Unmasking the other: Danger and difference in Hammer's colonial horrors

Introduction

This essay will examine *The Stranglers of Bombay* (1960) and *The Mummy* (1959) both belonging to a notable sub-category of films produced by Hammer Films in order to relate their content to wider discourses of representation and difference. These films belong to a strand that can be described as "colonial horror" which became a recurrent, if sporadic theme, present during the prolific output of Hammer Films from the late 1950s until its demise in the mid-1970s. These two Terence Fisher directed titles paved the way for a number of similar films produced both by Hammer and competitor studios. All of these films draw upon existing representations of the exotic and seek to exploit an underlying fear of cultural and racial otherness. The performance of quintessentially "British" values of heroism and moral virtue displayed by the protagonists of Hammer's horror stories found an obvious and absolute adversary in the ethnic "other" with the colonial realm offering a rich source of inspiration for narratives of exoticism and dread. Drawing upon existing colonial discourses of essential difference, such films rearticulated long established archetypes of cultural and racial otherness, reinterpreting them within the specific context of Hammer's lurid gothic sensibilities. This essay will explore these depictions within *The Stranglers of Bombay* and *The Mummy,* both in relation to wider elements of colonial discourse as well as the specific representational tropes associated with the criminal cult known as Thuggee. This paper will argue that the figure of the Thug – an influential but contested historical "fact" – played a central role in cementing many of the tenets of colonial discourse and management and that the influence of this mode of representation continued to shape popular representations of the "other" long after the period of British imperialism had ended.

The emergence of Hammer Films as a global exponent of lurid and lavish gothic horror films during the late 1950s and 1960s has created a lasting legacy that continues today. The stylistic and thematic influence of the Hammer brand established in this period continues to inform contemporary horror, most notably in the re-emergence of the studio itself with successful productions like *Let Me In* (2010) and *The Woman in Black* (2012). Despite the reputation of Hammer as a producer of horror films, the company's portfolio has always been much more diverse. Since its inception in the early 1930s, Hammer Films have produced titles across a range of genres including comedy, melodrama and romance as well as the horror and science-fiction titles it is more readily remembered for. Although the release of *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957 can be seen as the beginning of Hammer's classic horror cycle, it should be recognized that the subsequent output of the company for the next decade continued to be categorized as generically diverse. Ever since the successful release of *The Quatermass Experiment* in 1955, the company certainly developed and exploited horrific and otherworldly themes but what might in hindsight seem like a strategized focus on horror in the late 1950s and early 60s conceals the more piecemeal approach towards making films. Although the two films discussed in this essay include enough elements of violence and the supernatural to mark them out as horror films, they are also indicative of Hammer's more widespread attempts to establish a proven commercial formula during this period.

Though the horrific elements of both these films resonate with Hammer's other more explicitly gothic films, they can also been seen to form part of a more specific strand of colonial adventure/horror film. Both *The Stranglers of Bombay* and *The Mummy,* can be seen to sit in the middle of a distinct strand of colonial themed films produced at Hammer which includes *The Camp on Blood Island* in 1958 and *Terror of the Tongs* in 1961. Although this particular strand of horror/adventure was to fall somewhat by the wayside of the more successful gothic horror titles at Hammer, it would occasionally re-emerge again; most notably in John Gilling's

brace of Cornish "curse of the colonial" titles, *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* (both 1966). What these titles all share is that – despite the presence of bona-fide movie "monsters" (zombies, human/reptile hybrids, re-animated mummies etc.) – the real horror is derived not from these supernatural beasts but driven by the sublimated fear of the colonial and racial "other". Terence Fisher's films *The Stranglers of Bombay* and *The Mummy* then encompass many familiar representational tropes and archetypes associated with British colonial discourse. The classic binary representation of civilized white colonialists contrasted with the primitive native subject reflects established patterns of imperialist and orientalist discourse. Furthermore, these two films also reflect the central importance that the figure of the Thug played in cementing many of the aspects of colonial discourse that were central to the operation of British imperial governance and has continued to reflect and represent the racial other in popular fiction – not just in film but across a range of media from the stage, to television, from comics to computer games. As this essay will evidence, the key representational figure of the Thug is present not only in a film like *The Stranglers of Bombay* that explicitly focuses on the historical phenomenon of Thuggee but is central to understanding the representational strategies of many colonial-themed stories. Therefore, as this essay will demonstrate, even a film such as *The Mummy*, based as it is around a completely difference locale and mythology to that relating to Thuggee, reveals the ongoing articulation of essential difference inspired by this most horrific of criminal cults.

