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Journey to the East and national stereotypes. *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* as a depiction of contemporary social and cultural issues[1]

Podróż na Wschód i stereotypy narodowe. *Hotel Marigold* jako obraz współczesnych problemów społecznych oraz kulturowych

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Słowa kluczowe: podróż na Wschód, wiek senilny, stereotyp Anglika i Hindusa, tożsamość

Abstract

The subject of this analysis is the image of a contemporary trip to the East and national stereotypes (Englishman, Indian) in the movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. The image of the trip to India is analysed from the perspective of Bauman's metaphors of postmodern life, in which the redefinition of identity is inscribed. The journey in Madden's work is presented as an escapade somewhere between the expedition of a tourist and the wanderings of a vagabond, thus constituting a metaphor for the contemporary life of senile people originating from Western culture. The use of national stereotypes (*auto-images, hetero-images*) and the transformations taking place within them are reflected upon. It turns out that the image of the trip of the elderly English people to India combines comedic elements with reflections on the key phenomena of contemporary culture, such as a new form of life, the cult of experience characteristic of the West as a condition for the development of the individual, and the formation of a new stereotype of the journey and its participant.

The journey to the East is an old phenomenon in western culture and a well-known topic in art (Wieczorkiewicz 2022: 14–16, 18). It has been present in literature since *The Description of the World* by Marco Polo and in the minds of people of the Occident owing to romantism, its literature, paintings and intimistics. However, although journeys to distant parts of the world and opportunities to watch them in pieces of art were limited until the 19th century, the 20th century opened new opportunities to come into contact with them. Encountering new phenomena in the Internet era – continents and their residents, nature, and culture is also possible in the virtual world. Therefore, the still popular narrative of the journey in Western culture attracts attention. Literature and film not only offer works of art dealing with this subject matter, but they also inspire each other, which results in adaptations. One of them is *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, a film directed by John Madden in 2012, whose screenplay by Ol Parker is based on Deborah Moggach's book *These Foolish Things* (Moggach 2004; 2016). It is classified as a comedy (Wróblewski 2012: 84) and drama (Królikowska-Avis 2012: 74) with a distinct psychological trait[2], with a reflection on power and subordination, objection to racism, and a colonial tale (Wieczorkiewicz 2022: 82, 85).

The object of interest will be to create an image of a journey to India as toying with conventions and stereotypes. Therefore, the movie is an area of cultural comparison, which will provide an opportunity to disclose strategies for constructing notions of places and nations. For imagology, an image as a "mental or discursive representation or opinion on a person, group, ethnic origin or nation" (Leerssen 2007a: 342) is a key tool for comparison. It will be important in the considerations as Madden's movie presents an image of a journey which involves an encounter of cultures and their representatives.

Between a journey and an escape

The considerations should be started with a determination of the nature of the journey, which is at the centre of the movie's narrative. The vagabonds, no longer young, mostly over sixty years old[3], represent a group which dominates in contemporary Western societies, especially in Europe, but who rarely appear as movie

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[2] It is noteworthy that it has been regarded as being less subtle psychologically than other Madden's movies, e.g. *Her Majesty, Mrs Brown* (Królikowska-Avis 2012: 74).

[3] Wieczorkiewicz notes: "The characters in this story must have been born at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s. Therefore, they were almost The Beatles' peers, they were influenced by the hippie movement, they probably heard about the journey of 'the boys from Liverpool' to the Indian

characters (Królikowska-Avis 2012: 74). Their journey to India in the movie is neither an attractive form of entertainment nor a spiritual experience, which is usually associated with travelling to that country.[4] The journey is not an excursion, and it is also difficult to be categorised as a tourist expedition[5], which is signalled by the significant scene of waiting for the plane – all the vagabonds are dressed in formal clothes, which is surprising to a spectator, given the purpose and nature of the journey.

The journey to India can be referred to as post-modernity, and the metaphors of existence developed within its framework.

