

Renée Dickason
Rüdiger Ahrens
(eds.)

Screening and Depicting
Cultural Diversity
in the English-speaking
World and Beyond



Screening and Depicting Cultural Diversity in the English-speaking World and Beyond

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Foreword

Renée Dickason

UNESCO's 2002 *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity* states that cultural diversity is "a prime constituent of human identity," going on to add that it helps to ensure the harmonious interaction among people and groups and to produce such positive effects as social cohesion, peace and the vitality of civil society, along with intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual enhancement. According to this positive or "liberal consensus" point of view, respecting and encouraging cultural diversity should be regarded as a sign of tolerance and of humanity which are more than ever necessary in an increasingly globalised world, where national or individual identity itself would seem to be one of the victims of progress. However, cultural diversity has often received only grudging acceptance for it is undeniable that, within a given community let alone at an international level, any exception to the expected norms may become a source of tension, jealousy, antagonism or conflict, and is frequently accompanied by the perception that difference, or otherness, the outward symbol of the division between 'us' and 'them,' serves as a marker of superiority or inferiority and separates what we consider as civilised or acceptable from what is beyond the pale. Moreover, the acknowledgement that cultural diversity is of benefit to the community or nation is currently being called into question by influential political figures who find themselves caught up in the fraught atmosphere caused by the abiding threat of external or home-grown terrorism, while the shifting of the international balance of power and the global economic downturn exacerbate existing tensions. Cultural diversity thus continues to be a complex issue to discuss and to depict whatever the historical, geographical or ethical context in which it is considered or the viewpoint from which it is observed.

The articles published in this volume, written by European-based specialists in their own particular fields, cover a range of such issues, with examples drawn from the five continents. As awareness or experience of cultural diversity is one of the abiding legacies of colonialism, it is no surprise that most of the contributions should have at least an implicit link with the perceptions of empire or with post-colonial discourse. The first seven papers (by Rüdiger Ahrens, E. Guillermo Iglesias Díaz, Barbara Antonucci, Judith Kohlenberger, Sue Ryan-Fazilleau, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet and Kimberly A. Frohreich) discuss audio-visual productions which offer interesting insights into this theme by evoking varieties of cultural diversity in South-East Asia, South Asia, South America, Australia and South Africa. They reflect on the visions of both colonisers and colonised at periods of (more or less acknowledged) desire for imperial expansion, and the attitudes prevailing both within the homeland and in worldwide diasporic communities after the decline of empire. They thus highlight major questions

such as the complexities of identity or the relationships between domination and subordination. Nevertheless concentrating on this broader picture should not lead us to neglect the less apparent but nonetheless significant variety that can be discerned among the contrasting cultures more or less (un)happily coexisting within the microcosm of an individual society. This issue is addressed in the next two articles (by Samuele Grassi and Ewa Macura), which examine respectively a diachronic vision of Ireland and a contemporary view of cosmopolitan London, while the three that follow (by Renée Dickason, Amandine Ducray and Georges Fournier) consider the relationship between television and developing attitudes towards difference and diversity in the UK. The final two contributions (by Gilles Teulié and Pavlina Ferfeli) remind us that the evocation of cultural diversity may serve as a tool of propaganda in times of war, or as a means of questioning dominant practices of gender or commercial supremacy.

All in all, the depiction of diversity leads us into complicated territory. It is, as several of the papers in this collection suggest, inevitably influenced by such factors as historical or contemporary artistic practices, commercial or intellectual perspectives, politically (in)correct expectations, the contrasting pressures of war and peace, cultural or linguistic heritage and the perceived role of the chosen medium, as well as by the genre or register adopted (comedy, documentary, fantasy, science fiction...). They thus offer substantial food for thought, by discussing the real or imagined other in different locations, at different periods, through different modes of expression (moving images on the small or large screen, photographs and drawings, alone or in association with the printed word), or by suggesting the discordant richness offered by simultaneous presence of conflicting narratives.

Identity and Alterity in Post-colonial Film Versions: *A Passage to India* and *Apocalypse Now*

Rüdiger Ahrens

Film and the Novel

Moving pictures are, as James Monaco writes in his seminal study *How to Read a Film. The World of Movies, Media, and Multimedia*,

at first glance most closely parallel to the pictorial arts. Until quite recently, film could compete directly with painting only to a limited extent; it wasn't until the late 1960s that film color was sophisticated enough to be considered more than marginally useful as a tool. Despite this severe limitation, the effects of photography and film were felt almost immediately, for the technological media were clearly seen to surpass painting and drawing in one admittedly limited but nevertheless vital respect: they could record images of the world directly. (39)

With this development of the moving images, the perception of reality changed drastically, because the principle of *mimesis* lost its weight. During the 19th century, when the art of photography allowed the infinite reproduction of images and portraits, painters moved away from *mimesis* and towards a more sophisticated expression. They were now free from the duty to imitate reality and able to explore more fully the structure of their art. This change also affected the art of narration because writers began to reflect more intensely on their art, the aim of which was no longer to represent reality.