This is True! This Really Happened!: The Stranglers of Bombay

Following the enormous global commercial success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957 and *Dracula* in 1958, director Terence Fisher worked ceaselessly for Hammer Films, directing a further eight feature films over the next two years. During this period Fisher worked

on some of the studios most enduring classics and sandwiched in between two of them – *The Mummy* (1959) and *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) – he made one of his less celebrated films, *The Stranglers of Bombay* (1960). Despite the lurid and violent elements of *Stranglers*, the film stands apart from his explicitly gothic horrors[1], instead developing a boy's own adventure story set in colonial India. It is notable that the film is missing two of the key collaborators that had helped shape Fisher's early Hammer gothics. Jimmy Sangster, who had scripted both *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *Dracula,* is absent here and Fisher's leading man of choice – Peter Cushing - is also missing; both busy with other projects and victims of the rapid turnover of projects at Hammer during this period. Although this film reunited Fisher with composer James Bernard who produced another memorably nerve-jarring score, the lack of these two key figures does impact on the film's effectiveness. Although Guy Rolfe delivers a solid performance conveying both heroism and nobility, the hurriedly compiled script (written in a "rush situation" over a period of two weeks) by a young David Z Goodman[2], lacks the tight narrative drive that Sangster put to such good use in Hammer's gothic classics. Despite these narrative shortcomings, the film is much more than a fascinating curio and its focus on the criminal cult of Thuggee mark it out as an important film in the canon of colonial storytelling.

Unlike the gothic horrors directed by Fisher in the previous two years, *The Stranglers of Bombay* is not based on a gothic literary classic but on established historical "fact". In this way, *Stranglers* can be seen to develop similar themes to Val Guest's *The Camp on Blood Island* (1958), a controversial but lucrative[3] Hammer film also set "out there" in the distant East. Guest's film focuses on the real-life horrors experienced by British men and women incarcerated by the Japanese army during World War Two. The framing of the narrative around the violent and morally depraved oriental other, contrasted with the stoic heroism of the British protagonists is shared in Fisher's later film. Both films also ground themselves in terms of historical veracity, the "factual" basis helping to accentuate the horror of the violence and

cruelty depicted. The trailer for *The Camp on Blood Island* begins with a banner proclaiming "All this is real!" and *Stranglers* employed similar tactics across a range of publicity materials. Both the trailer and various posters for *The Stranglers of Bombay* proclaim "This is True! This is not Fiction! This REALLY happened!" aptly reflect the film's overwrought cocktail of historical veracity and lurid exploitation. Unlike Fisher's gothic horrors that were characterized partly by the expert manipulation of florid Eastman colour, *Stranglers* – like *The Camp on Blood Island* – was shot in black and white, a device employed to evoke a sense of documentary-like realism. That such stark cinematography is presented alongside more sensationalist elements such as those claiming that the film is the first to be shot in "Strangloscope" reflects the tonal uncertainty of the story presented on screen.

The emphasis on historical veracity and fact is also consistent with the initial and ongoing representation of Thuggee within colonial discourse. The discovery and extirpation of the criminal cult of Thuggee in India during the 1820s and 30s played a central role in establishing the paramountcy of British rule over the subcontinent. Furthermore the representation of the Thug both in factual and fictional accounts was to prove highly influential in shaping the characterisation of the native "other" within colonial discourse. Although many scholars (Roy 1988, Singha 1998, Lloyd 2006) have challenged the historical veracity of the British account of Thuggee, the dominant discourse emerging from the colonialist perspective has continued to shape popular representations of the criminal cult. Ever since the earliest fictional accounts– beginning with Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) – there has been an emphasis on the factual historical basis of the fictional recasting of the story of Thuggee. This is reflected in earlier filmic representations of Thuggee such as George Steven's *Gunga Din* (1939) which combines an account of the criminal cult with elements of Kipling's poem and the history of the Indian "mutiny" of 1857. The publicity for Steven's film

incorporated detailed exposition of historical facts about the criminal cult that are re-iterated throughout the film itself[4].

The Stranglers of Bombay, then follows the established pattern of representation emerging from the established colonial discourse that emerged out of the development of British rule in India. The film is largely a fictionalized retelling of the story of William Sleeman, the British administrator who discovered and destroyed (as the head of the anti-Thug campaign of the 1830s) the criminal cult of stranglers during the 1830s. Sleeman was not only responsible for carrying out the legal campaign against Thuggee but also for shaping the wider understanding and representation of this criminal cult. Sleeman's seminal text on the Thugs, *Ramaseeana* (1836) laid out the cultural, religious, linguistic and racial elements behind the criminal cult and played a key role in raising popular awareness – largely through the publication of extracts in the popular press - both within India and back in Europe. Despite the dubious evidence underpinning much of his analysis, the story told by Sleeman can be seen as the keystone of the representation of Thuggee ever since. Hammer Films had been interested in developing John Master's best-selling novel *The Deceivers* which itself is a re-telling of the Sleeman narrative about Thuggee. After rejecting this option due to the high costs of purchasing the rights to Master's novel, Hammer employed the young American writer David Z Goodman to develop another iteration of the established narrative of the British anti-Thug campaign.