Bauman points to two distinctive figures – a character of a tourist and a vagabond. Both grow out of the condition of the contemporary world, in which "one finds it hard to live one's life like a pilgrimage" (Bauman 2000: 142). Redefinition of one's identity, which is also important to those who enter the senile age, becomes a life strategy. This is the situation the movie characters find themselves in. Evelyn, a housewife (Judi Dench), Madge (Celia Imrie), bored with looking after her grandchildren, a couple – Jean (Penelope Wilton) and Douglas (Bill Nighy) – in a failed marriage whose financial future has become complicated, a judge tired with life (Graham – Tom Wilkinson), Muriel (Maggie Smith), frustrated with her ailments and the English healthcare system, and the lonely Norman (Ronald Pickup), are shown at the moment in their lives when one either rejects the previous lifestyle (Madge, Graham, Norman) or when one cannot continue it in its previous form (Evelyn, Jean and Douglas, Muriel). Their motives to leave England are presented at the very beginning of the movie, and the aesthetics of the presentation signals the dramas that accompany the making of the decisions. Exposing the characters in interiors and the cautious use of colours[6] – all of this amplifies the impression of sadness and necessity, which determine the characters' lives. As a result, the journey of each of them proves to be the choice of an evasive strategy[7], which becomes a utopia of a place in the movie[8],

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'hermitage in Rishikesh'" (Wieczorkiewicz 2022: 82). Therefore, that country and its country may have evoked associations with spirituality.

   [4] These experiences and their literary images prove to be diverse (Wieczorkiewicz 2022: 48–70).

   [5] Tourism is perceived differently by sociologists, for whom it involves "getting to various places to stay there for a while" (Urry 2007: 16).

   [6] Królikowska-Avis stresses a contradiction between how England and India are presented. According to her, the former is shown "in dark, sepiaed colours". Highlighting the multi-colour nature, polyphony and abundance of movement in the images of India is not original (Królikowska-Avis 2012: 74).

   [7] Strategy of escape.

   [8] It is founded on the desire to leave the rejected world and to find oneself in a happy place (Szacki 1980: 55–56, 65–110).

supported by the presentation of distant regions typical of modern tourism. India and the stay at the *Marigold Hotel* are shown as a place that offers not only good life to those who cannot afford to live like that in England but also a place of encounter with the exotic culture of what used to be regarded as the jewel in the crown of the British Empire.[9] In light of the social and psychological motives behind the movie characters' decisions to leave, they are not tourists. This is because a tourist escapes from current life and its routine, and he adopts the role of a guest, always keeping a distance from the places that he visits, and the journey itself is his goal, so there is no place in which he makes himself at home (Bauman 2000: 144–154). The creations of the characters in Madden's movie feature only some traits of a tourist attitude. Madge, Graham, and Norman escape from boredom and failure, but, at the same time, they do not regard their stay in India as a visit, although they count on attractions, which they find lacking in England. Moreover, according to Bauman, they do not miss home and always look for new experiences. Madge joins a club, initially passing herself off as a member of the English royal family, while Norman pretends to be an aristocrat, which is supposed to make him more attractive in society. Graham is looking for his old love (Manoj) and forgotten impressions from the country where he used to live.

The motives of Evelyn, Muriel, Jean and Douglas to leave for India make them metaphorical vagabonds, regarded by Bauman as the *alter ego* of a tourist (Bauman 2000: 151). Everyone is forced to make the decision to leave (by the financial situation: Evelyn, Jean, Douglas; by the health condition: Muriel), and their journey confirms the loss of their freedom, which some of them show by criticising the place of their new residence (Jean does not leave the hotel, Muriel stresses the lack of her favourite products and her aversion to foreign cuisine). However, the director and the screenwriter of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* showed the attitudes of the tourist and the vagabond in the modern world are transformable. This fluidity of the change in the movie is marked in the characters of Muriel, Jean and Evelyn. Muriel transforms from a culturally prejudiced vagabond, with a post-colonial attitude to India and its residents, into a person who wants to stay there and opens up to the surrounding world. She was given an opportunity to recover from her ailment (hip surgery) and found an occupation, improved her self-esteem and won other people's interest, and is an interesting example of a character transformed by an encounter with a different, distant and previously ignored culture. The movie creators avoided stereotypes by

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[9] A motif of an encounter with the culture of former British colonies in movies also includes Africa (Kazana 2008: 52–53).

