

SYNTHESIZING VIEWS ON TOURISM AND CULTURAL PROFILES – JOJO MOYES' *THE SHIP OF BRIDES*

Alexandra Mărginean*

Abstract

*The paper analyzes the introductory part of the novel *The Ship of Brides* by Jojo Moyes, as, given its synthetic but inclusive nature, it provides relevant intimations in what regards issues pertaining to cultural profiling and identities, focusing on – but not reduced to – the Indian and British ones. Other interesting matters come to the fore, besides cultural traits, and the whole information is gathered around two cores on which the two main sections making up the body of the paper are built. In the first, we analyze various tourism trends and types, noticing the way in which the text tends to place most of them in oppositions and distinctions – mass versus individual or responsible tourism, real and surrogate tourism experiences, reality and construct, heritage versus poverty or black tourism, eurocentrism and exotic cultures, financially deprived versus consumerist countries. The following section focuses initially on cultural characteristics and stereotypes regarding age (the elderly and youth), social status, class society, dress codes for women and the perception of gender difference, then passes on to throwing a glance at the surrounding physical, spatial realities: the slum neighborhood, the industrialized areas, poverty, hygiene issues and smells, the social arena. The conclusions draw on the complexity of the aspects tackled in the novel prologue.*

Keywords: tourism trends, eurocentrism, India, age, gender

JEL Classification: Z10, Z30

Introduction

The historical fact that this book relies on is the transportation of British soldiers' Australian wives by the English ship *Victorious* on the 2nd of July 1946, on a six-week voyage to be completed with a sum of family reunions. As the Preface announces, there is a connection that the author's family has with this reality on a personal level, namely her grandmother, Betty McKee, who was one of the more than six hundred and fifty brides on board.

However, from the novel at hand, we are only looking at the introductory part, which is about thirty pages long, and functions as a prologue to the whole story. Since the novel then begins with a complete change of scenery, moving the background to Australia, and as the episode presented in the Prologue appears somewhat separate and intelligible by itself, it can function as a short story, having a unity of its own and thus justifying an approach to it as a whole.

* Alexandra Mărginean is at the Romanian-American University. E-mail: marginean.alexandra.roxana@profesor.rau.ro

The action takes place in India in 2002. Jennifer, a British young woman, accompanied by her grandmother and her boyfriend Sanjay Singh, her college colleague of Indian descent, are returning, in the young man's family car driven by Ram Vaghela, the family chauffeur, from the Singh residence, a palace in Gujarat, heading for the airport in Bombay to fly back to Europe from a three-day holiday in India. They are traversing an industrial area at the periphery of Gujarat, which lines the seashore. On the way, the car makes a stop for the small stores by the road, where the young people enter to get some refreshments and the grandmother enjoys Indian tea. Right about when they are ready to go, Jennifer expresses her curiosity to visit the ship graveyard, and, despite Ram Vaghela's warnings and advice that she would be trespassing and that such a place is not fit for a lady, she enters the perimeter accompanied by Sanjay. Since they fail to return quickly, as they have promised, the elderly lady and the driver go looking for them on the beach and find them arguing with the owner of the industrial site, who is outraged by the young woman's presence there and the fact that she might be a reporter. Ram intervenes to talk to him and calm him down. While this happens, the old lady notices the name of the ship that is being dismantled there, which seems to bring back a distant memory, and the scene ends by her sitting on some metal scraps, deep in thought, remembering something from her past.

The reason why we have picked this prologue for an independent discussion is that the author manages to concentrate in it a great deal of details regarding various cultural profiles, suggesting the different cultural realities in a very synthetic and at the same time rather subtle manner, indirectly, from the characters' discussions and inner monologue. The cultural profiles we are referring to are the British (to some extent representing Europe), the Indians (to some extent standing for the Orient) and the Danish (symbolizing developed countries in which the state protects its citizens). Moreover, some lengthily debated issues come to the fore, such as the never-ending discussion on mass tourism versus other forms of tourism, the concept of financially disadvantaged countries and, by contrast, that of consumerist cultures, gender perspectives characteristic of India in opposition to those of Europe, issues pertaining to age and the generation gap, exoticism and attitudes to it etc.