The Stranglers of Bombay, tells the story of the discovery of a criminal cult of ritualistic stranglers operating on the roads of the subcontinent by the honourable Captain Harry Lewis of the East India Company (Guy Rolfe). Once the conspiracy is discovered, Lewis embarks on a campaign to expose the Thugs, battling against the violence of the stranglers on the one hand and the stubborn bureaucracy of his superiors on the other. As the story unfolds, the audience learns of the religiously inspired nature of Thuggee (the stranglers are devotees of the goddess

Kali and kill in her name) and the inherent savagery and duplicity of the native subjects. At the film's conclusion, with the conspiracy exposed and his superiors convinced of the threat, Lewis looks out into the jungle from the veranda of his bungalow and concludes to his faithful wife; "She's out there…Kali the murderess and her murdering sons. This is only the beginning…". Just before the credits role, the audience is informed via a final postscript of the historical "facts" behind the story, stating that over 1,000 men were hung for crimes of Thuggee and claiming that the cult had claimed over one million victims (an oft quoted[5] but contentious and unsubstantiated figure). The postscript ends by lauding the work of William Sleeman and by quoting a letter he wrote to fellow officers of the East India Company; "If we have done nothing else for India, we have done this good thing". This postscript follows the established pattern of fictionalized tales of Thuggee whereby the revelation and exposure of the crime is underpinned by reference the historical record begun by William Sleeman.

It also makes clear two ideological tropes associated with and developed throughout the anti-Thug campaign. Firstly, the strong conviction that colonial rule over native others by the British and their European counterparts was and is a justifiable arrangement. Captain Lewis represents the civilized and moral westerner who risks his career and his life to uncover a murderous conspiracy whose only victims are Indian natives. This selfless and morally upright imperative is contrasted by the wall of silence Lewis comes up against when seeking information and evidence from "ordinary" Indian subjects. Their mute compliance with the murderous death cult of Thuggee and fatalistic reluctance to help the crusading British officer, serves to set out the sense of absolute difference between "them" and "us" that was so crucial to the imperial project (Said 1979).

This feeds into the second narrative trope associated with and emerging from representations of Thuggee, which is the reaction of shock and incredulity felt by the colonial masters and their peers back home. The shock factor here is not that natives have primitive and violent impulses

but that even the most trusted and loyal Indians were participants in such heinous acts. This was apparent in the earliest reports of Thuggee when it was discovered that many of the supposed perpetrators of these crimes were on the surface, loyal, educated and trusted servants and subjects of the British. In *Ramaseeana,* Sleeman refers to the case of Hurree Singh, a trusted tradesmen and draper who had worked within the cantonment of Hingolee and personally known to Captain Reynolds (a member of the anti-Thug police) turned out to be a notorious Thug[6]. Even more shocking was the case of Dr. Cheek who employed a loyal bearer entrusted to look after his young children – a task in which he proved exemplary – only to discover that:

> This mild and exemplary being was later discovered by Sleeman to be a Thug: kind, gentle, conscientious and regular at his post for eleven months of the year, devoting the twelfth to strangulation. Cold-blooded human beasts with a callous disregard for the sanctity of human life for the one-twelfth of the year, and patterns of virtue for the remainder!
>
> James Sleeman (1933: 62)

The incredulity and "shock" expressed by British observers and commentators reflecting on the unmasking of those previously considered to be loyal subjects as Thugs, is underpinned by the central notion of essential difference that is so crucial to the articulation of colonial discourse. Within both factual and fictional accounts, the shocking "reveal" of trusted servants exposed as murderous cultists acts then as the confirmation of the absolute sense of difference that shapes the colonial relationship between the powerful and the powerless.

This narrative strand plays a significant part in *The Stranglers of Bombay* where two of the most prominent native characters are revealed to be members of the Thuggee cult. The first of these characters, Ram Das (Morne Maitland[7]) the jemander (i.e. wealthy land owner) and business associate of the East India Company is seen early on to be orchestrating the crimes of

the Thugs for his own financial gain. This character owes much to the depiction of the Chandra Sen character in John Masters' *The Deceivers* and both are based on the supposed complicity of Indian subjects at all levels of native society. Das displays many of the characteristics associated with the pantomime Eastern despot, he is at once depraved and cowardly, opulent and morally repugnant. Interestingly, although revealed early on to the audience as part of the Thug conspiracy, Das escapes arrest and retribution in the film. It may be that his continued freedom adds to the sense that "this is only the beginning" of the fight against Thuggee but it is more likely a narrative loose end engendered by the somewhat rushed nature of the screenwriting.