In this concern, novels and films differ greatly although they both belong to the epical genre of art. When we look at filmed novels such as those in this paper, E. M. Forster's (1879-1970) topical post-colonial novel *A Passage to India* (1924) and Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) symbolic tale *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which was turned into the expressive anti-war movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by the American film director Francis Ford Coppola, we become aware of distinctive features of filmed novels which strongly influence the perspectives according to which the readers and spectators look at these films not only because of the specific political backgrounds but also because of the change of perspectives which are necessarily conditioned by the genre-related techniques of the narration.

These can be briefly summarized as the following: (see Monaco, 45ff)

Both films and novels tell long stories with a wealth of detail applying the perspective of a narrator, who often interposes a resonant level of irony between the story and the observer. Whatever can be told in print in a novel, can also be roughly pictured or told in film.

There are however obvious and powerful differences between pictorial narration and linguistic rendering. For one thing, film operates in real time; it is more limited than linguistic narration. Film is generally restricted to what Shakespeare in his "Prologue" (l.12) to *Romeo and Juliet* calls "the short two hours' traffic of our stage." So film shares this restriction with the dramatic art.

Although film is limited to a shorter narration, it naturally has pictorial possibilities the novel does not. What cannot be transferred by incident might be translated into image. This induces the most essential difference between the two forms of narration.

Since novels are told by the author or the narrator, we see and hear only what he wants us to see and hear. Films are more or less told by their authors too, but we see and hear a great deal more than their director necessarily intends. It would be an absurd and rather impossible task for a novelist to try to describe a scene in as much detail as is conveyed in cinema. With film we have a certain amount of freedom to choose from the well of details and are also forced by the shortage of time to select one detail rather than another. Whatever the novelist describes is filtered through his language, his prejudices and his point of view.

The driving tension of the novel is the relationship between the material of the story (plot, character, setting, theme etc.) and the narration in language, i.e. between the tale and the teller. The driving tension of film, on the other hand, is between the materials of the story and the objective nature of the image. So the observer always has to relate the image to the outer world of his experience. In film, chance plays a much larger part because of the fast flow of time, and the end result is that the observer is free to participate in the experience much more actively. Therefore film is a much richer experience because the image on the screen continually changes as we redirect our attention.

On the other hand the experience of a film is so much poorer, because the *persona* of the director is so much weaker. Film can approximate the ironies that the novel develops in narration, but it can never duplicate them. That is why the modern era responded to this challenge of film by expanding attention to just this area: the subtle, complex ironies of narration. We will see that the two films in question thus mainly differ in this concern because *A Passage to India* closely relates the narrative original whereas *Apocalypse Now* is much freer in establishing new ironies and discrepancies in a post-modern sense than its model does.

Finally, one of the greatest assets of the novel is its ability to manipulate words, above all in modern narrations after the mimetic desire was reduced. Since films play with images rather than words, they do not dispose of such a vast profusion of words and never with the concrete insistence of the printed page. In this self-reflexive trend the novel approaches poetry as it redoubles its attention on itself and celebrates its material, which is obviously language or more generally artistic expression.

The Clashes between Two Cultures

Post-colonial Discourse

Ethnicity, hybridity and indigenouness have among others become keywords in the colonial and postcolonial discourses of the last two decades. They represent concepts and mentalities of the space “in-between,” i.e. cultural entities which have arisen since the decline of the British Empire during the post-war period in the 20th century. At the same time they are opposed to the idea of Englishness which held the British Empire together and which has become a most questionable label even in the heartland of the British Isles themselves. In her introduction to *Empire Writing*, Elleke Boehmer confirms that “a strong feeling to develop literary and cultural traditions” manifests itself in the colonies in order to give “form and significance to newly emergent nationalist feelings” (Boehmer, 1998, 34. See also Young). On the other hand, the notion of Englishness which in the days of colonial writing had become a “privileging norm” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 3) can be considered as the opposite ideology which attracts a high degree of attention. Even within English cultural criticism, Englishness has become a debatable subject which raises doubts about its stringency with English intellectuals. Jeremy Paxman opens his bitter self-scrutiny of the English mentality and his attack on its everyday complacency with the revealing sentence: “Being English used to be so easy” (Paxman, 9). Englishness is supposed to denote a national character of the English which makes them distinctive from other groups of people.¹ What are these distinctive traits which have come down to us from the late 19th century?

In Victorian times an imperialistic attitude was considered to be universal. This ambition was legitimized by a “God-ordained duty to go out and colonize those places unfortunate enough not to have been born under the flag” (Paxman, 65). The British Empire was a sign from God to indicate the superiority of the race against the inferiority of other races. That is why the English regarded it as their duty “to undertake the government of vast, uncivilised populations and to raise them gradually to a higher level of life” (*ibid.*, 69).

This messianic consciousness is linked to a strong national feeling and to national values, which implies a fear of foreign influences and of an alienation from one’s homeland by unfamiliar sentiments.

