-different dialectic of racialized sexuality, posed no threat because it produced no children; its advantage was that it remained silent, covert and unmarked [...]. In fact, in historical terms,

concern about racial amalgamation tended if anything to encourage same-sex sex (playing the imperial game was, after all, already an implicitly homo-erotic practice (Young 1996: 24-5).

Thus, homosexual relationships, although not accepted by mainstream society, were preferred to heterosexual ones when the race issue was involved because they could not threaten homogeneity. In the film Nawab and Harry seem to be friends. If there is the suspicion of a homosexual relationship, it is never explicitly explained. Anyway, whatever their relationship may be, Harry can freely move into the Nawab's palace without being expelled from the British community.

Robert Young adds that, if an inter-racial heterosexual union had to occur, it was better accepted if it was between a white man and a black woman: "This union can be effected because the white male, belonging to a strong, conquering race, will be in a position of power" (1996: 108). By the same stroke of hand, the reversal, that is, the relationship between a black man and a white woman, means a threat to the Western rule in the East: the birth of a half-cast who belongs to both the colonizer and colonized spheres. The negative consequence is that the superior/inferior hierarchy is destabilized. Taking this fact into account, John Hill, makes reference to *A Passage to India* and explains how the women who dared to venture into a closer contact with the natives are blamed for the loss of the empire in Raj films:

In a sense, the women in the Raj films endanger British rule both because, as Mrs. Moore, they have doubts about its moral basis and begin to question its legitimacy and because their attraction to Indians, or willingness to befriend them, upsets clear-cut divisions and weakens British ability to rule. Women, in this respect, may be seen less to epitomize colonialism than to be putting it in jeopardy. As Lean himself so bluntly put it: 'It's a well-known saying that the women lost us the Empire. It is true'. (Hill 1999: 112).

Laura Kipnis also reports a close relationship between gender and colonialism:

The relationship between phallogentrism and colonialism is such that a disturbance to the colonial order is analogous to a disturbance in the phallic order. The cinematic figure of woman –the sum of all its previously encoded implications of castration –can function as the most immediate synecdoche of this more global, and exo-physic, disturbance– decolonization (1989: 44).

In her attempt to escape the rigid class conventions of the British community, Olivia falls into the Nawab's arms. Yet she finds in him the same male-chauvinism she was trying to escape from. When she tells Douglas and the Nawab of her pregnancy, both are sure enough of themselves to think that the child is theirs. Of course, they also predict the sex of the baby: it will be a boy who will perpetuate their lineage and also their male-oriented societies. The Nawab's reaction is very telling because, as I

stated before, he seems to be happy not only because he is going to have a baby with his lover, but because this baby will be a living revenge upon the British overlords.

The Nawab, in this case, embodies what Homi Bhabha calls “the mimic man” (in Young 1995: 147). The “mimic man” apparently admires the status of superiority of the colonizer; therefore, he imitates his master in order to assimilate himself with him although, in fact, the native hates his dominators. In this film, the Nawab is often dressed in Western clothes when entering the British space. This imitation, this “grotesque displaced image of himself” (Bhabha in Young 1995: 147) becomes rather disturbing for the colonizer, who feels that his own power as over-ruler is threatened. Besides, this menace is real because “the fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s avenging anger” (Bhabha 1994: 44; italics in original). Consequently, the feared revenge turns out to be true: if Olivia’s child is the Nawab’s, this mixed-race “hybrid” baby would destabilise the hierarchical structures of power in the white system of domination (Bhabha in Young 1996: 23).

Nevertheless, taking into account the Nawab’s behaviour after the miscarriage, it seems that revenge was not the only reason for his relationship with Olivia. The whites expel Olivia from their community after the “horrible” crime she has committed. For some she is even “dead”. This is made manifest in the conversation between the Saunders, Crawford and other members of the British club after Olivia’s miscarriage. Mrs. Saunders laments that Olivia “killed her own baby”. Mr. Crawford comments: “Poor Olivia! She *was* a fine looking girl, too”. Another gentleman who joins in the conversation remarks: “Was? She is not dead...”, to which Mr. Crawford answers: “As good as”. This adamant categorisation shows how, for the British, Olivia had to be castigated for the horrible crime she had committed. This punishment entailed “outlawing” her totally. The Nawab, in contrast, takes care of her in spite of the fact that she disrupted his plans.

