

Sección de Filología de la Facultad de Humanidades
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana

CRITIQUE OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM
IN SATYAJIT RAY'S *THE CHESS
PLAYERS*, ASHUTOSH GOWARIKER'S
LAGAAN AND DANNY BOYLE'S
SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

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Abstract

This research makes an analysis of three Indian films—Satyajit Ray's *The Chess Players* (1977), Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan* (2001) and Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)—to see the evolution of British imperialism in India since its beginnings until nowadays.

Apart from that, I will divide my analysis in two main content blocks: firstly, the one dedicated to the analysis of British imperialism in colonial and contemporary India; and, secondly, the one that deals with the issue of British imperialism and its effects on Indian women.

1. Introduction

Before starting with the methodology and the analysis that I have made of the *The Chess Players*, *Lagaan* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, I will comment briefly on the context in which this research has been made: I am very interested in Indian history, which is very rich and extensive, and in Indian cinema. Bollywood films show a very different way of telling stories compared to Hollywood films and reflect, in some sense, the history and the reality of the country in a unique way. Since the colonial past of India has influenced much of its present, I have decided to analyse British imperialism in India since its beginnings until nowadays. In order to do that, as I have mentioned at the beginning of this section, I will analyse three films that represent three different stages in British colonialism in the country. As Indian films show an accurate portrait of India and the Indian national sentiment, I will deal with different scenes of each film to see how has British imperialism evolved in Indian history.

2. Methodology

The methodology that has been used for this research is based in two main approaches: the Postcolonial one, that helps me to understand better the role of British imperialism in India during the colonial times; and the Feminist one, that helps me to trace the consequences of British imperialism on Indian women.

Firstly, with the Postcolonial approach, I will use concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, opposition and subalternity. Hybridity is the situation when a person from the colony develops a mixed culture between the native one and that of the colonizers. Mimicry is the situation when a person from the colony starts imitating the culture of the colonizers. Opposition implies a point of view of the colonizers in which the natives are the Other, that is constructed on what they are not (for example, we, the colonizers, are civilized, whereas they, the natives, are savage). And, subalternity, shows a situation where the natives react to the situation of being othered and seen as inferior people by the colonizers. This reaction consists in blending their culture into that of the colonizers in order to preserve their customs and retain their social status (as it happened with the Aborigines when the conquerors arrived to the Isles).

Secondly, we have the Feminist approach, that comprises the use of two theories within the movement of the same name, that are the Western Feminism and the theory of Third World Feminism, which is the one that defends the idea of the double colonization of women in the colonies (this includes the imposition of two different codes that oppress them: the culture of the colonizers and the male chauvinism that exists in their own surroundings).

3. Authors and works analysed

In order to better understand this research, I will present briefly the directors of each of the films that I have analysed. The importance of filmmakers can be crucial because their styles of filming can help to understand the non-diegetic elements of their works.

Firstly, I will talk about Satyajit Ray (Calcutta, India, 1921-Kolkata, 1992), who is the director of *The Chess Players* (1977). He is one of the most important directors in Indian cinema and some of his most important films are *Pather Panchali* (1955) and *Apur Sansar* (1959), that are part of the so-called "Apu Trilogy". Regarding his style of filming, his works are influenced by the Italian neorealism and are made mostly in Bengali (Ganti:25) . Apart from that, Ray portrays reality with crudity in his works, with poverty, fallible heroes (for example, *Apur Sansar's* Apu, or *The Chess Players'* nobles) and there is no music in his films (as it is conceived in Bollywood with songs and dances), something that can be shocking because of the idea that all Indian films must include music. Regarding screenshots, it is worth mentioning that Ray makes use of a documentary technique, because in most of the screenshots I see that the camera is at the same level of the characters. This position of the camera permits me to see the story of the film from their point of view and also makes easier to familiarize with each of them, with their thoughts, their feelings, etc.



Figure 1

Satyajit Ray

Regarding *The Chess Players*, it is the story of the Indian kingdom of Avadh in the times of the East India Company (from 1757 to 1858) and all the events that take place until the British attack this territory in order to have control over it. These events that I am referring to take place before the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In this film, the plot is developed through two parallel stories that complement each other: firstly, the story of the kingdom of Avadh itself, in which the British try to dethrone the king of this state (Amjad Khan). They do this in order to have absolute control over Avadh by accusing the king of being a bad ruler. Secondly, there is the parallel story, with two nobles (Sanjeev Kumar and Saeed Jaffrey). Both are passionate about chess and do everything they can to play their favourite game whenever and wherever they can, even if they have to leave their families aside to do that.

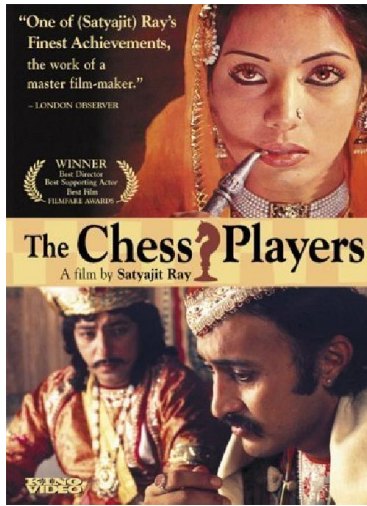


Figure 2

Next, I will talk about Ashutosh Gowariker (Bombay, India, 1964), the director of *Lagaan: Once Upon a time in India* (2001). He is a very well-known director in the scene of Bollywood who has made films such as *Swades: We, the People* (2004), *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) or the upcoming *Mohenjo Daro* (2016). Regarding his style of filming, I must say that he uses the theme of nationalism, either to talk about the past of India or about the present, giving an *enfoque introspectivo y realista del patriotismo* (Amin:152). With the introspective and realistic view of patriotism, I understand that Gowariker tries to portray patriotism from the inside and showing its good and bad points. Apart from that, I would like to mention also the special use of music that is present in Gowariker's films, giving diegetic and non-diegetic information about the plot (something characteristic of Bollywood films from the late 40s onwards [Amin:61]), specially about the feelings of the characters, as you can see in Figures 4 and 5 (in contrast to Ray's films, where music appears, but it does not give any extra information about the characters). Gowariker also makes use of different kinds of takes, to show not only the point of view of the people of Champaner, but also that of the British characters.



Figure 3 Ashutosh Gowariker



Figure 4 (*Lagaan*: 25:19)

In this Figure, it is shown a medium long shot that has plenty of light (not only because the take is set in the daytime, but because it shows the happiness of the people of Champaner for the rain). Apart from that, there is also a contrast in the clothing of the men and women of Champaner, because men wear white clothes, while women are dressed in red and orange.



Figure 5

(*Lagaan*: 28:57)

This Figure presents a medium shot with plenty of light as the previous Figure. In this take, there is a contrast in the colours of the clothing again. This time, the difference is between the clothes of the elder people of the village, and Bhuvan's clothing. Apart from that, it is remarkable how they are giving thanks for the rain during the song *Ghanan Ghanan*, that is also danced in the previous figure as a way of showing their happiness for this meteorological phenomenon and its consequences in their crops and their paying taxes for the British.

In relation to that, I have to mention that *Lagaan* (*tax* in English) is the story of the Indian drought-stricken village of Champaner in the times of the British Raj (from 1858 to 1947). The people of this village have to pay abusive taxes imposed by the British and Bhuvan (Aamir Khan), a young man from the village decides to rebel against this injustice. At the beginning, he does not have many support from his neighbours but, as the film advances, their support to Bhuvan's cause increases. After Bhuvan's rebellion, Captain Russell (Paul Blackthorne), one of the British authorities that rules over the princely state (38:51), challenges the people of Champaner, to play cricket. Captain Russell told them that, if they defeated the British, they would be free from paying any *lagaan* for the three following years if they won, but, if they lost, they had to pay a thrice the *lagaan*. Bhuvan creates his team with people from all castes and religions. Then, Bhuvan gets the help of Russell's sister, Elizabeth (Rachel Shelley) and she explains the team the rules of cricket. When the time of the match arrives, they play cricket for two days, and , despite all the problems that they have during the match (injuries, abuses from the

British, etc.) they get to win and be free from the *lagaan*. This victory of the Indians over the British created such a distress in the British that they opted to dissolve the cantonment and send Russell to the colonies in Africa.