Mass and individual tourism, eurocentrism and exoticism

Inside the story, we are witnessing, from the beginning, a bickering taking place between the group of characters which are metaphorically colorful (from the point of view of their background and interests). The elderly lady is woken up from dozing on the back seat of the car on a hot summer afternoon by the quarrel between her co-travelers. Among them, the most vocal from the group is her granddaughter, Jennifer, who is adamant about wanting to taste the local color of India instead of being taken to the usual monumental sights – temples and palaces. She is advocating this point to Sanjay (her boyfriend of Indian descent, who comes from a wealthy, respectable local family) and his chauffeur, Ram Vaghela, who offers to take her to his impoverished native slum and thus quench her thirst for seeing beleaguered, destitute people.

Some of the most important aspects connected with interculturality, cultural profiling and contemporary problems are already contained in this very first picture of the

novel. First of all, above and beyond the obstinacy of a young and perhaps a bit spoilt woman, which Jennifer indeed appears to be, there is a legitimate opposition set between the cultural concepts of mass tourism and individual tourism. While the former has been raised as problematic in modern discussions, the latter is usually introduced in the discourses of modernity as the more correct alternative. Big tourist parties on package tours are controversial, for various reasons, among which the disruption that they represent and the disrespect that they pay to local communities and identity, which we may go as far as to consider a threat to their authenticity and very existence, and the fact that the witnessing experience cannot be deemed as successful once it is not given proper time and attention, i.e. when the visit is done in a hurry by a stressed tourist who is usually on a clock. Moreover, the mass tourist's haste makes him/her come across as more aggressive and becomes offensive to the locals, as, while in a hurry, (s)he cannot grant enough attention to respecting the etiquette of the visited culture, and tends to impose on it the rhythms and attitudes of the culture of origin. Indeed, specialists studying mass tourism to the developing countries have noticed that, besides the potential economic advantages, it may also cause phenomena such as a loss of "innocence" for the local community, the reinforcement of "colonial" tendencies or values, the threat to sustainability and the environment, "commoditization" and "inauthenticity" (Harrison and Sharpley, 2017: 5). It has been put in opposition with "sustainable tourism" or "alternative" tourism (*ibidem*). Although we cannot speak of a seasonal movement in a large group when it comes to Jennifer and her grandmother, and thus two of the essential characteristics of mass tourism are not met (*ibidem*: 7), the conventionality of the tourist sights which the women have visited and the limitation of interaction with locals to a minimum, along with Jennifer's expressed feeling that she has not had a taste of the genuine local culture and her desire to remedy that nevertheless point to specifics of this type of tourism. However, we need to make one observation here, in connection to what we have mentioned above regarding wrong ways of visiting, out of which we gave as an example making the visit in a hurry or paying no heed to cultural etiquette. The demonization of mass tourism cannot and should not be made on principle, solely because of the large numbers of tourists, as other aspects (such as the ones mentioned in the previous sentence) may impact the visited culture more negatively than the big amounts of tourists, a point made by Harrison and Sharpley as well: "In the end, numbers are not the only factor: large numbers of tourists may be absorbed relatively comfortably, [...] whereas even a few visitors to destinations unaccustomed to tourists, *especially* those who want to understand local culture and meet local people, may be highly disruptive." (*ibidem*: 8). Jennifer's attitude of going on the construction site – a space where her presence is unwelcome and inappropriate – can be classified as a culturally disrespectful and thus "disruptive" manner of visiting.

As pointed above, the perception that the locals have of this mass tourism approach as offensive has something to do with the history of oppression that these cultures have experienced in relation to the cultures that the visitors come from. Especially when presented with what is called an "exotic" culture unfolding before us, this very name that we label it with is part of a patronizing attitude and type of thinking that become transparent in our approach of the context of tourism in that kind of region, even when we