With respect to the British reaction to Olivia’s problem, it could be said that, in 1923, Olivia had no other choice but abortion. When she realises that she might have a half-cast baby, she collapses. Cultural pressures condemning miscegenation were too overpowering for her. Had she had the baby, she would have been expelled from the community, but with a miscarriage she was found out anyway and was forced to disappear. Symbolically, “modern” Anne finds herself in the same situation. The film implicitly makes it clear that the circumstances, with respect to abortion had changed greatly by the 80s. As a result, Anne decides to go on with her pregnancy. The feeling of impotence in bridging the gap between different cultures in the 20s has therefore apparently been overcome in the 80s. Even so, Philip Strick explains how cultural barriers have not yet disappeared in the 80s:

For Anne, in the more tolerant climate of the 1980s, it seems possible to be a participant. Although like her great-aunt she spends a lot of time looking out of windows, she is able to live with an Indian family, picks up some of the language, can even mix with the Indian women from whom, two generations previously, she would have been kept in *purdah*. The barriers are crumbling. As with so much of Ivory's work, the theme is the possible reconciliation of two cultures [...], yielding gradually over the years to an underlying sameness (1983: 15).

In the images corresponding to the 1980s, the film clearly shows how everything has changed after the independence of the Indian sub-continent. This change is carefully presented in the references made to the different functions the buildings had in Imperial and post-colonial India.⁵ In the same way, the relationships between British and Indians have also changed through time. Anne lives with an Indian family, studies a little bit of Hindi, talks to the native women, is free to reject a white American's sexual advances and choose to have an affair with her Indian landlord instead.

Nevertheless, difficulties not only in race but also in gender relationships are still present. For example, Inder Lal, who is a nice and loving character, cannot hide his male-chauvinism, when he asks this intellectual woman with a paternalistic tone "Thinking again?", when they are in bed. These words, together with Inder Lal's advise to Anne another point in the film, to get married with an Indian man and have Indian children show his desire to bring this liberated woman back to the traditional female role of wife and mother.

Moreover, a lack of understanding between the two cultures also remains. The Indian women cannot understand why Anne is still single and childless. For her part, Anne insists in Ritu visiting a doctor who practices Western medicine in order to heal her illness. The cultural gap still separating the two nations is present right at the beginning of the film when Harry, already an old man, warns Anne about the "golden rules": "No water ever, no uncooked food, no salads, no fruits".

The film also shows the extent to which black women are still silenced. Although in the 80s the British woman can exchange some words with Inder Lal's wife and mother, these female characters are presented as ghost-like figures walking in silence in the house. In their brief apparitions, they simply smile as they serve and attend the man in the family and his guests. They are always relegated to the inner spaces of the home and the only time they abandon it is for a religious pilgrimage to cure Ritu's illness. It is precisely Ritu's sickness that breaks the family order. Her hysterical screams in the middle of the night symbolically underline how something repressed wants to liberate itself. As Gayatri Spivak points out, black women are

⁵ For example, Inder Lal's office had been Olivia's house, the town hall had been Douglas's quarters and the Nawab's palace is nothing but a "magnificent shell" (Millar 1983:65).

doubly subordinated because they were oppressed both by imperialism and patriarchy.⁶

Even though Anne is a white independent woman of the 1980s, who enjoys more freedom than her great-aunt and the contemporary landlord's wife, she also tries to have an abortion when she realises she is pregnant, and, like Olivia, she ends up isolated in the mountains. This fact proves that the prejudices against miscegenation have not totally been eradicated in the 1980s.

As a single mother, Anne does not fit in the Conservative party's advocacy of domesticity and family values (Lay 2002: 79-80). Margaret Thatcher was the first woman who became Prime Minister in Britain, however, she was not a militant feminist. On the contrary, she believed that the struggle for women's rights was something necessary in the past but out of date in her time: "'The battle for women's rights has largely been won', she said. 'The days when they were demanded and discussed in strident tones should be gone for ever. I hate those strident tones we hear from some Women's Libbers'" (Young 1989: 306).