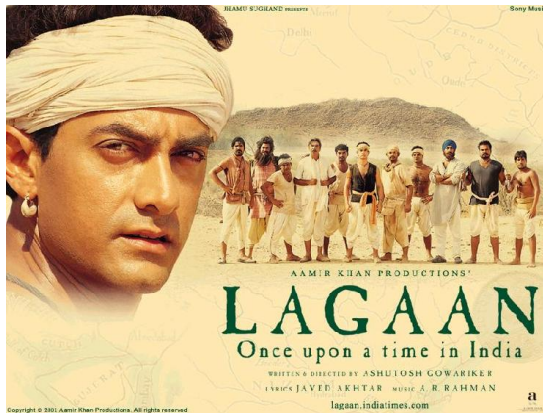


Figure 6

And, thirdly, I will comment on Danny Boyle (1959, Manchester, England), who is the director of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and is the only director of the three who is not Indian. His films are characterized by being low-budget and with a “bold visual imagery and exuberant energy” (Encyclopaedia Britannica) and, like Ray, portrays reality as crude as it is. This crudity of reality is clearly seen not only in *Slumdog Millionaire*, but also in another important film of his, *Trainspotting* (1996). In this film, the protagonist consumes alcohol and drugs and the side effects of the doses of drugs that he consumes are very detailed and crude, with vomits and hallucinations. Despite the fact that most of his films do not include songs as it is understood in Bollywood, *Slumdog Millionaire* does include one song at the end of the film, *Jai Ho* (see Figure 8). Despite this, it does not add any additional information about the story itself or the feelings of the characters, as it happens with *Lagaan*'s songs, but it only highlights the final victory of the protagonist.



Figure 7

Danny Boyle



Figure 8

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 1:51:05)

In this Figure, there is a long shot, in which Jamal, Latika, and other users of Mumbai's train station dance the song *Jai Ho*. Despite the few light of the setting, the dancers can be clearly seen and there is a perfect symmetry between the trains and the dancers that create a perfect closing to the film, but does not give any non-diegetic information about the feelings of the characters, but just celebrates Jamal's victory in the show.

This issue of the songs leads me to the film itself. *Slumdog Millionaire* is the story of Jamal Malik (Dev Patel), a boy from the slums of Juhu, in Mumbai. This boy participates in the famous quiz show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and answers all the questions correctly but, before answering the last question for 20 million

rupees, he is arrested under the suspicion of cheating. While he is in the police station, he is tortured by the police and he tells them his own life, that contains all the answers for the questions. He does this through flashbacks that go from his childhood until he arrived to the show. When he finishes his story, the police officer (Irrfan Khan) sees that Jamal is innocent and lets him return to the programme, so he can answer the last question, which he does not know. When he arrives, he makes use of the *Call a Friend* option and calls his brother Salim (Madhur Mittal) but, instead of him, the one that answers is Latika (Freida Pinto). She is the love of Jamal's life, who is escaping from Javed (Mahesh Manjrekar), the gangster that Salim works for. Even though she does not know the answer for the question, Latika tells Jamal that she is safe. Finally, Jamal answers the correct option and wins the great prize. The film ends with Jamal meeting Latika at Mumbai's train station and dance the song that has been previously mentioned.



Figure 9

4. Postcolonialism: British imperialism in India

4.1. The British in India: Elements of British colonialism in Satyajit Ray's *The Chess Players* and Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan*

When analysing the presence of British colonialism in India in these two films, I have to start by the colonial times, when the British governed Indian soil. In order to make an analysis of the role of the British and their influence in the life of Indians, I will see different aspects, such as politics, culture and the influence of British civilization, which was imposed to Indians during this time. In order to analyse them, I will see these aspects from the perspective of: Ray's *The Chess Players* and Gowariker's *Lagaan*. Firstly, in the field of politics, it is important to bear in mind that *The Chess Players* and *Lagaan* are settled in different stages of British colonization of India: in *The Chess Players*, it is portrayed the East India Company and an Indian kingdom (the kingdom of Avadh) that receives the protection of the British Army; whereas in *Lagaan* there is the British Raj, in which there are princely states governed by a rajah that serves the British. Apart from that, the film also shows the leaders of each village of each princely state (like Champaner), as I have seen in the film (see Figures 10 and 11).

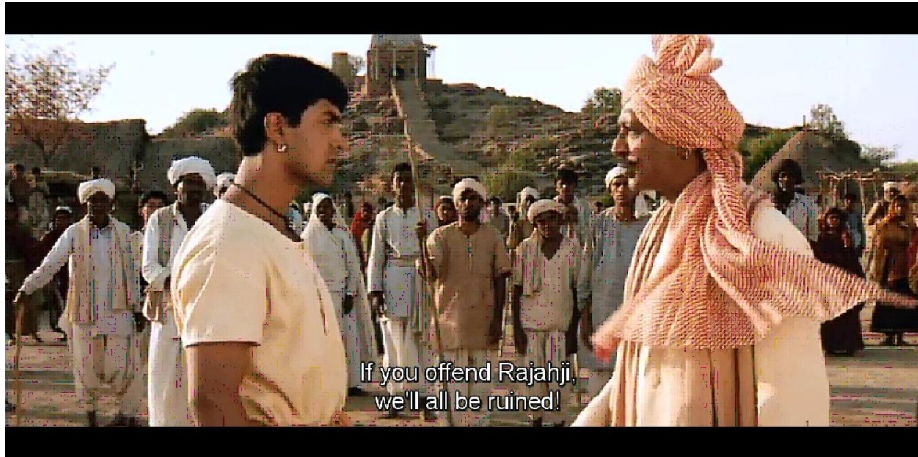


Figure 10

(Lagaan: 32:15)

This Figure shows another medium shot in which the light illuminates the leader of Champaner and darkens Bhuvan as a way to show the difference of power status between them.



Figure 11

(Lagaan: 55:09)

In this Figure, there is a low POVE shot that underlines the power status of the characters of the leaders of other villages. In this take, it is clear the feeling of uniformity, as most of the characters of this take are dressed in white, whereas only one of them is dressed in grey.

Secondly, the British influence Indians in several ways, creating situations of mimicry, hybridity, opposition and subalternity. Regarding mimicry, I see the example

of the King of Avadh in *The Chess Players*, who uses a Western crown, as it is shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12

(*The Chess Players*: 07:12)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which the light emphasizes the king of Avadh as a way of presenting him and his power status and his Western crown. Apart from that, the take presents a clear symmetry in the position of the king in his throne and the decorations of his palace.

In the case of hybridity, I consider that there are two clear examples in both films: firstly, the servant in *Lagaan*, who serves as a bridge between the world of the British and that of the people of Champaner. This can be seen in the scenes when he translates Elizabeth's instructions on the rules of cricket and teaches her Hindi, as it can be observed in Figures 13 and 14.



Figure 13

(Lagaan: 59:52)

This Figure shows a countershot, in which Elizabeth talks to the people of Champaner and Ram Singh, the servant, translates her words into Hindi. Apart from that, there is a contrast between the colour of Elizabeth and Ram Singh's clothing. Elizabeth is dressed in white, something that makes me think of the idea of purity that she represents as a young lady; whereas the servant is dressed in the white and grey of his uniform, representing somebody that follows the orders of others, as it happens with Elizabeth in this take.



Figure 14

(Lagaan: 1:13:16)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot of another scene in which Elizabeth and Ram Singh are with Bhuvan's team. In this case, it is worth noting the incidence of light on Elizabeth, an element that reinforces this relationship Elizabeth-purity that I commented in the previous Figure.

And, secondly, the characters of Captain Weston and General Outram in *The Chess Players*, who are interested in the Hindi language and Urdu poetry, as shown in Figure 15. In this scene, there is Captain Weston, who recites his superior General Outram a poem in Urdu written by the king of Avadh.