are unaware of its existence. This mindset has been termed, more or less indirectly, eurocentrism, and has something to do with the consciousness of having the upper hand and a certain arrogance regarding the visited culture. This upper hand, or even superiority, comes from the higher life standards of the countries that the tourists come from, from better hygiene, the belief in what we term as open-mindedness in dress and habits etc., and this mindset puts its imprint on the way in which the act of tourism is gone about, whether the tourist is aware of it or not. Sometimes the European tourist cannot help but ooze the consciousness of superiority in his/her actions in the act of visiting. Sometimes, of course, the very act of tourism is fueled by a desire to witness Said's Other precisely because, deep down, the tourist deems himself/herself as superior and is curious to see how this exotic other survives according to its very different standards, even despite these, while for the onlooker it remains a peculiarity, whether (s)he is aware of this mindset or not. The eurocentrist stance has constructed the Orient in romantic terms, as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said, 1980: 9). Even in the educated world, there is still a judgmental strain active in the approach of a lot of the most liberal and open-minded of people when it comes to the way they see exoticism. This mental attitude relies on the placement of Europe at the center of the world, claiming at the same time that it holds the universals according to which all the other countries can be judged (Sunar and Bulut, 2016: 5), and relying on dichotomies such as "East vs West, savage vs civilized, and progressive vs backward" (*ibidem*: 6). This is not to say that we do not notice the fact that "arrogant, self-interested and contemptuous evaluations have now lost their vanity" (Chakrabarty qtd. in Sunar and Bulut, 2016: 3), as the world has indeed progressed towards being open-minded and aware, but there is, still, an indeed much less powerful, but resilient underlying basic assumption there, even though subdued or kept in check.

All the ideas above are implicit in the conversation between the three characters – Jennifer, Sanjay and the elderly Ram. Jennifer opposes mass tourism and the conservative heritage tourism which only shows palaces and temples. However, her intention is not perceived as such by either Sanjay or Ram, as a genuine thirst to know how people really live in this country. Sanjay accuses her that she is interested in poverty tourism, or black tourism, just to be able to go back home and tell her friends about the terrible things that she has seen and about how they are ignorant of real suffering – whereas, obviously, at the same time suggesting that she has awakened due to what she has seen, which has opened her eyes. Sanjay's attack is not so obvious, but the implications that can be extracted out of his words are fairly serious. If we understand his reply as ironic, what we read into it is no longer comical, but downright face-threatening. Jennifer appears to be a snob capitalizing on other people's ailments, with no real regard for them, just in order to appear smarter, sympathetic, generous and sensitive, as well as, perhaps, enlightened. Also, she would, moreover, seem culturally aware, a citizen of the world. What Sanjay actually accuses her of is the vested interest of appearing as cultivated and profound before the others. The protest displayed by the young man at the girl's insistence subverts the image of a mature, empathetic traveler, trivializing it into pretense from her part. Although he does not really mean it this way towards Jennifer, the criticism (perhaps for others, if not necessarily for her) is still there. If she is not the target of his irony, some of

us, Europeans who organize compact packages to India expecting to see something exotic, are. Jennifer is therefore just a happenstance, pretext target for Sanjay's criticism, the real target being a significant segment of the European tourists.

European tourists are actually targeted by irony doubly, from the discourse of both characters. Jennifer criticizes mass tourism, while Sanjay criticizes the expectation of exoticism which does not take into account that India is a country of plural realities. The fact that Sanjay is bothered by this is also visible in the way he retorts to Jennifer, after she expresses the desire to experience the "real" India: that he is not a "virtual" Sanjay, meaning that he is part of the reality that she is looking for, genuinely, although he does not necessarily correspond to a "typical" Indian (Moyes, 2017: 11) (my translations). Here Sanjay is actually bothered by stereotypical thinking, which some people display and which he denounces with his remark, drawing attention to the fact that he is no less an authentic Indian just because he has spent a lot of time in Europe for his studies. What annoys him is, in this case, people's inability to go beyond stereotypical outlooks, and, secondly, that the stereotype includes or relies on the notion of poverty of means.

Among the wrongs of eurocentrism we have hinted at the neglect of sustainability and the negative impact on the environment and local communities through mass tourism and labeling. Part of it is also the capitalist-industrialist endeavor – otherwise yet another neglect of sustainable action, bearing, moreover, colonial overtones, which can be witnessed in the fragment under analysis in the very industrialization of the peripheral area, where every 400 meters the beach is set with a huge ship under deconstruction. Critics of Eurocentrism have referred to this industrialization tendency as a reminder of former empires colonizing the world. Kanth specifically refers to the concrete example of the British one in India, earlier or later in history, and rejects the inclusion of such tendencies in a theological discourse of the drive to know, progress and civilize, derisively calling it a "*Deforming*" instead of reforming (Kanth, 2005: 13), and as rather mirroring the "*material greed*" or "*anthropocentric vanity*" of the colonizer (*ibidem*: 14).