differentiating the course of changes in the characters. The second of the women mentioned above – Jean – evolves, but in the direction opposite to Muriel and Evelyn. India disappoints her from the moment she leaves the plane. The places (crowds, abundance of colours, motion) and their audiosphere (noise, different languages) evoke fear in her, which is amplified by the appearance of the hotel. This character transforms from a vagabond into a quasi-tourist over the course of events. Jean rejects the people that she meets (except Graham), and the culture of India does not attract her interest but makes her distanced, revealing the crisis in her marriage, which leads to her decision to return to England. For the third of the female characters – Evelyn – the trajectory of changes set out by the creators is still different. A housewife, trusting wife, not very independent, made to change her lifestyle when she inherited some debts after her husband's death, discovers some hidden talents in herself after arriving in Jaipur. Like a vagabond, she misses home, but, like a tourist, she creates a new life: she accepts the conditions of staying at the hotel, she is open to people and financially independent (she finds a job), so she makes herself at home in India, which is helped by the burgeoning feelings for Douglas. The way these characters are created shows that the movie shows an image of a journey, which – irrespective of the reasons – makes the characters redefine their identity, and travelling to a distant place alone does not guarantee happiness. Therefore, notably, the movie enters into polemics with an image – well-established in Western culture – of a journey to a distant land as a way to achieve harmony (Wieczorkiewicz 2022: 25–35). This approach to an important cultural phenomenon is among those very often updated in contemporary film and literature.[10]

The creation of movie characters that are connected with metaphors of post-modern life, such as the tourist and the vagabond, necessitates the characterisation of the movie's journey. India plays the role of a utopia in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, and travelling there has a form of escape, although it also resembles a tourist escapade. The evasion function is strongly stressed in the narrative. The first minutes of the movie present scenes from the characters' lives which affect their decisions to leave. Their common feature is the striving for a change necessitated by the financial and health-related situation they found themselves in or necessary because of the feeling of being unsatisfied. The utopia of the place is also implied by a repeated scene of getting to know the offer of the hotel in Jaipur. Information on the Internet and brochures are the components of the image

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[10] However, one should stress that the sequel highlights this motif and, in fact, its whole narrative focuses on it.

of a modern happy place, which is a cultural topos. An exotic landscape, historic atmosphere and comfort provide a vision of an interesting place. An advertisement can be regarded as an example of the semiotics of a tourist attraction, in which images play the role of signs and information about them – that of markers (MacCannell 2002: 171–173). This folder, being a so-called "out-of-eyesight marker", presents a strongly persuasive image. The scenes of reading it highlight those features of the hotel, which occupy an important place in Western culture axiology. Beauty, the past, tradition – all these things have been valued highly in the Occident for ages, but the mention of comfort at a place described as an Indian palace, where one can spend the final part of one's life, reveals the social and cultural phenomena of recent years. Therefore, markers are inconsistent – the hotel is a boarding house at the same time, so the journey cannot be regarded as travel. The trip retains important features of tourism, such as provincial needs with respect to a distant culture and authenticity put up for trade (Culler 2009: 15). It is worth reminding that the needs mentioned above are regarded by Daniel J. Boorstin as typical of a modern tourist, who also seeks a caricature of a different culture (Boorstin 1963: 114). The characters in Madden's movie (except Graham) do not have any in-depth knowledge of the cultural heritage of India, and they do not seek it. They behave like travellers, who, before the mid-19th century, left home for a purpose (Boorstin 1963: 93). In the movie in question, it is living one's old age in dignity and recovery, i.e. plans that do not have much in common with tourism. Observing modern Europe, the movie creators took into account an important cultural phenomenon, i.e. the emergence of the hybrid traveller-tourist. The social and economic processes lying at its foundations (distinct demographic tendencies) are shown in a comical manner, but regardless of the nature of the narrative, they testify to significant socio-cultural changes. Their clarity increases when one focuses on the confrontation of out-of-sight markers with reality, which is strongly stressed in Madden's work. By engaging in comical situations, the director and the screenwriter revealed the specificity of contemporary tourism and various attitudes towards experiencing The Other. Markers – in the movie: hotel advertisement brochures – prove to be signs only partially referring to the designate when the movie characters arrive at their destination. The hotel is dilapidated, there is no working phone, and some rooms have no door, but the hotel manager Sonny Kapoor (Dev Patel), hopes for his first guests, who were lured to India by a free flight, among other things, to show some leniency. A confrontation of the offer with reality reveals differences in the mindset of people of different cultures and the process of verifying facts. A marker is juxtaposed with a view (MacCannell 2002: 187–190). The characters' creations reveal

various courses of the process. Faced with difficult experiences – astonishment and disappointment – the strangers behave differently. No one does reconnaissance involving connecting information with reality on the spot (contamination of a marker with a view), which would make a seedy hotel look attractive, if only to a small extent (MacCannell 2002: 191). None of the English characters ignores the discrepancy between the information in the commercials and the reality of the place, with makes them all surprised. According to MacCannell (2002: 176), "Engaging in the view brings disappointment", referring to a situation in which the view lacks markers either because it has been replaced by a different view or because a stranger lacks information about it. Jean and Muriel, characters in Madden's movie, feel the difference between the notion formed by the advertisement (marker) and the reality, while the other foreigners show a different approach arising from their attitude to The Other.