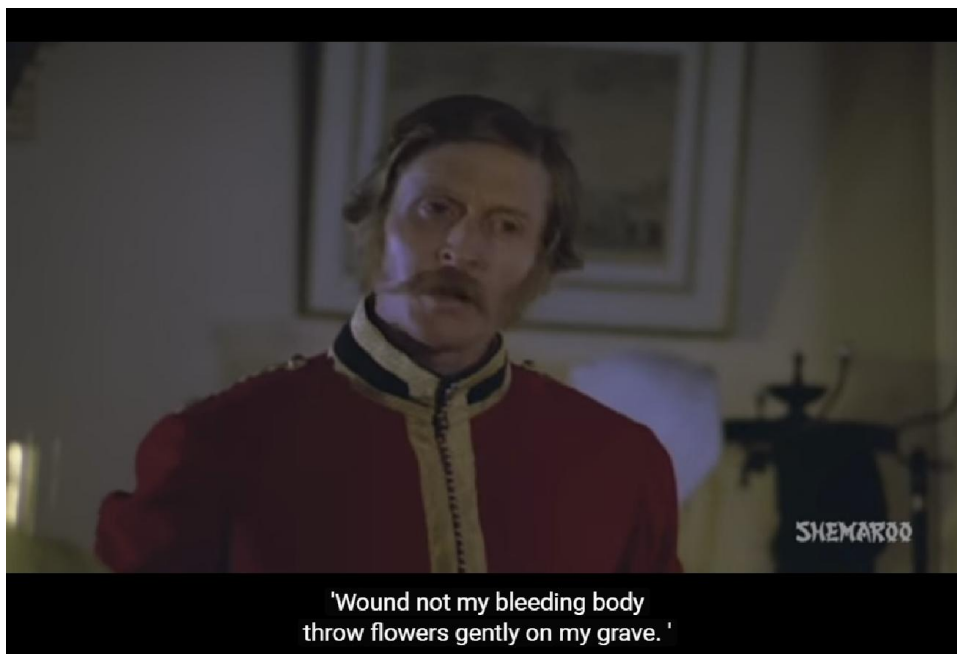


Figure 15

(*The Chess Players*: 12:37)

This Figure shows another medium shot with fewer light than the others, with a Captain Weston that is reciting General Outram a poem in Urdu written by the king of Avadh. Regarding colours, there is a huge presence of red, as it is the colour of the uniforms used by the British during the colonial times.

Regarding opposition, I see that it appears in both films, but more specially in *Lagaan*, where the conflict is more direct and we see an active struggle on the side of the Indians. In this film, I see the opposition between the people of Champaner—led by Bhuvan—and the British—managed most of the film by Captain Russell, who is the one that defies Indians to play cricket and pay the *double lagaan*, as it is shown in Figure 16.



Figure 16

(*Lagaan*: 38:51)

In this Figure, there is another medium shot, with Captain Russell talking to the people of Champaner about the cricket match. Regarding to the issue of colours, there is another contrast, in this case, between Captain Russell's Western clothing (red jacket and white shirt) with the traditional Indian clothing of the rajah. Despite the similarities in colour with that of Captain Russell's, there is this feeling of failed imitation of the British fashion, that can be compared with that of the traditional Indian institutions that work for the British during the colonial period.

Finally, I see the case of subalternity because the Indian characters of both films are othered by the British ones, who see themselves as superior beings.

Apart from all these elements, it is worth mentioning more examples of the influence of the British civilization that is imposed on Indians, like the existence of two ways of playing chess (the British and the Indian) in *The Chess Players* , as it can be seen in Figure 17, or the colonial imposition that implies the learning of cricket by the people of Champaner in *Lagaan*, because they had to learn how to play this British game in order to be free from the *lagaan* the three following years.



Figure 17

(*The Chess Players*: 20:34)

This Figure shows another medium level shot, in which an old man tells the nobles the British way of playing chess. In this take, it is worth noting the traditional Indian clothing of the old man in contrast with the whiteness of the chess piece of the Minister (or the Queen, according to the British). Apart from that, this clothing also contrasts with the purple wall behind him with beautiful white decorations.

Returning to the idea of politics and ways of governing, it is also remarkable the fact that the British try to dethrone Wajid Ali Shah, the king of Avadh, in order to control directly his kingdom. In order to do this, they discredit (specially General Outram) Ali Shah's way of ruling his people by saying that he is more interested in his poetry, music and having feasts in his palace than governing his people as a *good king* should do. This image resorts to an Orientalist perception of India, without thinking on any kind of morals and only enjoying themselves, in contrast to the *civilized West*, in which the people live according to concrete morals and with rulers that (in theory) set laws to regulate the lives of their people for their own good. Apart from that, it is also worth noting the powerful parallelism that appears in *The Chess Players*. Throughout the film, I have these two nobles are obsessed with playing chess (with the Indian way of playing the game), whereas the British are playing their own chess game with the kingdom of Avadh. This game of chess

played by the British consists in having control over Avadh with a masterstroke: the discredit and the dethronement of its king.



Figure 18

(*The Chess Players*: 20:11)

In this Figure, there are the same elements of the previous Figure, but with a countershot instead of a medium level shot.

Another element related to the influence of British civilization that is imposed over Indians is the evolution of the servant in *Lagaan*. This man presents changes from being the obliging person from the beginning of the film to the proud Indian I see near the end of the film after his change of behaviour towards the British. This transformation takes place after the mistreatment that the servant has received from his superiors, specially from Captain Andrew Russell, as it is shown in Figures 19, 20 and 21.



Figure 19

(*Lagaan*: 165:27)

This Figure shows a medium shot in which there is Captain Russell beating Ram Singh before showing his sympathy to the Champaner team. In this Figure, there are different contrasts: firstly, that between Captain Russell's red and white cricket clothing and Ram Singh's grey and white servant clothing, that underlines the relationship master-servant that exists between them. Secondly, we have the contrast with the light, because Ram Singh is illuminated, whereas Captain Russell is in shadows, something that shows how evil is he in contrast to the goodness and kindness of Ram Singh.



Figure 20

(*Lagaan*: 165:36)

In this Figure, there are the same elements of the previous Figure, but with a Ram Singh taking off his turban in response to the beatings that Captain Russell has given him.



Figure 21

(*Lagaan*: 205:11)

This Figure shows a close up of Ram Singh with the traditional Indian clothing with that resembles to that of the rest of the public, creating a feeling of uniformity. Regarding the issue of light, it illuminates Ram Singh and the rest of the public as a way of showing happiness for the victory of Bhuvan's team.

4.2. Neocolonialism in Contemporary India: Elements of British colonialism in Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*

After seeing how British imperialism was physically present in India, I will say that this imperialism continues to exist in independent India, but with different forms. The presence of British imperialism is not political as it was in colonial times, but mainly economic, due to the effects of the economic liberalization during Narasimha Rao's times (from 1991 to 1996). In order to see this in a more detailed way, I will analyse Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* that will show us a picture of contemporary India and the ways in which this British imperialism has survived until nowadays.

Throughout the film, I can see that there are two main signs of neocolonialism, which are multinationals and British soft power (in this case, British culture, which has a crucial role in some of the questions that are answered by Jamal Malik).

Regarding multinationals, I see that there are references to well-known brands such as Coca-Cola and Converse (see Figures 22 and 23), the phone enterprise in which Jamal works (see Figures 24, 25 and 26).



Figure 22

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 23:42)

In this Figure, there is a countershot in which Maman is giving a bottle of Coca-Cola to Jamal and Salim before taking them with him. In this take, as it happens with all the film, there is fewer light in order to highlight the misery in which Jamal and Salim live. Returning to the take, there are shadows inside the tent where the two brothers sleep, but there is light from outside, where Maman is, giving the impression that Maman is the salvation for Jamal and Salim, who are working in a Mumbai dump.



Figure 23

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 40:22)

This Figure shows a low POVE shot in which Salim or Jamal are taking a pair of Converse trainers from the shoes that tourists leave outside Taj Mahal. In this take, there is a contrast between the white trainers and the dark coloured trousers of the child who is wearing them, creating a feeling in which the trainers are more important than the rest of shoes that are left outside the monument.