The society of affluence and mass consumption is hinted at when Sanjay patronizes Jennifer's wish to experience the real India, by jokingly saying that all that they could offer her was Coca-Cola and air conditioning – i.e., the very products that she has been used to from her own culture. The mention of the famous brand of soft drinks which has penetrated on most of the world markets points to consumerism, as well as to the concept of globalization. The irony is again directed both at the western world and their marketing and excessive consumption, and at the limited perceptions and expectations that some people may have on India and who lack the awareness that they live in a globalized world in which no pure culture exists anymore. Excess in consumption is reflected in the greed mentioned above, whereas the spread of brands would reunite both the vanity of the European-western world and its penchant towards the practical, business-like aspect of life – in opposition, for instance, to the spiritual one – pointing even to a kind of mercantilism that has penetrated all spaces of the world, even those where spirituality has a long tradition, leveling them as a result of capitalism and globalization, just as it happens in the industrialized periphery that the characters are traversing. Taking into account this last aspect, what he says reflects the plural reality of modern India, as well as its economic advancement and the way in which it has gradually become a world power.

Cultural profiling and stereotypes

Age stereotypes and cultural mindsets are also made visible subtly in the discussion. Firstly, both European and Indian perceptions seem to converge on the fact that the elderly need their rest and would profit from any given moment when they can steal a few moments' nap. As soon as she realizes that they have woken up her grandmother with their bickering, Jennifer asks her if she is alright. However, the Europeans seem to feel guilt for taking time to be inactive (and sleep), as the respectable lady excuses herself for her doze, whereas Ram reacts by telling her not to, since mature people should be allowed to take their time when they need rest. Hence, the respect granted for this specific age trait – the need for rest – is greater in India than in Europe, where inactivity is perhaps seen as a weakness, whereas in the other space it is a right that the person has gained due precisely to his/her advanced age. Elderliness is venerable in itself in India, and positively connoted with attributes of, for instance, wisdom, whereas in Europe it is respectable inasmuch as it can deny itself and emulate youth. In our mentality, in modern times when the cult of the body is very prominent, old age is admired according to how well it manages to be unlike itself and mask its advancement: the elderly are supposed to be fit, active, display positive thinking and optimism. The more they resemble the young, the better integrated and accepted they become. They should be able to overcome any difficulties that come with old age and prove themselves as active and useful to society. The greater respect that Ram enjoys due to his old age, and the fact that it comes with the apurview of wisdom, is proven by two facts. For one, even though he is a servant, so of a lower social rank, he is extended help by Sanjay, who offers to replace him in driving the car in case he is tired; although Sanjay is the son of Ram's employers, and thus his master, he does not perceive his offer as strange or inappropriate and does not hesitate to make it. Secondly, as Ram perhaps considers Sanjay's comments to Jennifer as a bit harsh and close to stepping over the line of respect, he allows himself to draw the young man's attention to his words by a very subtle irony meant to make Sanjay aware that he should mind his tongue so as not to go too far and offend Jennifer; the comment made by Ram is that he does not want to let Sanjay drive in his stead because he would not want to interrupt his brilliant discourse. As he says that, Ram also looks at Jennifer's grandmother in the mirror, taking the liberty of a side glance filled with significance and what appears to be a wink. This situation makes us understand that advanced age comes with a respect that allows such trespasses of rank and is therefore prioritized as more important than these, which makes it, by implication and deduction, particularly prominent since it surpasses class and hierarchy in a society which is known for the weight it puts on these.

There is another aspect to the construction of the cultural perception on old age put forth in the context above, namely its opposition to young age in terms of wisdom versus impetuosity. Ram's words put an end to the quarrel between young Jennifer and young Sanjay, showing how the elderly are characterized by temperance which may slow down the tumult and/or carelessness of youth. Thus, the profile of the young is also being contoured, step by step. The way Jennifer and young people are creatures prone to living the moment and not think of consequences, or long term, is proven by her tattoo, which her grandmother notices when a bit of the young woman's skin gets revealed by her