The national character creates a conformity of behaviour and of roles which lead to a certain uniformity and in-group cohesion. The pressure exerted by this kind of cohesion becomes all the more stringent when the persons involved are

1 “Englishness is the attribution of characteristics, habits, customs and traditions to the English as a people which makes them distinctive from other groups of people” (Scheunemann, 11).

displaced from home and are dangerously exposed to a foreign country. Then the reaction increases by stereotypical violence and routine conventions which can above all be observed in far-away colonies and territories.

So the typical Englishman is dependent on rationality and unemotionality which had come down to him from the Puritan heritage of the 17th century. It was subsequently further strengthened in the age of reason prevailing in the 18th century.

These national features are illustrated in the inventory of people in the novel, whom we will look at more closely in the following.

The Stereotypical Oppositions of Englishness and the Indian National Character

Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* is set in early 20th century in India, in the city of Chandrapore and in the neighbouring Marabar Hills. E. M. Forster based his novel on material he collected on his first two visits to India in 1912-13 and in 1921. In political terms the novel is pre-1914, but due to the different times of composition it displays a mixture of periods.

The novel is subdivided in a dialectical form into three parts according to the places where the action is laid, i.e. in "Mosque," "Caves" and "Temple." The title is derived from a poem by Walt Whitman, in which the American poet hails the construction of the Suez Canal as a symbol of a new era dominated by technological progress as a guarantee of peace and harmony. Forster's novel can be read as a satirical answer to and a sceptical commentary on this vision. Within these foreign surroundings the English nationals have to overcome an alienating awareness.

Ronny Heaslop as English colonizer and officer has to follow the rules of law and order, whereas his fiancée Adela Quested who has come all the way from home on board a steamer with his mother Mrs. Moore feels estranged not only in her social role but also in the unfamiliar cultural context. Adela, who tries to be ascertained in her plan to be married to Ronny, encounters some comprehension of her ambivalent and vague personal situation only from Cyril Fielding, the English teacher who is best accustomed to the Indian character. On the other hand, Dr. Aziz, the Indian doctor, is the only person on the opposite side who is able to bridge the gap between the two cultures and who makes some vain efforts to reconcile the opposing sides by his understanding behaviour. He is surrounded by a group of Hindus and Muslims who display little knowledge of European views and who adhere to an irrational Indian heritage impenetrable to the English mind. Also the English social military order governed by strict legal regulations stands in stark contrast to the indigenous chaos and mystical irrationality which rules the native Indians. To the enlightened European observer this Indianness defies any definition. Among these Indian personalities only Dr. Godbole, a

Brahman priest, speaks out for his ethnic group and expounds what their leading principles are. So he is a kind of interpreter between his Indian countrymen and the English colonizers.

Englishness in the Film Version of *A Passage to India*

In 1984, David Lean presented a film version of the novel with Judy Davis as Adela Quested and Peggy Ashcroft as her mother-in-law. James Fox as Ronny Heaslop and Victor Banerjee as Dr. Aziz are the male counterparts, while Alec Guinness assumes the mysterious and contradictory role of the Indian priest Dr. Godbole. The most impressive mass scenes of the Indian populace who fill the dusty public places and bewilder the European observer by their chaotic and archaic behaviour.

The visual component of the film underscores several features of Englishness which are less obvious in the novel but strike the observer by their apparent visibility in the film. The opening scenes are focussed on the technological progress in England and in India by the journey of the English ladies to the Indian subcontinent. The railway, the obvious symbol of the Industrial Revolution, was introduced to India from 1853 onwards and reached a length of c. 40,000 km some 40 years later and some 72,000 km before India was granted independence in the middle of the 20th century (see Headrick, 55). Even today the Indian railway network is the fourth largest in the world. This massive investment of some 200 million pounds was very important from a political and military point of view because the railway system guaranteed “a military measure for the better security with less outlay” and in economic terms it allowed “lower costs, higher speeds, and greater reliability” (*ibid.*, 59, 51). These achievements were extensively used by the English occupants, who also relished the sleeper compartments and the restaurant service on their overnight journeys. The hard seats of the fourth class were however overcrowded by the Indian natives, who had to make do with the less developed amenities of waggons. Even today these harsh conditions on Indian trains with many passengers hanging on the outside doors are very conspicuous to the foreign visitor on the trunk lines.

The second feature of the Indian character can be detected from the nature-nurture debate. This discrepancy is visible from the orderly habitats of the English in contrast to the archaic and simple conditions of life of the Indians. The genetic heritage of the colonizers allows them to live in highly developed surroundings whereas the indigenous people are dominated by superstitions and archaic living quarters. The intellectual standard of the English unfolds a sophisticated organization of their life. The dangerous contrast of these two sides of civilized life is demonstrated during the visit to the Marabar Caves, when the Indian Dr. Aziz is wrongly attracted by Adela to one of the caves. In the darkness of this uncivilized setting, Adela's imagination turns into a hallucination when she,

under the stress of the Indian natural heat, dreams of a love affair. Her sudden escape and her report of an attempt by Dr. Aziz to harrass her sexually lead to a court trial during which she decides to revoke her accusations. Her moral defeat is celebrated by the Indians in a hilarious and unruly feast, which again illustrates the harsh contrast of the two cultures. Deeply disappointed by English culture, Dr. Aziz finally refuses the reconciliatory hand of the English teacher Cyril Fielding, stating that, on the basis of these experiences, East cannot meet West – a statement which some sixty years later was to be repeated by the Indian writer Salman Rushdie.