Thatcher praised domesticity in several of her speeches. In her view, "the home should be the centre but not the boundary of a woman's life" (Young 1989: 306). That is, the political notion of the freedom of the individual defended by the conservative party was also applied to the gender question: a woman should be free to decide for herself what her aspirations in life are. However, this discourse was accompanied by the praise of family values and the traditional role of wife and mother for women, which relegated them again to the private, rather than the public realm of society.

Unlike Olivia in the 1920s, Anne freely decides to have her baby, however, she will have problems with her child being a half-cast because racial prejudices were still present in the 1980s. This is hinted at the final scenes of the film when she is shown opting for complete loneliness in the Indian mountains. As Milne states: "If Anne's sexual freedom sheds light on Olivia's frustration [...], so Olivia's flight sixty years earlier suggests that Anne too is not yet quite free and feels obliged to seek refuge from the stigma of social shame" (Milne 1983: 83).

As stated before, Thatcher did not hide her defence of a "pure" British identity in which blacks were excluded. As Hugo Young explains:

She [Thatcher] possessed no delicacy, such as other politicians of all parties had learned to cultivate, when dealing with black or brown people. Rather the reverse. Permanently on her record [...] was the remark she made on television in January

⁶ As Spivak states, "She [the Third World Woman] is not allowed to speak: everyone else speaks for her, so that she is rewritten continuously as the object of patriarchy or imperialism" (in Young 1995: 165).

1978 about the legitimate fears of the white community as it was being 'swamped' by non-whites. On immigration she had always belonged instinctively, without effort of much apparent thought, on the hard right of the party (Young 1989: 233).

This distinction of cultural groups according to skin colour reflects a desire for the preservation of identity boundaries. Stuart Hall explains that:

Identities are constructed through, not outside difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term –and thus its 'identity'– can be constructed (1997: 4).

Therefore, Anne's baby is still a disturbing element in a society based on identity divisions. Consequently, it seems that she is not so free as she might, at first hand, appear to be. Maybe this is the reason why she also chooses the isolated mountains as the place where her child will come to the world. Nevertheless, the hybridity of Anne's child does point to the possibility of reconciliation between two clashing cultures. Her decision not to have an abortion indicates, if not the total reconciliation between cultures, at least the hope that this possibility exists.

Hence, the solution proposed in the film is not the erasure of cultural identities, but their mixture, in other words, hybridity. In the past, Olivia's pregnancy was interrupted because "the poor unborn creature becomes the symbol of multiple incomprehensions" However, in the present, "an offspring of the East and the West in willing alliance" is going to be born (Millar 1983: 66). This is precisely what this half British and half Indian baby, represents: a positive hybridity that, hopefully, will put an end to the prejudices, dichotomies and separations of the past.

The nostalgic return to the past in *Heat and Dust* does not preclude, therefore, a critical perspective on present ills. At first sight, the comparison of the two parallel stories set in the 1920s and 1980s respectively, seems to foreground the way societies, customs and mores change and how, with the passing of time, gender and race relationships are not so constrained by social pressures. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis proves that in the 1980s a cross-racial relationship between a black man and a white woman is still not free from difficulties. In *Heat and Dust*, the solution proffered as a means of bridging the gap between cultures is hybridity. In the film, the mixture of cultures is symbolised through cross-racial gender relationships which result in a mix-breed offspring. This child would represent a multicultural union and the overcoming of prejudices in a new, more tolerant society. Nonetheless, in Thatcherite society, this situation is presented as problematic because social pressures, which associate the idea of British national identity with whiteness and thus relegating "other" identities to the periphery, are still too powerful. Cross-

cultural heterogeneity threatens this established order because a possible half-cast belongs to both sides of the dichotomy at the same time.

Hence the relevance of *Heat and Dust* in particular and the Raj Revival films in general during the Thatcher decade. Although these heritage films seem to conform with the dominant ideology of the time in their nostalgic rendering of Britain's grand imperial past, they simultaneously engage in a harsh criticism of contemporary times, especially in their dramatisation of the difficult relationship between races and cultures. If the merging of cultures through hybridity was out of the question some decades back, it is evidently still a very problematic solution in the present. And yet, as *Heat and Dust* discreetly signals, hybridity is probably the only hope of one day overcoming existing ethnic and cultural boundaries.⁷

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