jeans, and which she does not remember being told about. A tattoo means a *carpe diem* perception on life, thinking short term, seasoned with a bit of nonconformist tendencies – just like wearing something that is deemed inappropriate in the culture where the tourist is paying a visit, jeans being a bit controversial for young women in public places in India. Recklessness is something that often accompanies passionate attitudes; it is, after all, what will get Jennifer into trouble on the construction site a bit later on. Jennifer is stubborn, as she would not give up her idea of touring. She is also self-righteous, as she would not listen to advice, even when her own grandmother is trying to slide it to her diplomatically, and a bit self-centered, as she insists not only on making a halt even though the old lady is obviously tired and would like to get to the destination without any more delays in the journey, but also on visiting the naval construction site by the road. From the Mr. Ram and Jennifer's grandmother's attitudes, though, we cannot help but notice that the deference that the elderly expect from the young is greater in India than in Europe, where a certain amount of leeway is granted.

Jennifer is intent on going to the beach to see the naval site despite being warned that it is not a place for tourists, let alone young women who also happen to look very differently from the locals, in terms of both physical appearance and dress. This brings us to the different perceptions on gender and dress.

We have already mentioned that Jennifer's jeans are out of place in the context, fashion-wise. While on the beach after having entered the construction site, the workers witnessing the fight between the tourists and the owner are elbowing one another in mock of her jeans trousers and vest. Jennifer's grandmother sees it, but is also made uncomfortable herself by the men's ostentatious looks, which means that the problem is not only what they consider inappropriate dress when it comes to women, but also something else. It can be that their different physical traits seem unusual and draw people's attention leaving them in awe. This is definitely one reason, as, before leaving the Singh luxurious home, Mrs. Singh, Sanjay's mother, insisted on lending them the family car and driver instead of letting them wander through stations by themselves, and pointed to Jennifer's blond hair while saying so. This was a hint at the marked way in which Indians react to a different set of traits or different attires than the ones that they are accustomed to.

Another reason why Indians tend to look at the two women suspiciously would be the fact that women are misplaced altogether in the public sphere, and should perhaps remain within the private one of the household. The partitioning of the spaces into gendered ones is illustrated by Ram's advice to Jennifer not to breach the perimeter of the construction site, and the motivations that he gives: that it was not a place for a lady and that it was a working area. The second reason also points to the fact that women are neither supposed to work for money, which is perceived as degrading, nor to be found in an area where paid work is unfolding. Even in what concerns the trip back from the Singh residence in Gujarat to the airport in Bombay, Sanjay's mother lends them the family car and chauffeur, suggesting that they should neither go by themselves to the train station, as the two women intended, nor travel unaccompanied by men even in car. This definitely points to the problem considered by women going out by themselves, without male company, into the public places. Moreover, it appears that women should not order or buy

things by themselves in public as well. The servant, Ram, is the one who ordered tea for the elderly lady as she decided to get out of the car and wait for her granddaughter on a tea shop terrace. Also, as Jennifer expressed her wish for a refreshment, Sanjay told her that he would buy some soft drinks when the car makes a halt near a store, but Jennifer corrected him, using the plural, saying they *they* would buy the drinks. This play upon grammar actually points to a discrepancy in perceptions when it comes to gender differences in situations involving public purchases.

The aspects connected with gender introduced by the text above have something to do with the way the emancipation of women has only seen later developments in India, in comparison with Europe. Thus, only as late as 1992 was the National Commission for Women set up by the government in order to check the adequacy of constitutional and legal provisions for women, followed, the subsequent year, by a decision to allot one third of the village councils seats to women, and then, in 1999, the same number “in state legislatures and the Parliament” (Dalmia and Sadana, 2012: XXII). The recentness with which these matters were addressed shows that women still have a long way in establishing equality of rights with men in this space, and explains the differences arising in perceptions when it comes to women’s place and attitudes in Indian society – reflected by the narrative facts above.

The poverty and lack of hygiene are hinted at as characterizing the world of Indian slums and outskirts. Grandma hesitates to go to the toilet, suggesting this very issue when saying that, with the exception of luxury hotels, going to the toilet was as traumatizing an experience as not going when one needs to. Moreover, while thinking about the experience in the country, the elderly woman describes it as a bombardment on the senses, despite the filter provided by air conditioners and upscale hotels, referring to the smells in the streets. Here, it is worth investigating a bit this annoyance that the character, and the Europeans that she mirrors have in relation with smells. One obvious reason would be that, to us, the fact that she is bothered by the smells is immediately understood, as a taken-for-granted idea that it is normal to be bothered by what we call foul smells. What we are not aware of, though, is that even this taken-for-granted category – of unpleasant smells – is a cultural construct. Secondly, it is perhaps part of our European-western mindset to consider smell as a second-rate sense, inferior in importance to sight and gaze (which have been dedicated a fair amount of literature), and usually unconsciously associated altogether with primitivism and the animal world; proof of this bias is encountered in Alain Corbin’s work on European and western perceptions of and on smell (Corbin qtd. in McHugh, 2012: 12).