Figure 24

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 64:02)

In this Figure, there is a medium long shot in which there is Jamal talking during the English class while he is serving tea. Here, there are two main contrasts: firstly, there is the contrast between Jamal's simple clothing and that of the students, that can resemble to that of any First World student. Secondly, there is the contrast between the poster of the white people in white T-shirts and the people inside the English class because the poster gives an idea of uniformity and equality that does not exist in the

classroom, where there is no uniformity (everyone is dressed the way they like) nor equality (there is no equality between Jamal and the rest of the students, because he has to work while the rest of youngsters of the classroom are studying).

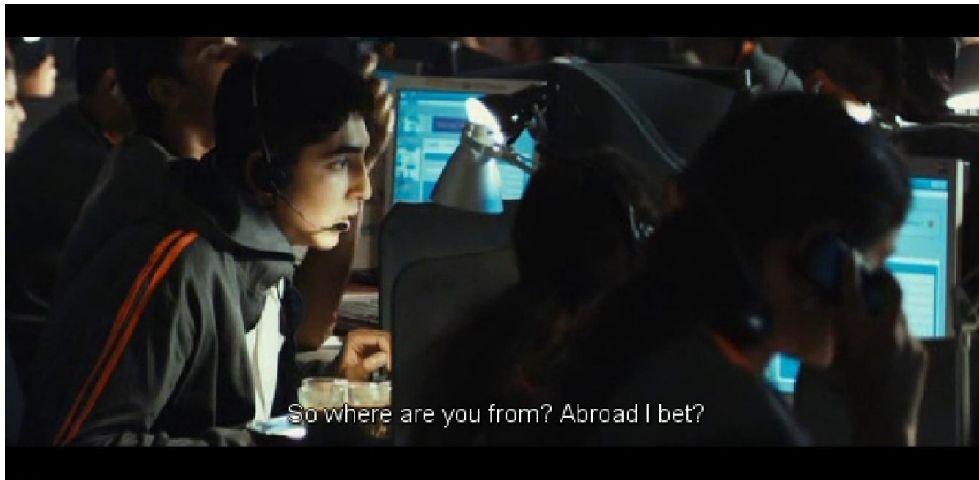


Figure 25

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 65:49)

This Figure shows a medium shot in which Jamal is talking to Mrs MacKintosh, a Scottish customer. In this take, there is a contrast between the lights of the lamps and the computers, and the darkness of Jamal, who is in shadows. This is a symbol of how the British multinationals *shine* with their services in the UK, whereas their workers in India and other developing countries are *in shadows* by working for a small salary and having bad working conditions, as it happens with other multinationals as a product of globalization.

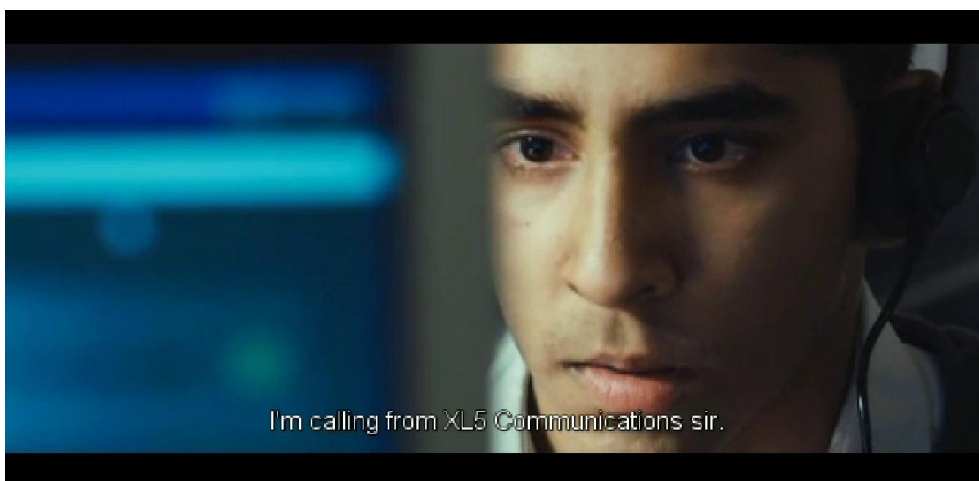


Figure 26

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 67:35)

In this Figure, there is a countershot, in which there is Jamal talking to Salim pretending to sell him the offers of XL5 Communications, the enterprise he works for. As commented in the previous Figure, there is the contrast between the lights of lamps and computers, and Jamal.

Another element related to multinationals in India is the development of Mumbai throughout the film. This is produced after Rao's economic liberalization of the country and multinationals coming from abroad, as it can be seen in figures 27 and 28.



Figure 27

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 70:56)

This Figure shows another countershot, in which Jamal and Salim talk about how Mumbai has changed, when the slums of the city are clearly seen. In this take, there is a contrast between the slums, that appear illuminated, and Jamal, who appears in shadows again, implying that Mumbai has a great future (to become a great city, like the ones that exist in the West), whereas Jamal has no future, as he only has his job in the call center and anything else, compared to Salim, who is rich after he began to work for Javed, one of Juhu's gangsters.

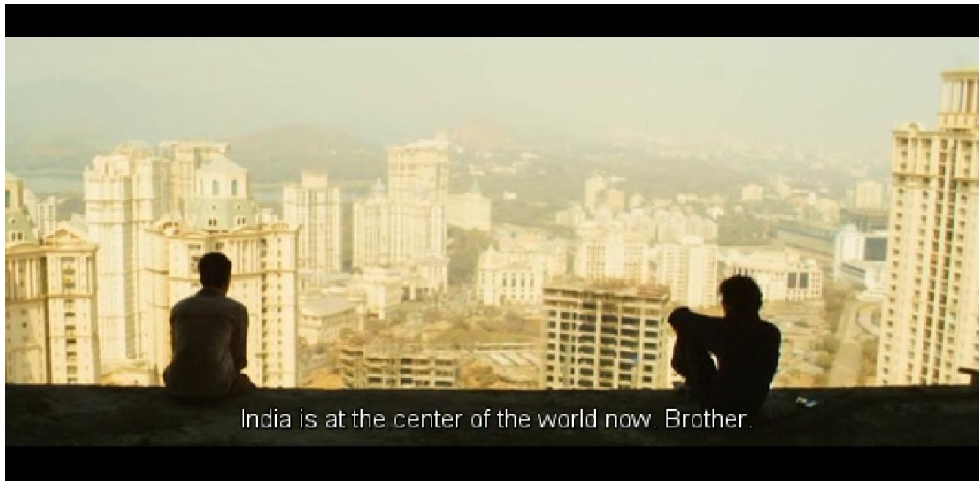


Figure 28

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 71:09)

In this Figure, there are the same elements as the previous Figure, except for the type of take (a medium shot), that intensifies the contrast already explained between the city of Mumbai and Jamal and Salim, who is also included in these shadows, as he works for a gangster doing illegal things for him (something that contradicts the information given in the previous Figure, where only Jamal was the one with a *dark* future).

In the case of the British soft power, I consider that there are two key elements of British neocolonialism that appear in the film: firstly, British culture, that is known by Jamal from his experience in the call center where he works, as it is shown in Figures 29 and 30.



Figure 29

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 64:21)

This Figure shows a close up in which one of the students of the classroom of Figure 24 answers one question about what the students knew about the UK. In this take, there is the contrast in colours and clothing that was mentioned in that Figure, but with the girl mostly covered by shadows, like the rest of her classmates and Jamal himself (whose arm also appears in this take), as a way of showing the struggle that these people have in order to learn about another culture that is different from theirs and that they know mainly from Scottish cultural references, that may have relationship with the director of the film, who is Scottish.