These contrastive elements are very impressively illustrated in the central scenes of the film.

The Film Version of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898)

The End of the *Pax Americana*

If *A Passage to India* signals the end of English dominion in the East in an early phase of the 20th century, the film version of the Conradian novel *Heart of Darkness* takes the development of decolonization a step further by choosing the Vietnam War in the second half of the 20th century as the end of the *Pax Americana*. *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and its expanded version *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2001), both by the American film director Francis Ford Coppola, mark a new variety of the anti-war film which connects the political justification of the Vietnam War with legal issues of political power and cultural supremacy. In our context I would like to connect the relations between law and equity with the various supplementary relations between dominant and marginal discourses, colonial and postcolonial stories, or included and excluded voices. Literary as well as non-literary rhetoric grows out of a particular place and time. Therefore literature may not provide minorities with an absolute sense of justice, or represent an openness of justice regarding inequities committed by legal exclusions.

Among many others, the fiction of Joseph Conrad is a case in point. Above all in his narratives *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899-1900), Conrad explores contexts in which the law's exemplary economy of norms and precedents may turn out to be paradoxical. Here he raises the question of excess in terms of the question as to how much the internalization of guilt in self-imposed isolation is indebted to the very legal assumptions about personality that cause conscience to operate. This presence of guilt-as-indebtedness in his fiction reflects an affinity, unintended by many of his characters, between the renunciation of norms or customs and the alienation from intimacy and social bonds.

According to Elleke Boehmer, Conrad is preoccupied with "colonialist writing under high imperialism" because he shows the consequences of

imperialist expansion by military force (Boehmer, 1995, 61). He stringently describes the two sides of the coin of imperialism, the civilizing effects of European colonialism, but also its destructive consequences and dangers. His fiction explores the transgressions in the human soul evoked by the exploitative actions in Africa and in other parts of the world. Along with these transgressions of cultural and ethnic borders go the violations of equity because the subordination and the neglect of native rights create a sense of injustice on the part of the colonized and the indigenous people. His short story *An Outpost of Progress* (1898) is the germ of the longer narrative which a year later was published equally as a description of the dark inner life of the Belgian Congo. The short story already presents itself as a bitter satire of exploitative behaviour and imperialist conquests which treat Africans as savages. It tells the adventures of two white men with the names of Kayerts and Carlier, who with the assistance of a native, "a Sierra Leone nigger" by the name of Makola, try to establish a trading post for ivory, a constellation of personal relationships which is hardly altered in the novella *Heart of Darkness*. In the middle of the wilderness they get on quite well living on their trading profits until a conflict with the savages erupts when a group of armed men come out of the forest, out of the "land of darkness and sorrow" (*Outpost of Progress*, qtd in Boehmer, 1998, 258). During the attack Kayerts mistakenly kills his partner Carlier, who is unarmed, and falls into a deep depressive mood because of this illegitimate murder. Eventually, when the director of the trading company arrives to collect the ivory, Kayerts is discovered dead in his room. Because of his guilt and the lie he had told that Carlier died of a fever he cannot bear to go on living. Here the transgression of truth by a hypocritical excuse is eventually punished by a self-execution in the wilderness of the African jungle. By the confrontation of European ethics with the natural primitiveness ruling in the wilderness, the cultural gap becomes manifest and requires sacrifices on either side. This compassion and exaltation is eventually solved in the name of equity because each party has to suffer from the injustice being executed on either side.

With reference to *Heart of Darkness* Benita Parry describes Africa as a continent "without law or social restraint" (Parry, 29. See also Panagopoulos, 73ff). Indeed, the story narrated by Marlow, the fictive narrator of this adventure trip from the Thames estuary into the Congo delta, could be called an allegory of the great imperialist war which is projected into the psyche of the individual. It describes the decadent morality of colonial powers exploiting the natural resources of foreign lands in the figure of Kurtz who establishes a realm for himself in the midst of African savagery. Because of his misconceptions about the primitive forces being set free by his activities, he is as doomed to die as is Kayerts in the germinal story which precedes *Heart of Darkness*. The novella is not only a description of the European exploitation of Africa with the ivory trade, but also a journey into the archetypal consciousness of the participating individuals and into the reflections of their selves and that of European colonialism. The crisis

between civilization and nature, between legality and illegality becomes obvious and marks the transgression from one place to the next as a geographical movement, a kind of exotopy, which corresponds to a mental process of moving from a traditional position to an alienating one. The atrocities of colonialism make people speechless so that on the surface of the narration blanks mark the incapacity of the narrator to give an adequate description of the physical consequences of colonialism. When the equity principle comes to rule, Kurtz as the incarnation of evil dies in an assault by the natives with his own comment "The horror! The horror!"