Mc Hugh though, who analyzes smell and smells in the South Asian world, points out in his study the different perceptions on smell in the oriental space as well. Quoting Edward Washburn Hopkins, he reveals the fact that the Vedic texts mention the existence of sniffing as a replacer of kissing (*ibidem*: 13), then reminds us of the practice of smelling impure substances as part of religious rituals of penance (*ibidem*: 26); in traditional texts, the smells of fish, goat urine and cow urine are given as comparison indicators for others, of plants which are not deemed as foul-smelling, which shows that they “may well not have been perceived” as bad (*ibidem*: 67); also, some smells are not necessarily thought of as good or bad, but auspicious (*ibidem*: 73) or, on the contrary,

harbingers of death (e.g. a blooming or flowery smell), disease or the presence of demonization and good or bad spirit (*ibidem*: 76); fumigations – the smoke resulted from burning bad-smelling substances – are used to repel demons and illness, but a demon may be equally drawn by an unpleasant odor or chased away by a pleasant one (*ibidem*: 77-8); the fact that social castes used to be classified according to bodily aromas, by the association of character and personality features with certain scents (*ibidem*: 83-4) reveals the prominence and paramount importance of smells.

Mc Hugh concludes that, while for Europeans a smell is an individual, lonely experience, for the oriental it is relational; for us, smell is only meant to evoke, it has a mnemonic role, and is solitary, whereas for the oriental it triggers the desire to find its source and be united with it or experience it, thus always being interactive and social (*ibidem*: 101-2). If for the European a smell has no real meaning or reality beyond representing a trigger of memory and other realities, then that makes it a much drier cultural construct for us than for the oriental, whose perspective on it is thus considerably richer and more inclusive. On this principle, smells and aromas are part of Indian life to a greater extent – in perfumeries, cooking etc. This cultural difference makes the western visitor find the smells of India as burdensome and, although the tendency is to all-knowingly dismiss this perception by reducing it down to the fact that the smell may be unpleasant, or too much, it is perhaps explainable as much more than that, through the lens of the cultural differences and facts mentioned above. We understand from the insights offered by McHugh above that this dismissal is the result of arrogance and/or lack of awareness of how smell is culturally constructed in a drastically different manner in the two broad cultures at hand. Awareness of this fact might force us to question even deep-rooted ideas such as what is foul when it comes to smell, after all.

While looking through the car window at the industrial neighborhood unfolding before her eyes, Jennifer wonders aloud if that was a town built around a landfill or dump site. There is a typical scape of the Indian slum or peripheral area, characterized by an agglomeration of disparate elements, potholes and dirt roads. In car, they pass old decrepit homes, warehouses for wood and steel, the wall along the carriageable made up of metal panels with patches. Since it is an industrial area, next to a ship graveyard, the items lining the road are extremely diverse, consisting in various objects that can be found on ships and which are meant to be marketed after the vessels are disassembled, as well as the products of the developing industry: kitchen sinks, scooters, mattresses and operation tables. The road is blocked at some point by a cow passing, this animal being, of course, a representative one for the country, since it is considered sacred in India. All sorts of small shops can be found on either side of the street, among which a teahouse could not be missing. This is the place where the elderly lady enjoys some tea prepared with sugar, milk and spices (and which is ordered by Ram).