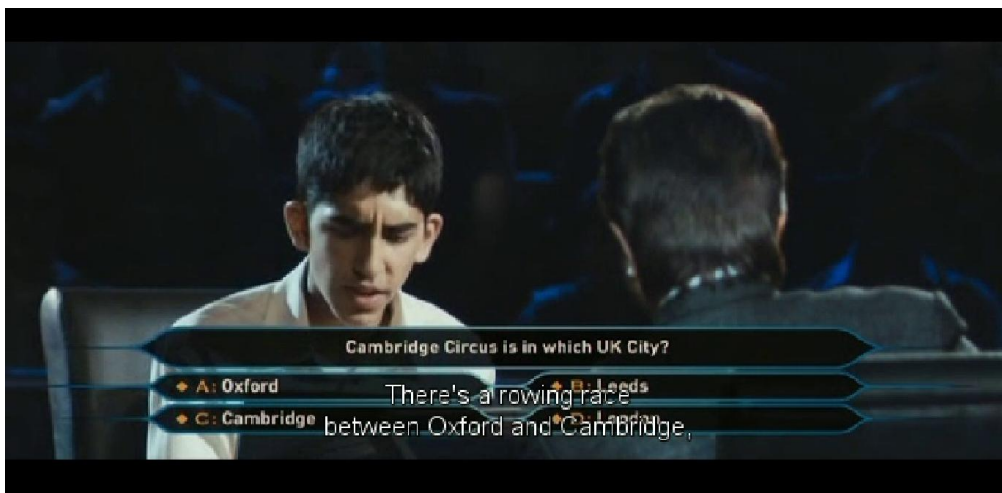


Figure 30

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 68:14)

In this Figure, there is a countershot, in which Jamal is answering one of the questions of the TV show *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*. As it happens with the previous Figures, lights and shadows play an important role in the diegetic and non-diegetic information conveyed in the film. This take presents a Jamal who is half illuminated and half in shadows. This represents his humble origins from the slums and his job in the call center (the part of the shadows), and the opportunity that he has to change his life for the better (represented by the part of the light).

And, secondly, the quiz show *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*, which is the one that gives the frame for the film. This can be seen in Figure 31, when Jamal is answering one of the questions of the show.

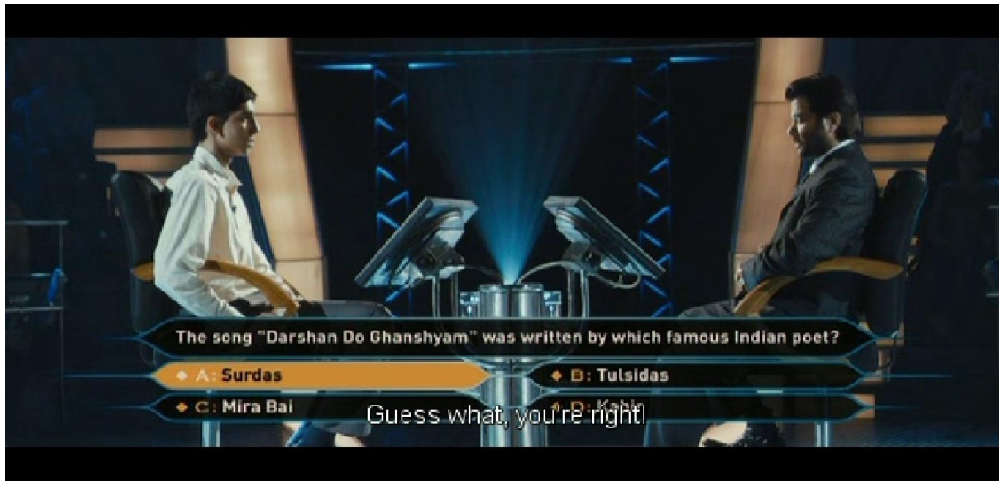


Figure 31

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 35:53)

This Figure shows all the elements of the previous Figure, but with a medium long shot, in which the character of Prem Kumar (Anil Kapoor) participates of these lights and shadows, that give a foreshadowing of what he will do with Jamal after the penultimate question, that reveals his greedy and envious personality.

This programme, called *Kaun Banega Crorepati* in its Indian version (also known as KBC), is a show of British origin which is very successful in India, something that proves that British imperialism continues to be present in India, but with the form of enterprises and culture.



5. Feminism: British imperialism and the second sex in India

After talking about the Postcolonial section of this research, I will show a Feminist paradigm in my analysis. Indian women live in a society that is mostly male chauvinist, so I will explain the situation that Indian women have in the context of British imperialism and double colonization. To do this, I will base my interpretation of the three films in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders*. This source gives contrasted views about the female condition that appear with the arrival of the British (Mohanty's Third World Feminism) and Western Feminism. As the situation of women in India varies with time, I will divide my analysis on the situation of women like I did with British imperialism: colonial India and contemporary India.

5.1. Colonial India: Situation of women in *The Chess Players* and *Lagaan*

On the one hand, I consider *The Chess Players'* wives of the nobles, Mir Roshan Ali (Saeed Jaffrey) and Mirza Sajjad Ali (Sanjeev Kumar). They are neglected by their husbands for the sake of playing chess, as it can be seen with Mir Roshan Ali's wife in Figures 33 and 34.



Figure 33

(*The Chess Players*: 31:12)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Mir Roshan Ali's wife is telling him the problems that chess is creating in their intimacy as a married couple. This take shows a contrast between the wife's clothing (specially the light green scarf that she wears for the head) and Mir Roshan Ali's one, which is in dark colours.



Figure 34

(*The Chess Players*: 33:13)

This Figure shows a close up of Mir Roshan Ali, who is on the bed with his wife, who is pleading him to stop playing of chess and be with her, because the game is destroying their life as a married couple. In this take, there is a contrast between Mir Roshan Ali himself (who is dark skinned) and the pillow (which is white). Apart from that, the issue of the lights and the shadows take part in this contrast because both the pillow and Mir Roshan Ali are mostly in shadows and poorly illuminated by the moonlight that enters to the room, something that accentuates the feeling of fear that the noble has towards his own wife and for making his friend Mirza Sahib wait too much to continue the game of chess.

This element shows the male chauvinism of Indian society at that time, in which women are terribly subjected to male domination, they have no voice and they have to obey their husbands in everything they want. This situation of women is very similar to that of Western women during the 18th and the 19th century, with women confined to the domestic sphere and to serve their husbands.

Despite this situation in which Indian women live, there are people that turn the roles of patriarchy, as it happens with the character of Mirza Sahib, who does nothing when he discovers his wife's infidelity (see Figures 35 and 36).



Figure 35

(*The Chess Players*: 78:43)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which the wife of Mirza Sahib and her lover are scared of Mirza Sahib knowing about their relationship. This take shows a contrast between the wife's clothing (she wears a pink sari) and the lover's one (he is dressed in purple and maroon).



Figure 36

(*The Chess Players*: 82:35)

This Figure shows another medium shot in which Mirza Sahib discovers his wife's infidelity and he does nothing about it. In this take, there is a contrast between Mirza Sahib's clothing (who dresses in green) and that of his wife's lover (who is dressed in purple).

Another element that shows the male chauvinism of Indian society that oppresses women in colonial times is the issue of polygamy. There is a scene of the film in which General Outram says that Ali Wadi Shah, the king of Avadh, does not pay attention to the women of his harem, as it is shown in Figure 37.



Figure 37

(*The Chess Players*: 14:08)

In this Figure, there is a close up of General Outram, who is talking with Captain Weston about the king of Avadh's harem and how the routines the monarch affect the time he spends with his wives and *muta* (in English, temporary) wives. Apart from that, there is also a contrast in the way in which both men are dressed: Captain Weston is dressed with the red uniform of the British Army during the colonial times, whereas General Outram is dressed as any British noble from the 18th-19th century.

This scene shows something that reinforces the idea already explained of women seen as objects and entities without any voice in society, as they are seen as a way of entertaining the king and giving him an extensive offspring that can secure the succession to the throne of Avadh.

On the other hand, there is the situation of women in *Lagaan*, in which I see the influence of both the British culture and the Indian one in Indian women's lives. In this sense, I will talk mainly about two of the main female characters of the film, that embody perfectly this issue: Gauri (Gracy Singh) and Elizabeth Russell.

Firstly, Gauri shows some aspects of the male chauvinism in Indian culture that are in line with what I have previously mentioned with the wives of *The Chess Players*. This male chauvinism can be seen, for example, in the obligation that Gauri has to be married, that I see since the beginning of the film, as it is shown in Figure 38.