The equation of the end of European colonialism in the heartland of the African centre along the fatal artery of the Congo River is transferred to Vietnam during the American war against the communist Vietcong in *Apocalypse Now*, where the Mekong River also assumes the symbolic role of a fortune bearer. Here the American Captain Benjamin L. Willard is ordered by the army superiors to liquidate the rebellious Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, who in the north of the contested peninsula near the Cambodian border has separated from the American army in order to establish a despotic community with thousands of indigenous people as obedient followers. In many regards he resembles the dictator of the same name in the Conradian narration as the "evil genius" who is a satirical image of the European colonizer aiming to exploit the natural resources of the land but who also establishes his realm of violence and oppression on the basic and archaic instincts of human nature. In a way, although not in this drastic dimension, these servants exaggerate the primitive natives of *A Passage to India*. Willard, with all his obedience and fascination for his job, is the centre of consciousness of the narration and of the sequence of events, which eventually leads him to kill his antagonist in the Cambodian jungle. His journey on a small patrol boat which he undertakes with a group of fellow soldiers representative of modern American society allows him to gain a deep insight into the American character with all its desire for amusements and consumption. As H. U. Seeber describes in his seminal essay on the "Surface as Suggestive Energy. Fascination and the Voice in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" there is in fact "a chain of fascinations linking Europeans and Africans, Marlow, Kurtz and the listeners, fictional and nonfictional, through the medium of voices and sounds" (Seeber, 1999, 215. See also Seeber, 2009). These analogies between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Coppola's film are of course very obvious and manifest. They make the film a great masterpiece which marks the European colonial past from a different perspective in world politics. Willard finally kills Kurtz in a barbarous way and himself becomes more of a beast which he has just exterminated than a human being. Therefore in a parallel action the final scene gains the emblematic value of a sacrifice because at the same time a buffalo is killed by the surrounding populace in a quasi-religious feast.

The Analysis of Screen Shots

The interplay of Willard, the tenacious and determined American officer, and Kurtz, the self-centred despot, magnificently played by Marlon Brando, is surrounded by average representatives of their society and by telling communal tokens of their culture. Louis K. Greiff therefore rightly says:

With rock music as frame, and particularly with The Doors, Coppola has found an image to conflate nightmare with normalcy – the worst extremes of Vietnam with the givens of American life. Wild, destructive, and self-destructive as it can become, rock music is also inseparable from our daily lives as Americans – as common and accessible to all of us as the portable radio beside the desk at which I write. (485)

With these features in the background, one might well recognize the intention of film director Coppola to make the movie an average event accessible to the common observer in the cinema. He mainly draws on *Heart of Darkness* as his model, but he also makes use of material from the Vietnam War which is collected in a special volume with the title of *Dispatches* (see Herr). The following analysis, which will select fourteen sequences from the film in order to illustrate specific film techniques Coppola uses, is based on a certain vocabulary and a language of the film directors. So some expressions should be explained here beforehand to facilitate the understanding of the selected sequences. Others are of course self-explanatory so that they require no special reference (see Surkamp).

- A *full shot* offers a full view of a person and includes the entire body but not much else.
- An *American shot* shows three quarters of a person from his/her knees up.
- With a *close-up* the camera is very close to an object or to the face of a person.
- An *establishing shot* allows a general view of a location of the following scene and provides essential information for the orientation of the viewer.
- A *point-of-view shot* (POV) shows the scene from the point of view of a character.
- An *over-the-shoulder shot* makes the camera move close to, but not fully into, the viewing position of a character.
- A *reaction shot* shows the reaction of a person with wonder, amusement annoyance, horror, etc., to what he/she has just seen.
- In a *reverse-angle shot* the person is seen from the opposite side of a subject.
- Camera angles determine the position and the height of camera in relation to the object: e.g. *eye-level* or *straight-on angle*. With a *high angle* or *overhead angle* the object or person is seen from above, the opposite is true with a *low angle* or *below shot* from below.
- *Panning* lets the camera move from left to right or *vice versa* around the vertical axis. *Tilting up* or *down* makes the camera move upwards or downwards around the horizontal axis. With a *tracking* or *pulling shot* the camera follows or precedes an object which is in motion itself.
- With a *dissolve* one proceeds from one scene to the next by a slow transition so that the end of one scene is superimposed over the beginning of a new one.

These techniques – and there are many more – allow the film director to achieve special effects which determine the perception of the observers.

The following sequences describe certain scenes of the film which are relevant to its full understanding. In brackets the exact time (minutes and seconds) is given.

In the first sequence, *Willard's Desperation* (1:45 – 7:50), Captain Willard is presented in a reflexive mood. He describes his situation: "Saigon. Shit. I am still only in Saigon" (3:59) and his separation from his wife: "I hardly said a word to my wife until I said yes to the divorce" (4:48). So he is lonely, frustrated and without any personal ties. He drinks a lot of alcohol and destroys his wife's photo and a mirror. The vagueness of his mental state is underscored by many dissolves, flashbacks and the song "The End" by The Doors. The disorder in his room and the loud noises of helicopters flying by correspond to his state of mind and to his lack of orientation.