The questions that Ram Vaghela asks the elderly lady reveal his preoccupation with the poor rights and status of the working class members in his country, and the intention to take social action in order to change them for the better. Ram wants to know how many days off the venerable lady's servant (actually a cleaning lady) gets and if these are paid for, if she has her own room etc. He fishes for information so as to understand the differences existing between other, more civilized countries and his own

in granting more rights and privileges to the lower-class citizens, and thus see how to go about initiating the union he has in mind. The details that he gives – that a worker earns a pound a day, the lack of insurances and support from the government – point to the persistence of a layered society. On the other hand, his interest in promoting social emancipation for the lower classes also reveals that social distinctions are not as clear as they used to be, and that awareness of a different, more equalitarian mentality among the lower classes is present and active in their mindsets. This latter view is in agreement with Jaffrelot's contention that "caste identities are more malleable than many social scientists used to think until recently" (Jaffrelot, 2012: 96), which is a conclusion to his article that investigates the aspects that have powered social change towards democratization and a levelling of society since the beginnings of the British rule in India. Among these, the "ethnicization of caste", which began against the background of British industrialization (that increased the importance of the working class) with the introduction and development, during the 19th century, of the theory of a common Indo-European race migrating to India (*ibidem*: 82). Jyotirao Phule interpreted as implications of this theory the association of the Brahmins (the upper caste) with the white, Arian, invading race, and of the lower castes with the local, true, original inhabitants of the land, whom he called the Dravidians, and who had, in this light, the primacy of authenticity over the top castes (*ibidem*: 83). Later on, in the 1920s, Ramaswami Naicker (Periyar), disappointed in Gandhi and the Congress, launched the "Self-Respect Movement" which relied on the concept of equality (*ibidem*: 85). Caste associations for political reasons began to form (*ibidem*: 86), such as the Gujarat Kshatriya against the background of the 1947 democracy (*ibidem*: 87). Other measures into more modern times included the "positive discrimination" of the Untouchables group (which was originally outside the caste system, at the base of it) through the establishment of employment quotas for them (reserved workplaces) etc. (*ibidem*: 91). Ram Vaghela's concerns and attitude in the story echoes the spirit of these manifestations, and the fact that India has come a long way from its initial social order, but at the same time proves the fact that inequalities are still a thorny matter, since the character resorts to examples of other countries, such as England and Denmark, looking for suitable examples of more successful societies – from the point of view of the issues that preoccupy him.

However, the facts mentioned above in what regards the reality of modern India – the emergence of the working class, along with the appearance of heavy industrialization – have something to do with the relatively recent emergence of this country among the world's most developed economies, and the significant expansion that it is expected to produce in the following decades. A top ten of "the world's biggest economies", drawn based on data acquired from the International Monetary Fund places India on the seventh position, but even more interesting is the prediction that by 2050 it will become the second most developed nation, after China and before the United States (Smith, 2018). It is interesting how the country has turned its destiny around from being exploited colonially and providing cheap workforce to more developed state entities towards rising in a skyrocketing motion of self-assertion.

There is one last aspect which we need to touch upon before making the concluding remarks. It detaches itself from Ram Vaghela's attitude as he comments, to

his wife, on how stunned he was to see an old lady (Jennifer's grandmother) cry her eyes out in public and needing to be carried away and physically supported because she was overwhelmed by emotions upon seeing the metal skeleton of a particular ship (which brought back memories). He manifests to his spouse his displeasure at the old lady's reaction, saying that he would have expected more composure from a British woman, and an ability to keep her emotions in check. This difference arises from the broader one, of affective versus neutral cultures, mentioned by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner in their studies. In a table displaying the degree to which certain countries would refrain from emotional response in percentages, India's repressiveness is translated in 51%, whereas the British dislike emotionality in a proportion of 45% (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997: 70). Perhaps surprisingly, Indians look on expressing affect with more disapproving eyes than people from the UK, which we would not expect, given the plethora of emotions which we see in popular culture productions, which apparently counters the traditional ways and the core values of formal contexts.

Conclusions

This paper has investigated the introductory part of the novel *The Ship of Brides* by Jojo Moyes, as it represents a good referential piece for a set of distinctions that can be made in what regards, for instance, Indianness and Britishness, or mass tourism versus responsible tourism. We are provided with valuable information and illustrations of topics such as age perceptions, gender and dress codes, the appearance of specific scapes, as well as social and cultural issues concerning class and affect in India. Besides constituting an open mirror to Indian identity, the introduction to the novel occasions the approach of concepts such as eurocentrism and exoticism, plural visions, and their interpretations in context. We have also seen in the fragment the mirroring of some of the implications of the modern realities concerning India, such as the advancement of the working class and the emergence of its economy, announcing an even more auspicious perspective in the relatively near future, for a country that has already come a long way in terms of economic development.

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