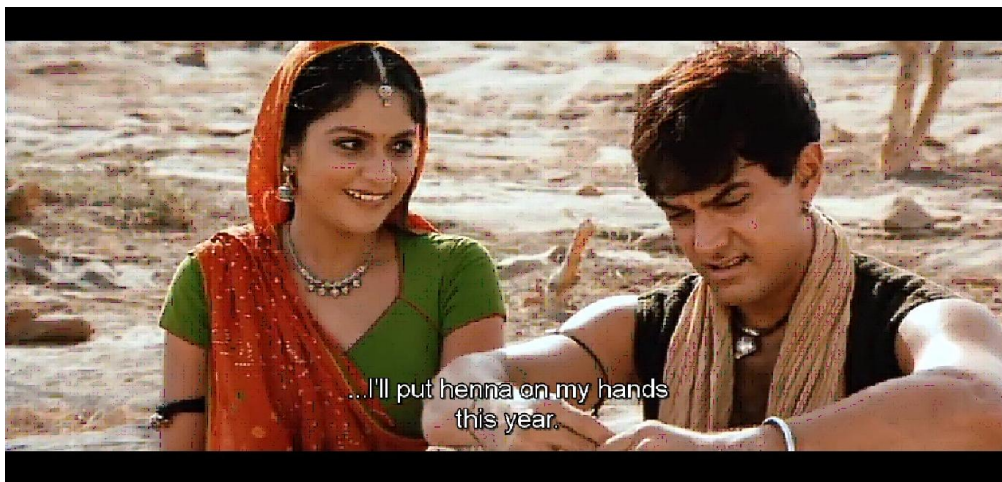


Figure 38

(*Lagaan*: 16:32)

This Figure shows a medium shot in which Gauri talks to Bhuvan about her future marriage. In this take, there is a contrast in the clothing of both characters: Gauri dresses in vivid colours, such as red and green; whereas Bhuvan dresses in darker colours like brown or black.

Regarding the British culture, there is no direct influence of the British in Gauri's lifestyle as a woman, but she is affected by the *lagaan* problem. Gauri has to support Bhuvan and the rest of the people of Champaner, even helping them in the gatherings of the Champaner cricket team, as it can be seen in Figures 39 and 40, in which Gauri prepares food for the Champaner cricket team.



Figure 39

(*Lagaan*: 76:43)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Gauri gives food to Bhuvan and his team during their first gathering. This take shows again a contrast between the vivid colours of Gauri's clothing (in this case, green and orange), whereas the clothing of Bhuvan and his team is not that colourful (brown and white).

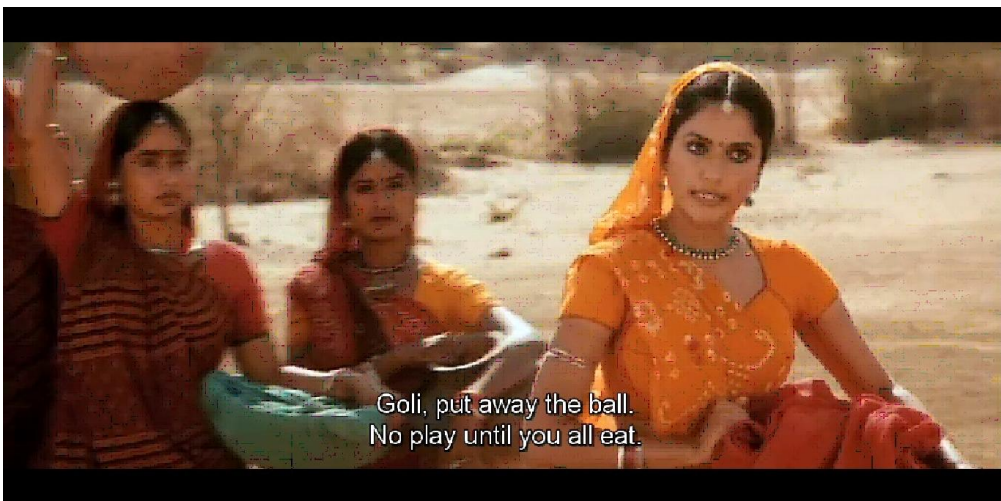


Figure 40

(*Lagaan*: 106:24)

This Figure shows a medium shot in which Gauri is trying to give food to Bhuvan and his team in another gathering. In this Figure, there is another contrast regarding clothing. This time, the contrast is in Gauri's clothing (who is dressed in orange) and the rest of the women's one (who are dressed in darker tones of orange and red).

Secondly, there is Elizabeth, the sister of Captain Russell. I consider that this woman represents the Western civilization that the British are trying to impose in India during the colonial times. Apart from the consequences that I have commented in the section about Postcolonialism (hybridity, mimicry, etc.), Western civilization does not bring any news to Indian women because Western civilization is as male chauvinist as the Indian one is. A consequence of this is that the Western civilization, does not bring any idea of gender equality to India because women are also seen as subaltern. According to Mohanty, “colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination and suppression [...] of the heterogeneity of the subjects in question” (18). This implies that it defended the idea of women being in the domestic sphere and at the service of her husbands, her fathers or other male members of her family. This can be clearly seen in the case of Elizabeth, because she is dependent on her brother and lives with him in the cantonment.

Apart from that, her brother forbids her to leave the cantonment, so she can see Bhuvan and the rest of the people of Champaner, as it can be seen in Figure 41.



Figure 41

(Lagaan: 97:56)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Captain Russell forbids Elizabeth to leave the cantonment. This take shows a contrast between Captain Russell's clothing (the red uniform that was already mentioned on Figure 37) and Elizabeth's one (who is dressed in a cream coloured dress, that gives an idea of elegance).

This dependence also leads Elizabeth to leave the village with his brother at the end of the film (see Figure 42).



Figure 42

(*Lagaan*: 210:24)

This Figure shows another medium shot in which Elizabeth is leaving Champaner with her brother after Bhuvan's team's victory in the cricket match. In this take, there are shadows in the carriage, in contrast to the outside, that are emphasized with Elizabeth's black dress, that are a symbol of sorrow, because she leaves Bhuvan. In this sense, the sorrow is that of a widow who lives without her love and who is incapable of piecing her life again with other men.

Despite all of this, I consider that Elizabeth rebels in some way against Western patriarchy because she does not obey the norms that Captain Russell imposes on her and helps Bhuvan and his team. Elizabeth considers that the British are abusive with the people of Champaner and she tries to teach them the cricket rules, so both teams can compete in equal conditions (see Figures 43 and 44).



Figure 43

(Lagaan: 41:56)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Elizabeth reproaches her brother the unfairness of the challenge of the cricket match with the people of Champaner in disadvantage, as they do not know the game rules. This take shows a contrast between Captain Russell's red jacket and Elizabeth's white dress, hat and umbrella, that can represent Captain Russell's aggressivity against the purity and goodness of Elizabeth.



Figure 44

(Lagaan: 74:37)

This Figure shows a high POVE shot in which Elizabeth teaching Bhuvan's team the cricket rules. In this take, there is a contrast between Elizabeth's white dress and umbrella and the brown of the land in which she is teaching the game.

Returning to Indian women, it is also worth noting that Champaner has already set different roles for the people of the village depending on their gender, as I see in the scenes of the songs "Chale Chalo" and "O Paalanhaare" (in English, "Let's Go" and "Oh, Saviour", respectively). In these scenes, men are preparing their cricket equipments for the match against the British, while women are praying for their men in the temple of Champaner, so the gods can protect them and help the team to defeat the British (see Figures 45 and 46).



Figure 45

(*Lagaan*: 128:56)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in perspective in which Bhuvan and his team (composed of) are preparing themselves for the cricket game during the song "Chale Chalo". This take shows a feeling of uniformity but, this time, is not an uniformity in clothing, but in skin colour, as all the people of the Champaner team are dark skinned.



Figure 46

(*Lagaan*: 174:39)

This Figure shows a medium long shot in which the women of Champaner are praying to Krishna and Radha during the song “O Paalanhaare”. In this take, there is a contrast between the mother of Bhuvan’s clothing (she wears a white sari) and the rest of the women’s clothing (who are dressed in red and orange saris). Apart from that, the light illuminates them in the middle of the night, creating a feeling of illumination and devotion on the side of Champaner women.

