

HYBRID HERITAGE ON SCREEN: THE 'RAJ REVIVAL' IN THE THATCHER ERA

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Elena Oliete-Aldea's monograph *Hybrid Heritage on Screen: The Raj Revival in the Thatcher Era* is a fascinating book that explores the Raj productions of the Thatcher decade in depth. Characterised by its interdisciplinary approach, this excellent piece of scholarship combines film, cultural and postcolonial studies to disclose the ambivalences, paradoxes and inconsistencies of the Thatcher era. Although there exist collections and treatises devoted to the analysis of films made in the 1980s in Britain (Hill 1999; Cornut-Gentile 2005) and to heritage films (Higson 2003; Monk 2012; Vidal 2012), the current volume is actually the first work to bring to the fore Raj productions and analyse them in context. Prior to the publication of Oliete-Aldea's monograph, literature on the Raj productions during the 1980s was limited to single articles in journals, such as Muraleedharan's in the volume edited by Monk and Sargeant (2002). Hence, *Hybrid Heritage on Screen* is a pioneering and innovative work since it provides for the first time a meticulous analysis of Raj productions. Oliete-Aldea challenges expectations and at the same time gives the readers an understanding of the complexities of the period via the movies explored, true refractions of this society. The volume sheds light upon the ambivalences elicited from the films analyzed, since their nostalgic journey to the past constitutes a critical look at Britain's imperial past.

The book is neatly structured into six chapters. While the first three chapters offer the theoretical background, the last three are the core of the volume, the analysis

of the film corpus, which includes Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982), *Heat and Dust* (1983), *A Passage to India* (1984) and the TV serials *The Far Pavilions* (1984) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984). After an introduction that offers a succinct summary of all the sections dealt with in the volume, the monograph starts with a strong theoretical chapter, which provides the underpinning for the later discussions of British films and TV series released in the 1980s and set in India at the time of the British Empire. By incorporating a plethora of literary theorists, such as Derrida, Grossberg, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Lacan, Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon or Paul Gilroy, this first chapter provides an overview of the concepts of identity and hybridity. Different perspectives —both positive and negative— are presented by delving into the complexities of the terms, incidentally revealing how unstable the categories have become. This first chapter should be required reading for students of cultural studies and/or postcolonial studies. Of particular interest is chapter two, which turns to a contextual analysis of the 1980s. It focuses on the Thatcher era and deals with the ways Britain had to undergo the trauma of decolonisation and its gradual, often painful adaptation to a new postcolonial and globalised world. As Oliete-Aldea argues, the Thatcherite period was characterised by harsh neo-liberal policies as well as strict moral principles. Chapter three includes a historical overview of the empire film genre and explores it during WWI and WWII, but the main thrust of the chapter is a thorough discussion of the different meanings that emerge from the films produced in the Thatcher era. Oliete-Aldea convincingly highlights the connection between the advent of Thatcherism and the rise of heritage films. Oliete-Aldea claims that although they are images of a past that showed unity, they actually represent a “troubled revision of British history and identity” (83) and “a step forward in the revision of the past relationships between East and West and their continuity in the present” (84).

After the theoretical background, the following three chapters consistently examine the Raj productions of the 1980s. Chapter four starts with Attenborough's *Gandhi*, which inaugurated the 1980s Raj revival cycle and was a critically acclaimed film. Oliete-Aldea offers an engaging reading of the film since she explores how Attenborough's *Gandhi* reasserts the Conservative Thatcherite — and also Reaganite— discourses of the time. While there are other Raj productions of the 1980s that leave room for ambivalence —explored later in the monograph— this is not the case of *Gandhi*, which emerges as a very conservative film, tinged with an orientalist approach, which made it more marketable. Presented as a Christ-like figure —murdered by his own people and whose last words are devoted to God— and always surrounded by white people, Gandhi makes an attractive figure easily assimilable to Western ideology and thus a walking justification of the supremacy of the West. Oliete-Aldea persuasively concludes the section showing

how the film manipulated the past to convey and favour a conservative ideology. In chapter five, she takes up the challenge of analysing two literary adaptations: *Heat and Dust* and *A Passage to India*. They differ consistently from Attenborough's *Gandhi* because they hint at ambivalence and tentatively offer a third space. As Oliete-Aldea comments, they also confirm the tendency of Raj productions to "feminise the imperial accounts of the past" (114) since they both revolve around female characters. As can be imagined, the relationships formed between Eastern men and Western women become the core of the movies and, subsequently, of the chapter. Despite the difficulty in the reconciliation between cultures, *Heat and Dust* proposes the creation of a hybrid space via Anne's quest for hybridity and pregnancy. The baby, half British and half Indian, precisely represents a positive hybridity and thus, hopefully, will put an end to injustices in the future. Miscegenation is equally discussed in *A Passage to India* through the characters of Aziz and Adela, but there is no ray of hope for these two characters. In spite of the fact that the attempt at reconciliation between races is present in *A Passage to India*, this movie is a step backwards in comparison to *Heat and Dust*, which actually presents hybridity as a solution.

The last chapter is devoted to the analysis of two TV serials: *The Far Pavilions* and *The Jewel in the Crown*, which are again vehicles for ideological discourses. The issues of hybridity and inter-ethnic relationships are constant features in these productions. While *The Far Pavilions* has been considered as fostering an orientalist discourse via the casting of actors and actresses who used 'blackening', *The Jewel in the Crown* has been regarded—and praised—as a more realistic portrayal of the last days of the empire. Curiously enough, the strength of this chapter resides in going beyond this traditional interpretation of these two TV serials. In Oliete-Aldea's opinion, the orientalist discourses in *The Far Pavilions* are so obvious that the movie should be read as a parody of previous empire films. Interestingly, the inter-ethnic relationship works perfectly in this TV serial, distancing it from all the films analysed, and clearly defying the "conservative preservation of the white, national identity boundaries of the 1980s" (170). However, despite the readers'—and critics'—first impressions, *The Jewel in the Crown* is less ambivalent than *The Far Pavilions* and leaves almost no room for hybridity. Miscegenation is impossible, characters belonging to the low strata of society seem dangerous and the main characters are in the end relegated to the margins. Strangely, Oliete-Aldea concludes the chapter by highlighting the ambivalence of this production. Although I share Oliete-Aldea's tenets in all the chapters, I cannot but disagree with this one since her analysis of the *The Jewel in the Crown* would seem to show it as being rather one-sided and quite lacking in ambivalence. The volume is brought to a close with the idea that all the Raj productions explored had no qualms about presenting the notion of hybridity more positively than had been the case in earlier empire films.

Oliete-Aldea's insights into the connections between the 1980s Raj productions and the Thatcherite period could have included a dialogue with other film texts from the period, but set in post-colonial India, such as *36 Chowringhee Lane* (Aparna Sen, 1981) which would have made the discussion even more enriching and engaging with regard to hybridity, female identity and, ultimately, ideology. This would have required a deeper theoretical discussion of the movies.

This having been said, it is commendable that Oliete-Aldea has produced solid, well-researched analyses of the Raj productions, substantiated with theory, in very readable prose. With *Hybrid Heritage on Screen: The 'Raj Revival' in the Thatcher Era*, Oliete-Aldea has managed to smooth the way for future research and consolidate the need for an analysis of Raj productions of the 1980s since they provide ideological discourses and help the readers understand the inconsistencies of the period in which they were produced.

Works Cited

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