Toying with stereotypes

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel is also a movie whose creators skilfully used cultural stereotypes.[11] Some directors regard them as indispensable in this art. Krzysztof Zanussi even claims that:

> […] a stereotype is an element of synthesis, a necessary linguistic operation, particularly important for the audio-visual language, which dominates nowadays. The only problem is how understandable a stereotype is, what elements it is composed of and what stereotypes are addressed in the communication (Zanussi 1995: 218).

Images of The Other in culture become *heteroimages* or *auto-images* (Leerssen 2007b: 27) – images of strangers and of one's own nation.[12] Copied in various spheres of culture, they become stereotypes which – while remaining fictional – enter relationships with reality, with characteristic features of the truth (sometimes these are "generalised facultative features"), they are points of reference which help one to create new relations in the real world (Beller 2007b: 430). Madden and Parker used national stereotypes present in the original novel, where critics noticed references to the traditional image of India (Falconer 2004, online). It is interesting how they are presented because, on the one hand, the creators refer

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[11] Hans Henning Hahn stresses a link between the stereotype and the movie and theatre comedy (Hahn 2011: 33).
[12] They are a manifestation of auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes.

to stereotypes of English people, i.e. *auto-images*, while on the other, they introduce a stereotype of Indians and of India, which is present in British culture. When juxtaposed, these imaginings bring much humour but also sarcasm to the movie. Stereotypes are present in *The Best Marigold Hotel*, and they create an ambiguous image of the nations. The group of strangers from England is diverse in this regard, and extreme attitudes appear at the very beginning. The stereotype of the British Empire resident has a long history and is very detailed. Developed over a long time[13], largely based on a contrast with the stereotype of the Frenchman (Spiering 2007: 147), it became established in the 19th century as two patterns. The first of them is a type of the English gentleman, who is morally stable and earnest, phlegmatic (also a detective or an agent; Spiering 2007: 145–146), but fit. The other has different characteristic features. Choleric, audacious, with a volatile temper – he was the opposite of a gentleman.[14] If national stereotypes are regarded as the result of a choice of the most distinctive features (so-called *selective attention*: Beller 2007a: 7), those indicated in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* provide interesting information on contemporary culture.

The women in the movie are presented in a more stereotypical manner, which is not a frequent phenomenon in culture (Macrae, Stangor, Hewstone (ed.) 1999: 84). Graham, Douglas and Norman have traits that are important for the idea of the gentleman, such as calmness, self-restraint, elegance and culture[15], and the conduct of none of them reveals the stereotypical ideals of the residents of India.[16] And Graham, who has known the local culture since his young days, i.e. since colonial times, is completely free of them. The director and the screenwriter created different images of women, with some of the ladies having the traits that make up the stereotype of an Englishman. They enriched those characters with the inclination to perceive Indians through cultural patterns. The attitude to another nation, important in the history of England, is a significant component of

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[13] More detailed descriptions were provided in the 18th and 19th centuries, although it has been pointed out that some components of the Englishman's stereotype are derived from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The wife of Bath`s tale* (1387–1392), in which politeness is a characteristic feature of the gentleman – the prince and the count. Cf. Spiering 2007: 146.

[14] This model is clearly marked in *The History of John Bull* (1713) by John Arbuthnot.

[15] It is worth recalling the famous *Völkertafel* (1725), also known as *Table of nations*. In the iconographic presentation and the characterisation of European nations originating in Styria, the characteristic features of Englishmen include their artistic mind, lack of calm, appreciation of work and regarding it as leisure.

[16] The Norman character is distinctively different from its literary model. In the novel, he is an irritating, not very neat, elderly man, behaving like a boor, constantly manifesting his sexual interests.