This introductory sequence is ended by a new scene, *Willard's Secret Mission and the Kurtz Dossier* (9:30 – 17:01), which takes him to Na Trang, where he is given a new order by a certain Luke, a high-ranking General and CIA agent. In a secret mission he is ordered to kill Colonel Walter E. Kurtz in the northern jungle near Cambodia. The clear order "Terminate with extreme prejudice" (16:59) is accompanied by insert photos of Kurtz showing him as a well-dressed American officer in the prime of life.

The third sequence, *The Crew of the Patrol Boat and the Arrival in the War Zone* (19:00 – 25:00), shows Willard in his boat on his way with his crew to the Nung River. In an inner monologue he presents his accompanying friends:

- Chef, a saucier from New Orleans, who suffers from homesickness and who does not see any sense in what they are doing,
- Lance, a typical beachboy from California, who is more and more addicted to drugs,
- Chief, who plays the role of a perfect military officer and who follows the rules of the military war game,
- Clean, a mechanic out of the Bronx, childish and naive, also addicted to drugs.

Willard describes them all, a cross section of contemporary American society, with a sarcastic undertone as "rock and rollers with one foot in their grave" (19:31). Memories of his comrades, flashbacks, anticipations of dangers and menacing enemies, war material and the presence of media representatives give a full picture of the hectic atmosphere and the crazy situation which will be incumbent on their life-threatening mission. The river as a symbol of life but also as the battlefield appears in an extreme long shot. This is curtailed by a reverse-angle shot which shows an old Vietnamese woman carrying a crying and bloodstained baby. The war actions are highlighted by the predominance of red

and orange shades and tones, which contrast with the misty and dark images of the surroundings.

The climax of these war actions is the *Helicopter Attack accompanied by Wagner's The Ride of the Valkyries* (32:00 – 38:30). The irony comes from a trumpeteer who in an old-fashioned way reminding us of the American Civil War blows his instrument in order to initiate the game of death. The predominance of warm, red and orange shades and tones overshadows and distracts at the same time from the crude and gruesome war actions which are to follow. The tilt down movement of the camera focusses on the peaceful Vietnam village and contrasts brutally with the noise of the bombs and the artillery. Wagner's music is also integrated into this contradictory and absurd game of life and death.

The fifth scene, *Show of the Playboy-Bunnies* (59:00 – 1:07:00), offers a satire on the amusement industry in the midst of the jungle war and is commented on by Clean: "This sure enough is a bizarre sight in the middle of this shit." (59:45). The studio light, which blazes throughout the whole scene, makes an unreal, fantastic and artificial impression on the roaring crowd of the maddening soldiers so that the bunnies must escape in their helicopters. The observers are all the more involved in this scene by over-the-shoulder and low angle shots.

The situation in the *MEDEVAC-outpost (Medical Evacuation)* (1:17:00 – 1:22:00) runs out of control, because the soldiers there are in despair and disoriented. The boat crew runs more and more into dangerous and ambiguous events so that they can only anticipate the mischief ahead of them. The turmoil is increased by a Vietnamese boat, which is mistaken by them for a partisan trap so that they open fire on innocent civilians.

The uncertainty of the whole enterprise is once again intensified by the *Crew Losing Control and Humanity Scene* (1:29:00 – 1:34:00), when they stop a Vietcong trading boat. Clean suddenly opens fire and mistakenly kills a Vietnamese woman. The scene recalls the My Lai massacre, when on the 16th of March 1968 American GIs randomly killed hundreds of Vietnamese.

In the eighth sequence, *Situation at the Military Outpost Do Lung* (1:34:00 – 1:40:00), Willard and his crew reach the "last army outpost on the Nung River. Beyond it there [i]s only Kurtz" (1:34:47). In allusion to the hell which they are now entering a messenger shouts at Willard: "You're in the asshole of the world" (1:36:26). The general madness grows to a great extent and the warnings of the soldiers become more and more explicit: "Man, you gonna to die" (1:35:30) and "You'll get what you deserve" (1:35:45).

The ominous character of the ninth sequence, *Post from Home and Clean's Death* (1:43:00 – 1:48:00), shows Clean's tragic death in the wilderness by a hostile arrow coming out of the dark of the surrounding woods.

The narrowing of the river indicates the end of Willard's journey. It coincides with *Chief's Death and the Journey in Kurtz' Empire* (2:21:00 – 2:28:00), which is the penultimate sequence of the film. Chief objects to Willard's intention to enter

Kurtz' empire because he fears a great misfortune. Willard forces him to carry on with the following words: "You're not authorized to stop this boat, Chief" (2:14:17). During the row between the two men Chief is finally hit in the back by a spear and falls down onto the bottom of the boat trying to strangle Willard in his agony. Chief in his death throes is visible in a reverse-angle shot and at eye-level perspective so that he abuses Willard for the misfortune: "You got us into this mess and now you can't get us out...You son of a bitch. You bastard" (2:16:20). Chief's dead body is given to the natural element of the river on which he slowly glides out of sight. Lance is the only crew member to accompany Willard into the realm of Kurtz which is full of dead bodies, dirty followers of Kurtz and all sorts of signs and symbols of destruction.