In this line of gender roles, it is important to underline some more aspects of the character of the widow in *The Chess Players* (who is Mir Roshan Ali’s wife, that lives like a widow because she has her husband playing chess all the time). Firstly, we have to bear in mind that she has a lot of power behind the curtains of the house and she uses this in order to enact subaltern rebellion against her husband. In order to do that, she uses the excuse of the headache to make her husband go with her, as it is shown in Figure 48 and she steals, and later throws, Mir Roshan Ali’s chess pieces (see Figures 49, 50 and 51). She does these things in order to assert her position as a wife and to recover her husband from his addiction to chess. Nevertheless, Mir Roshan Ali does not show any aim to return to his wife’s side, as he shows a despising attitude towards her, as it is shown in Figure 47. In this scene, it is clear that he does not see his wife as a lover, but as an annoying servant that can only cook dishes for him.



Did you like the biriyani?

Figure 47

(*The Chess Players*: 28:16)

In this Figure, there is a countershot in which Mir Roshan Ali laughs at his wife in front of Mirza Sahib when she calls him. This take shows a contrast between Mir Roshan Ali's outfit (which is cream coloured) and the rest of the scene, making him the center of attention of the scene.



Figure 48

(*The Chess Players*: 28:40)

This Figure shows a medium shot in which Mir Roshan Ali's wife is calling him with the pretext of a headache to make him come. In this take, there is a contrast similar to that of Figure 33 but, in this case, the wife's green scarf is emphasized among the shadows and the rest of her clothing.



Figure 49

(*The Chess Players*: 40:50)

In this Figure, there is a countershot in which Mir Roshan Ali is telling Mirza Sahib that somebody has stolen his chess pieces. This take shows a contrast between Mirza Sahib's hat (which is pink) and Mir Roshan's clothing (which is cream coloured and fair green).



Figure 50

(*The Chess Players*: 57:19)

This Figure shows a medium shot in which Mir Roshan Ali's wife hopes that her husband and Mirza Sahib are not playing chess after the *disappearance* of the chess pieces. In this take, there is a contrast between the wife's orange and green sari and the rest of the scene.



Figure 51

(*The Chess Players*: 57:19)

In this Figure, there are most of the elements of the previous Figure, but with a medium long shot, in the context of the wife carrying the chess pieces to throw them to her husband and Mirza Sahib.

5.2. Contemporary India: Situation of women in *Slumdog Millionaire*

After analysing *The Chess Players* and *Lagaan*, I will comment on the situation of women in *Slumdog Millionaire*, in which the Western Feminism sets the pattern for contemporary Indian women. Despite the fact that there are several female characters in the film (Jamal's mother, the American woman that gives Jamal the 100 dollar bank note, etc.), I will focus my analysis on Latika. The reason for this decision is because she is the leading female character, as she is the motivation that Jamal has to go to the quiz show. She is oppressed by most of the male characters

in the film (Maman, Javed, Salim), who want her either as a lover or as a prostitute, as it can be clearly seen in Figures 52, 53, 54 and 55.

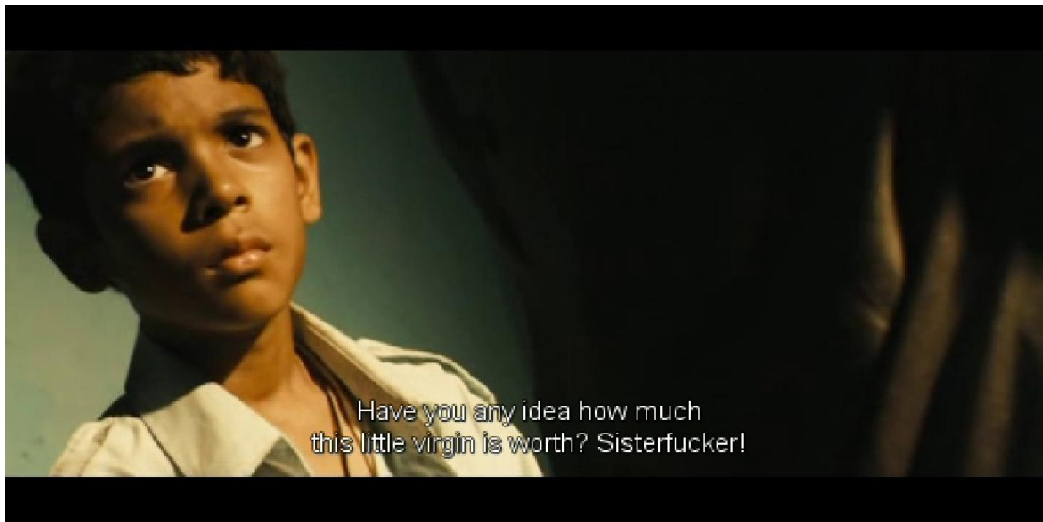


Figure 52

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 54:11)

This Figure shows a countershot in which Maman is reprimanding Jamal about his trying to take Latika from him, alluding to the value that she has as a virgin, implying that the gangster wanted to use Jamal's love as a prostitute. Despite the amount of shadows that appear in other *Slumdog Millionaire* takes, in this one, there is more light on Jamal's face, creating a contrast between him and his white shirt, and the rest of the scene, creating a feeling that there is hope in his freeing Latika.



Figure 53

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 61:37)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Latika stays with Salim after he threatened Jamal with a Colt gun. This take does not show much light, but most of it illuminates Salim, as a symbol of his power over Latika, who is in shadows, as the subaltern of Jamal's brother.



Figure 54

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 76:07)

This Figure shows a countershot in which Jamal tells Latika his reasons to go to Javed's house. In this take, like the previous Figure, there is not much light, but it

illuminates Latika, emphasizing her from the rest of the scene, giving her a great importance in the take. Apart from that, the light permits to see a contrast between her clothing (a white shirt) with the dark coloured clothing of Jamal.



Figure 55

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 93:13)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Javed talks by phone while one of his girls is trying to dance with him. This take shows a room full of women at the service of Javed, and there is a contrast between the old fashioned and extravagant clothing of the gangster and the clothing of the women of the room, who dress in other colours and with a more modern (and Western) kind of clothing.

This image reflects what Mohanty states that “sexism [...], misogyny and heterosexism underlie and fuel social and political institutions of rule and thus often lead to [...] violence against women” (3). Despite this, Jamal is the only male character in the film that treats her as an equal (see Figures 56 and 57). This attitude towards his love Latika is untouched by time or social customs, something that opposes Salim’s male chauvinist attitude towards her.



Figure 56

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 20:11)

This Figure shows a countershot in which Jamal tries to convince Salim to let Latika be with them in the container, as she could be their third musketeer, whose name Jamal does not know. In this take, there is a contrast with the lights and the shadows, as the light comes from the outside, whereas the inside of the container is completely in shadows, something that make the spectators focus their attention to the outside and, more specially, to Jamal, who is emphasized with the light from the outside.



Figure 57

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 107:32)

In this Figure, there is an extreme close up in which Jamal kisses Latika's scar in her cheek at Mumbai's train station at the end of the film. Due to this kind of close up, there is a contrast with the lights and the shadows between Jamal's face, which is in shadows, and Latika's cheek, which is illuminated in a way that the scar (that is at the center of the take) is emphasized.

Apart from that, it is important to mention that Latika shows an evolution near the end of the film, in which she rebels from the male characters that oppress her. After Salim gives her the keys to flee from Javed's house, Latika fights to assert her rights as an individual and strives to be with Jamal, as it can be seen in Figure 58, that shows how Latika not only escapes from Javed, but answers Jamal's call and tells him that she is safe.



Figure 58

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 102:06)

This Figure shows a close up of Latika in which she tells Jamal that she is safe after escaping from Javed. In this take, there is a contrast between the light and the shadows, so Latika's face is mostly in shadows, whereas part of her face is illuminated. Apart from that, the shadowed part of the take contrasts with the outside, in which the light wins the shadows as a symbol that there is hope outside that car, so Latika and Jamal can have a new life together.