the stereotype of the contemporary Englishman. The viewer does not learn much about the female characters' knowledge of India from the initial scenes: Evelyn takes it from guidebooks, and Jean mentions having read Kipling's book[17], which provides encouragement to learn about other cultures. Therefore, the cultural patterns facilitate encountering the heritage of India and its residents. The Englishwomen – especially the desperate Jean – imagine the country rather as a place where one can make their dreams come true (Douglas' wife is thrilled with information on the place of their future residence). However, regardless of how much knowledge they have, the female characters are aware of the differences between this place and other ones that they know, and this attitude conceals their bond with "good old England", which always leads one to confront other cultures with it. Therefore, on the one hand, the purpose of the journey lies within the stereotypical notion of the Orient as a mysterious area with a long history (which is emphasised in the tourist brochures in the movie) and on the other – it raises concern based one fear of the otherness, which implies lack of what is native and well-known, i.e. it breeds prejudice. It is clearly outlined in the scenes taking place in Europe when Muriel notices in Indians the lack of traits and values which she regards as English (knowledge, hygiene, safety, culinary tradition)[18] and soon after arriving in India, when Jean says her husband was right, by saying that "this country is more civilised than I thought", that is, it reminds her of her homeland. This ethnocentric, stereotypical image of the Englishman is based on simplifications of traits and on putting them in opposition to those typical of a different nation and its culture. According to Hahn (2011: 45), the more a heterostereotype (and, as a result, heteroimages) is based on negation, the more positive the autostereotype (and auto-images) becomes.

The creators of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* particularly stress the strangers' fear of the loss of comfort – which is highly valued in modern Western culture – and of a different cuisine. In the reverse of those fears, there is a check-in scene at the airport, when one learns something about the characters' luggage, whose items – in the case of, for example, immigrants – are regarded as symbolic objects. A suitcase and its contents play the role of the signs of home (Morley 2011: 62–65). Among the noteworthy items in the movie, there is a portable radio (Norman), which indicates the need to follow the news, and groceries (Muriel).

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[17] His work, paradoxically, influenced the way Indians perceived themselves (Gottlob 2007: 181).

[18] It worth reminding that the hospital scene begins the tale in the novel. What Muriel says provides an excellent illustration of the claim that a description of a stereotypised object consists of three elements: perception, valuation and emotional connotation (Hahn 2011: 72).

Attachment to the native food-related tradition lies within the stereotype of the Englishman, who "eats differently than the French" (Spiering 2007: 147). In *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, this element of the idea of the nation's representative is outlined strongly in the behaviour of Muriel, who wants to take her favourite sauce, tea, oatmeal cookies, pickles, pickled onions and eggs to India, which is comic given the fact that some of these items (tea) come from India, and the others can be bought there. She also says that "she does not eat food whose name she can't pronounce". Therefore, the idea of the culture of a new place of residence is based on a permanent but superficial attachment to one's tradition and building images of The Other (country, culture, person) and focusing on the absence of what is known and originating (or mistakenly thought to originate) from one's own country.

The use of cultural stereotypes in the movie extends beyond the co-creation of comic scenes to include the creation of ambiguous characters, that is, characters that are contrary to those stereotypes. From this perspective, Muriel is the most significant character – her personality undergoes a transformation and verifies the stereotype of the Indian. At first, she just quotes popular ideas and opinions. The hospital scenes, in which the frustrated patient complains about improper care, show a worrying image of her attitude towards Indians. She treats doctors with disrespect, and her concerns expressed to the nurse who transfers her are astonishing, as they reveal her xenophobia and prejudices: She associates Indians with a frightening crowd, brown faces, dirt and the smell of curry[19], and groups of thugs. This picture speaks more about Muriel, who sees the Englishman as the opposite of the Indian, than about people of the other culture. It is easy to note that the movie makes use of important elements of the stereotype of the Indian. The notions of India and its residents have been formed since antiquity and appeared in Greek and Roman culture, but they took their final form in colonial times (Gottlob 2007: 180). The image of this nation, as shown in Madden's movie, consists not only of traits of character but also appearance. The elements of appearance exposed by Muriel indicate that the stereotype is based on a valuation of anthropological features with an aesthetic criterion, while the attributes of character and customs are exposed arbitrarily and tendentiously. Although they help to create a comic atmosphere, her irrational prejudices are also part of a humourless image. Her aversion to Indians (for example, she does not enter a room when she sees the hotel personnel and says, "There's an Indian there") gradually wanes. The character transformation, although not an original feature in films on

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[19] Cleanliness and smell have been factors of exclusion for ages. Cf. Morley 2011: 166–168.

this type of subject matter, is shown through contamination of seriousness with affection (sometimes even sentimentality). Muriel carefully examines the financial position of the hotel, looks seriously at her chambermaid and her caste relations, visits her home, meets her family, and helps Sonny run the hotel. Confrontation of the scenes in which her prejudices are overcome (which makes one think of popular movies and novels) with those preceding the departure for India brings some optimism to the movie, and the character's sarcasm is replaced with a smile. Therefore, Muriel is an example of an extreme attitude, with Graham – an open person (e.g. the scene in which he plays with children), who knows the country and its customs (e.g. forms and customs relate to travelling), and keeping a good memory of them – being on the other end of the spectrum.