With the eleventh sequence, *The Arrival in Kurtz' Empire* (2:21:00 – 2:28:00), the spectator along with Willard's entrance becomes fully aware of the magnificent realm and the pacifist atmosphere of a utopian community. Willard hardly believes his eyes when he discovers Colby, the officer who before him had been ordered to kill Kurtz, but who had changed sides and become one of Kurtz' admirers. He is also stunned by the multi-cultural community living with Kurtz, a sort of mirror-image of American society.

The Taking of Willard and the First Meeting with Kurtz (2:30:00 – 2:36:00) describes Willard's entry into Kurtz' garden and his discovery by the armed warden who takes him to their Lord's chamber. He is quizzed about his mission and eventually set free.

In the thirteenth sequence, *The Horror and Kurtz or Kurtz and the Horror* (2:52:00 – 2:57:00), Kurtz delivers several speeches in order to justify his actions and to ponder on violence and madness. He also tells about his previous life and gives Willard permission to kill him: "But you have the right to kill me. You can do that" (2:52:07). Kurtz appears very human and understanding. What is important here is the handling of the lighting, which makes Kurtz a very mysterious figure and which underlines his secret power over his followers. His face is rarely fully visible and is never completely lit. The emblematic rendering of the scene makes Kurtz a powerful, god-like character who lives in isolation from his followers. They bring in a water buffalo in order to sacrifice the animal to the gods. Kurtz is ready to die in a stoic mood and never tries to get rid of Willard, the messiah and the executor.

The last sequence shows *Kurtz' Death as a Human Sacrifice and Willard's Decision to Fulfil his Orders* (2:59:00 – 3:08:00). Willard indeed kills the tyrant according to his orders with a sword at the same time as the buffalo is beheaded in a parallel quasi-ritual act. This sacrifice diverts the attention from Kurtz, whose execution is not shown directly, but he falls down in a stream of blood shouting the same words as in *The Heart of Darkness*: "The Horror. The Horror" (3:02:05). Willard leaves the scene together with Lance and in a reverse-angle shot appears swimming

in the water with his head covered in mud. He is shown in the same position and reflects about the likelihood of his succeeding Kurtz.

Conclusion: a Mirror-image of America?

The question remains to what extent Coppola succeeds in depicting a representative image of America, its multicultural society and its political responsibility in an international world. Louis Greiff gives an affirmative answer to this inherent question and rightly says:

Coppola has ingeniously centered the ethical issue by appearing to marginalize it. Like Jim Morrison and The Doors, it is the characters at the edges of *Apocalypse Now* who give us back ourselves as Americans. In them, as in the rock songs which frame the film, we can detect the strong and creative rhythms of our own culture and, inseparable from them, its darkest overtones as well. (491)

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Slumdog Millionaire: (Hyper)modern Tales of India's Glocalized Economy

Guillermo Iglesias Díaz

I don't like artsy-fartsy movies. Well, what's the point of focusing on incest, poverty, and all that stuff? Well, what I do like are movies that reflect our Indian culture and our magnificent Indian values. (Deepa Mehta, 0:12:04)

The character in *Bollywood / Hollywood* (Deepa Mehta, 2002) has good reasons to dislike films about India in which the harshest aspects of its society are on display. Leaving India's own productions aside, there is a long tradition of abusive representations of South Asian communities in the classic era of the British and Hollywood movie industries, what is known as "colonial films." More recently, films such as *Heat and Dust* (James Ivory, 1983) and *A Passage to India* (David Lean, 1984) contributed with their exquisite formal work and apparently kinder treatment to spreading more than questionable images about India. In relation to this tradition, I intend to analyze here Oscar winner *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), Danny Boyle's controversial adaptation of Vikas Swarup's novel *Q & A*, and determine whether it contributes to engrossing our shared fictions of "exotic" India (in the broadest sense of the word) or provides an alterNative vision to hegemonic constructions.

As has been noted in recent decades "meaning is not at all [a] stable relationship between signifier and signified" (Lapsley and Westlake, 37) and, thus, more relevant than what is being told (in this particular case, the story of a young man coming from the slums of Mumbai), is the position of the "teller" which contextualizes her/his narrative, as "practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*" (Hall, 222, original emphasis). In this regard, we may affirm that Boyle's latest film fits perfectly well into his cinematography: one of the main features in most of his films is the use of modernist self-reflexivity and a tendency to provoke in order to pose questions about standard hypocrisies and controversial aspects of modern-day societies.