Returning to Salim, it is important to highlight the fact that he shows male chauvinist attitudes since the beginning of the film, that are suffered by Latika and by Jamal. The fact that Jamal also suffers this lies in his constant defense of his love, something that Salim hates because he also wants Latika for himself. During the film, there are different scenes in which this male chauvinism of Salim is clearly visible, like his constant allusions of his being the eldest of the family, as it can be seen in Figure 59 and the humiliations that he makes Latika suffer in order to reinforce his authority over her, that can be seen in Figure 60. Nevertheless, Latika and Jamal react to these ill treatments from Salim and enact the subaltern rebellion against him by putting some chillies in his bed, as it is shown in Figure 61.



Figure 59

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 20:14)

In this Figure, there are all the elements already commented in Figure 56, but with Salim's answer to Jamal's demands, as he does not want to have Latika with them by underlining his status of the eldest of the family (composed only by Jamal and him after the death of their mother) and, in theory, the one with more power of the two.



Figure 60

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 26:22)

This Figure shows a countershot in which Salim orders Latika to take a baby, so she can have more money as a child beggar, because it would look like she is taking care of her, like a mother. In this take, there is another contrast similar to that of the previous Figure, in which there is light from the outside, whereas there are shadows on the inside, but in this case, the image of the outside is not that idyllic because there is a dump, something that intensifies the feeling of poverty and determinism in which these children live.



Figure 61

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 27:13)

In this Figure, there is another countershot in which Latika and Jamal are taking revenge of Salim's ill treatment towards them by putting some chillies in his bed. This take shows a similar contrast between lights and shadows already commented in previous Figures but, in this case, light illuminates Latika's face and the chillies that she is taking for Salim.

Another element that is worth commenting about Western Feminism in the film is the way in which Indian women dress near the end of the film, because they shift from the sari to the Western clothing, that implies a change of values from the dependent woman of the past to embrace the values of Western Feminism and Western male chauvinism, as it is clearly seen in Figures 62 and 63. This is another consequence of the economic liberalisation of Narasimha Rao during the 90s. It has implied, not only the opening of India's economy, but also the arrival of new customs and ways of living that come from the West, including the ones that imply the emancipation of women (Western clothes, drinking alcohol, smoking, etc.).



Figure 62

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 93:11)

This Figure shows a countershot in which Javed changes the TV channel from the news that talk about Jamal and the TV show to a Bollywood music video in which there is a group of women dancing. In this take, there is a contrast between the light and happiness that comes from the TV (the light of the TV as a machine and the happiness of the group of women that are dancing in the video) and the darkness of Javed's room.

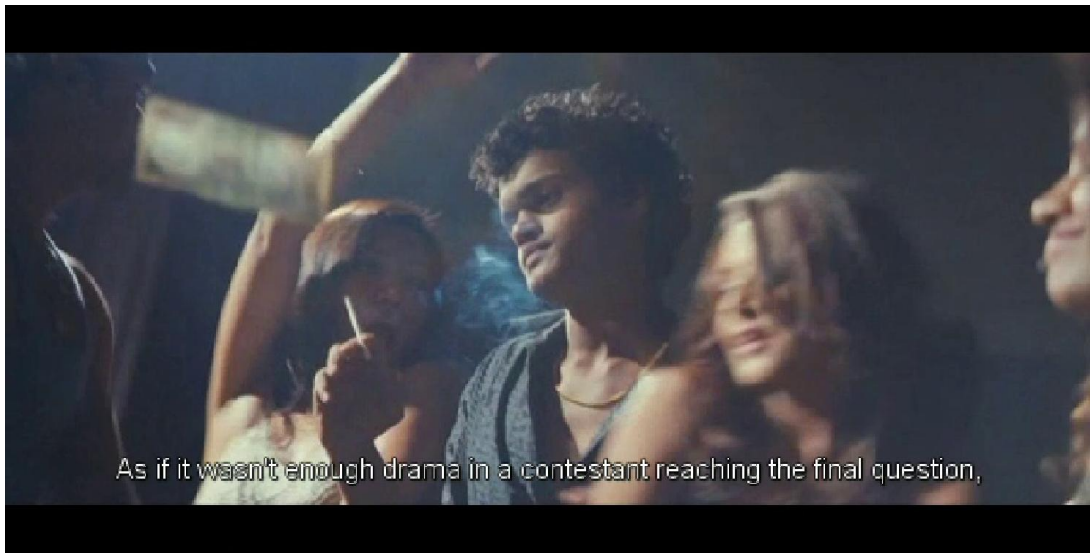


Figure 63

(*Slumdog Millionaire*: 93:26)

In this Figure, there is a medium shot in which Latika, Javed and Salim are watching the news about Jamal and *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire* while there are women dancing in the room. This take shows three types of contrast: firstly, a new contrast between lights and shadows, in which Salim and the women are illuminated, whereas the shadows take most of the room. Secondly, a contrast between Salim's dark skin and the women's lighter one. And thirdly, a contrast between Salim's dark blue shirt and the women's light coloured ones.

6. Conclusion

After this analysis on the issue of British imperialism in these three films, I can say that they show a perfect portrait of how British imperialism worked and continues to work in India and its consequences in Indian men and women's lives. The colonial times have shown tough times for Indian people because of the abuses of the British, that did not see the Indian population as an ally in trade, but an enemy that had to be colonized. This colonization has brought situations of hybridity, mimicry, opposition and subalternity that represent this imposition of Western civilization in a millenary culture such as the Indian one. Despite the fact that India got its independence from the British in 1947, British imperialism continued existing in the country under the form of multinationals—that established there after the economic liberalization of Narasimha Rao's government—, instead of the British political institutions or enterprises that ruled India during the colonial times (the East India Company, the British Crown, etc.). This Western colonialism that has arrived in India centuries ago, has affected women in a special way. Being one of the hopes of development in this country that faces the challenges of a globalized world, they have been imposed a Western civilization that has not given them (at least in its beginnings) more equality. The British brought with them an idea of women living in the domestic sphere that reinforced the conception that the Indian culture had of them of doing the house chores, getting married and having children. Despite this, women try to rebel in its subaltern status to assert their rights as individuals while embracing Modern Western values that help them to emancipate and fight for the life that they want. This struggle is easier with the existence of men that treat women as their equals in a situation in which gender equality can be a new ally in the future for a globalized India.

7. Appendix

In this section I will provide the fact sheet of the films that have been analysed in this TFG:

The Chess Players (Shatranj ke Khilari)

- Year: 1977
- Country: India
- Director: Satyajit Ray
- Producer: Suresh Jindal
- Screenplay: Satyajit Ray
- Art director: Bansi Chandragupta
- Music: Satyajit Ray
- Cast crew:
 - Amjad Khan (as Ali Wadi Shah)
 - Sanjeev Kumar (as Mirza Sajjad Ali)
 - Saeed Jaffrey (as Mir Roshan Ali)
 - Richard Attenborough (as General Outram)
 - Tom Alter (as Captain Weston)
 - Amitabh Bachchan (as the narrator)

Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India

- Year: 2001
- Country: India
- Director: Ashutosh Gowariker

- Producer: Aamir Khan and Mansoor Khan
- Screenplay: Ashutosh Gowariker and K.P. Saxena
- Art director: Nitri Chandrakant Desai
- Music: A.R. Rahman
- Cast crew:
 - Aamir Khan (as Bhuvan)
 - Gracy Singh (as Gauri)
 - Paul Blackthorne (as Captain Russell)
 - Rachel Shelley (as Elizabeth Russell)
 - Javed Khan (as Ram Singh, the servant)
 - Amitabh Bachchan (as the narrator)

Slumdog Millionaire

- Year: 2008
- Country: UK-India (co-production)
- Director: Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan
- Producer: Christian Colson
- Screenplay: Simon Beaufoy
- Art director: Abhishek Redkar and Ravi Srivastava
- Music: A.R. Rahman
- Cast crew:
 - Dev Patel (as Jamal Malik)
 - Madhur Mittal (as Salim K. Malik)
 - Freida Pinto (as Latika)
 - Anil Kapoor (as Prem Kumar, the TV presenter)
 - Irrfan Khan (as police officer)
 - Mahesh Manjrekar (as Javed)
 - Ankur Vikal (as Maman)

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