National stereotypes are used differently in the creation of Jean. However, her movie portrait is outlined differently, with cultural prejudices playing a different role in building it. When creating a character with a different biography and mental construction, the creators took into consideration the types of national stereotypes, including autostereotypes. Jean takes up her journey only for economic reasons, but it evokes a naive enthusiasm – an association with the attachment to the history of the Crown, typical to many British people, superficial knowledge of the Orient and the effectiveness of advertising. Her prejudices balance between "then" and "now". Mentions about history, the empire and the standard of the hotel in the brochure are praised and indicate that the stereotype of India coexists with a different one – respect to the past in its various manifestations (from taxis through phone boxes to the times of the British Empire). She perceives the distant country as backward, and she is astonished by what it is really like. Colours, sounds, motion, language, architecture and methods of transferring from one place to another breed aversion not only because they are perceived as troublesome but mostly because they are not English. Madden revealed an important trait of stereotypical opinions – they are a generalisation, which is formed outside of experience. Jean confronts previous ideas, which she was imbued with by culture and society (Hahn 2011: 54, 60–62), creating a community which is no stranger to xenophobia. The permanence of stereotypes in confrontation with a new place is the counterpoint of the transformation of Muriel's attitude, but also of those of Douglas, Evelyn and Madge, who are free of prejudices.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel strongly emphasises the complexity of the Englishman's stereotype. It is not homogeneous but co-created by another one – the stereotype of the Indian. Therefore, *auto-images* include *heteroimages*. Muriel's and Jean's prejudices are shown as a manifestation of ignorance and trusting generalisations. Encountering a different culture and its creators plays a dual role

in the movie's narrative. It contributes to the comedic element while also diminishing the power of stereotypes. Indians may think about time, promise, and conditions in a different way, but at the same time they reflect on the future without pessimism. This aspect of the notion of them is shown in the welcome scene at the airport and the welcome dinner (the host's speech). The enterprising, although a little crazy, businessman Jay (Sid Makkar) and his sister Sunaina (Tina Desai), who thinks in a modern way, do not have much in common with what the visitors think of Indians. This contrast is signalled in a subtle way by juxtaposing the mental and visual layers. Since neither of them is created as unambiguous, the characters' appearance in the Jaipur scenery is slightly misleading to the viewer, who initially notices what has been established in his mind by stereotypes, i.e. elements of clothes associated with the local tradition. However, the movie creators managed to avoid simplification. It does not idealise local residents, but a critical attitude to certain aspects of culture: arranged marriages, excessively strong family relations and the caste system (Królikowska-Avis 2012: 75). Therefore, stereotypes are important in the movie, and although they are regarded as judgemental (Berting, Villan-Gandossi 1995: 14), they are not unchanging in Madden and Parker's movie.

Summary

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel presents an interesting image of contemporary cultural phenomena – a journey to the east and encounters of representatives of distant cultures which used to be linked with each other. They had appeared earlier in English movies in the 20th century. The motif of leaving and returning to India in colonial times can be found in the series – *Jewel In the Crown*, directed by Christopher Morahan, Jim O`Brien, 1984, and *The Far Pavilions*, directed by Peter Duffell, 1984, which also refers to stereotypes, but those are included in a totally different reflection – on memory and heritage (Włodek 2018: 75–78). The image of a journey of the elderly English people to Jaipur and their encounter with contemporary residents of India and their customs employs national stereotypes, with comedic elements with deeper meanings behind them: metaphoric presentation of the fate of a modern old age pensioner from the Western culture. The movie creators navigated a delicate balance between the representations of nations and the idea of a journey that evokes both travel and escape. This balance protects the movie from banality, which is a risk when fictional patterns of romance and journeys to distant lands are present. Stereotypes in *The Best Exotic*

Marigold Hotel evoke extreme emotions, from laughter to disgust, the journey does not remind one of any previously known forms, and the characters' experiences fluctuate between the ordinary and the extraordinary. At the same time, these components of the movie structure show the phenomena, which are the objects of interest of cultural anthropology, such as – typical of the West – the cult of experience, understood as part of an individual's transformation (Abrahams 2011: 60–61) and the formation of a new stereotype of the journey and the traveller.

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