This characteristic was already present in three of his earlier works. In 1989 he devised and produced a medium-length film, *Elephant*, about the Troubles in Ireland from the point of view of an IRA militant. Some years later, he released his first feature film, *Shallow Grave* (1994), the story of three young professionals and good friends who share a flat and, out of paranoia, end up killing each other because of a bag full of money. It was in 1997, though, that *Trainspotting* launched his career, with the portrayal of the life a drug addict (Mark Renton) and a subtext about the tensions between centre and periphery in both contemporary urban spaces (Edinburgh) and in the construction of any given national identity. Boyle

has thus shown from the beginning of his career a taste for formal and narrative devices which focus our attention on the narrative process: radical editing work, fragmentation of the narrative line, intrusive narrative voice, fantastic or hallucinatory episodes, fast motion, oblique camera angles, saturated lighting, extreme close-ups or the use of songs in the sound track as an additional comment on the images and not just a mere ornament.¹ This formal approach (defined in cinematographic parlance as hyper-modern) sets his films at a far remove from the realist mode and its conservative ideological implications.²

Slumdog Millionaire has been defined as a film in which “opposites collide – horror and joy, colourful fantasy and grimy reality, history and hyper-modernity. It is itself many different kinds of film: thriller, romance, picaresque” (Sandhu). This might be an accurate definition of the film, although I would rather say that there is a “coexistence” of opposites and not a “collision,” as I will try to show: as the author of *Q & A* has pointed out, “India is a country where no one leads the life of an island. The lives of the rich and the poor, the high and the low, intersect everyday” (Swarup, 370). The plot is quite simple: Jamal Malik, a young man from the slums of Mumbai, is arrested on suspicion that he has cheated in the Indian version of the TV show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* just when he is about to win the biggest prize in history ever. By means of flashbacks while he is interrogated by the police, we learn about his life, his reasons for participating in the show and how he acquired the knowledge to answer the questions.

As was the case in *Trainspotting*, Boyle places at the centre of the narrative a character that lives on the margins of the hegemonic national identity of his country, posing questions about “the link between Indian heteropatriarchy, Hindu cultural norms, and national identity” (Mishra, 336). If Mark Renton showed explicit contempt for his national identity (“It’s shite being Scottish,” he said full of rage in one of the most popular sequences of the film: 0:32:00), Jamal Malik, a Muslim from the slums of Mumbai, disregards the symbols of his country without dramatism. When, in the show, he is asked about the national emblem of India and what is written underneath (“The most famous phrase of our country,” the host adds: 0:14:55), Jamal needs a lifeline because he does not know the answer. The police officer interrogating him notes, suspiciously, that even his five-year-old daughter knows that. Jamal, however, has another kind of knowledge:

- 1 The song “Paper Planes” included in the *Slumdog Millionaire* soundtrack is worthy of comment, if only briefly: M.I.A raps, dubbing a song by The Clash, a British punk-rock band known for their political commitment and, leaving the lyrics aside, the fact that M.I.A is the daughter of a persecuted Tamil leader in Sri Lanka adds further commentary about Boyle’s choice of the soundtrack for a film whose action is set in India.
- 2 On this subject, see Laura Mulvey’s seminal work “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen*, vol. 16, nº 3 (1975), Peter Brunette and David Wills’ *Screen / Play Derrida and Film Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, and Jill Nelmes (Ed.) *An Introduction to Film Studies*, London, New York: Routledge, 1996. See also Lapsley and Westlake.

when he asks the officer who stole a constable's bicycle and the policeman answers he has no clue, Jamal tells him everybody in Juhu knows that, "even five-year-olds" (0:14:46). The film thereby openly questions the concept of "formal" education and, as Robert C. Young has pointed out:

Everyone has informal education, and the boundary lines between the formal and the informal are more than fluid. The knowledge that you need is the knowledge you learn informally. From your own family and environment. The knowledge you learn formally is someone else's knowledge. Who authorized it? Whose knowledge is it? (14)

Thus, as was the case with "meaning," it is not only "knowledge" that matters, but also whose knowledge it is and who is interested in spreading (and / or imposing) it. In the same way, later in the film, when the officer tells him whose face is on 1000 rupee notes (Ghandi's), Jamal says with scorn: "I've heard of him" (0:47:10), dismissing another frozen symbol in the showcase of myths, whose ideals have been washed away by the waters of neo-imperialist global capitalism.

Slumdog Millionaire narrative's originality lies in that it is structured around a TV game show. The show, in certain ways, comes to stand for the worst aspects of neo-liberal economic policies, as is made evident from the outset when the link established between the police station and the show is one of violence: a slap by the police officer gives way, by means of a direct cut, to the manipulative host of the show, Prem Kumar. Kumar embodies amoral capitalist modernity, the "new rich" who travel "from guarded homes to darkened cars to air-conditioned offices, moving always in an envelope of privilege through the heat of public poverty and the dust of dispossession" (Appadurai, 628). He is, in short, somebody who has forgotten where he comes from: by the end of the film we learn that he is a "self-made man" (the capitalist myth *par excellence*) who got out of the slums, too, or so he says, in order to win Jamal's trust, trick him and make him lose all the money he had won on the show.

On the other hand, Jamal represents everything that ensues from the international projection of India as one of the countries which, according to all economic analysts, will become a world power in the near future. But, as Sudesh Mishra has noted,

[c]ommentators have warned us about the damaging effects of globalized economics on rural populations, and their concerns are borne out by the obscenities of child labour and the scandalous rate of suicide amongst India's impoverished, debt-ridden farmers [as] India's economic momentum is largely city based and the chief beneficiaries are the burgeoning middle classes. (318)

Jamal's life experience comes to remind us of those "obscenities [...in] India's economic momentum."