The second "secret Thug" character in *The Stranglers of Bombay* is a somewhat more nuanced figure whose true nature is revealed later on and extends the discourse of essential otherness even further. Whereas Ram Das can be seen to be an individual that audiences might expect to be unreconstructedly "other" - with his relatively privileged position based on the last vestiges of Indian (or more accurately Mughal) power – Captain Silver (Paul Cassino) is a much more troubling figure. Not only is Silver a captain in the East Indian military, he is of mixed-race heritage so potentially bridges the racial and cultural gulf of difference between "them" and "us". The exposure of Captain Silver then, is yet another "shock" reveal that underlines, not only the discourse of racial and cultural difference, but that no matter what the particular circumstances might be, the native subject can never be fully civilized or completely trusted. Despite his position in the British structures of governance and the English blood in his veins, Silver ultimately is subsumed to the regressive attributes of his "other" side. This is a key message within the machinations of colonial representation and in *The Stranglers of Bombay* underpins the sheer weight of the task in hand to destroy the cult of Thuggee and to bring order to the subcontinent.

The theme of miscegenation arose early on in fictional tales of Thuggee, beginning with the mixed-race Thug Feringhea (based on a real-life convicted Thug) in Eugene Sue's *The Wandering Jew* (1844-5) and has been present ever since. The character of the mixed-race Thug, in this case Captain Silver, acts not just as a reminder of essential difference but as a warning for the need to be ever vigilant and to ensure that "they" are never to be completely trusted, and that "we" must always been on our guard.

"Not intolerant. Just practical"[8]: Taming *The Mummy*

Many of the themes present in *The Stranglers of Bombay* can be seen in Fisher's previous film *The Mummy* (1959) which again combines elements of colonial adventure with more traditional aspects of horror. *The Mummy* can be seen as the final stage of Hammer's revival of the Universal horror classics of the 1930s, following in the footsteps of Fisher's previous remakes of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. A much more accomplished film than *The Stranglers of Bombay*, *The Mummy* reunites all of the key players associated with Fisher's previous Hammer horrors. Both Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee are present – again ensconced in their heroic/horrific roles, James Bernard provided the score and Jimmy Sangster wrote the screenplay. Despite some unevenness in the script (the Ananka/Isobel reincarnation narrative is introduced rather late on in the piece) the film has an energy and drive that is lacking in *Stranglers* and proved to be much more influential on subsequent colonial themed horrors at Hammer and beyond.

Like *The Stranglers of Bombay, The Mummy* presents a range of themes and representations consistent with existing colonial discourse. Furthermore, although clearly not a film about Thuggee, *The Mummy* it does reflect many of the emblematic tropes and archetypes emerging from the representation of the criminal cult. The terror engendered in both

films is derived from the fear of the colonial other, but there is a significant change of setting in *The Mummy*, which (after the initial Egyptian prologue) brings the horror of the colonies back "home" to rural England. Importing the menace of the "other" in this way underlines the perilous risk of contamination associated with overexposure within the colonial encounter. The travails of the main protagonist of the film, John Banning (Peter Cushing) that derive from his obsessive interest in the archaeology of the East reflect a wider concern with the dangers of the colonial "taint" on western culture and society. This strand of orientalist discourse has a long established history (Said 1979 & Kabbani 1986) and is also characteristic of many examples of Thuggee fiction since the mid-nineteenth century[9].

The plot of *The Mummy*, follows a familiar trajectory as the dedicated archaeologist John Banning returns to England following the opening of the tomb of Queen Ananka, only to be pursued home by the agents of an ancient curse. The horrors brought to bear on Banning and the village community that surrounds him, exemplifies not only the exotic dangers present in the colonial encounter but also the unchanging sense of difference that exists between colonisers and the colonized. Right from the outset of the film, it is made clear that Banning has been damaged or "tainted" by his obsessive over-exposure to the culture of the East. His denial of medical treatment for a wounded leg (so anxious is he to bear witness to the opening of Queen Ananka's tomb) leaves him with a pronounced limp; a physical reminder of the terrible risks of exposure to the domain of the native other. The representation of the returning imperial protagonist as wounded or damaged by his exposure to the colonial domain is a recurring theme in such tales and can be seen again in John Gilling's *The Reptile* (1966). In the first of Gilling's Cornish based Hammer horrors (filmed back to back on the same sets and sharing many cast members), Dr. Franklyn (Noel William) returns home from the East bearing a similar limp to that of Banning's. The metaphor of contamination is extended in *The Reptile* resulting in horrific consequences for Franklyn's daughter Anna (Jacqueline Pearce). She

comes to embody the terrifying consequences of colonial exposure and cultural mixing as she periodically transforms into a murderous reptilian beast whose only redemption is her own death.

As the colonial sins of the father are visited on Dr. Franklyn's daughter in *The Reptile*, the horrors unleashed by the Mummy's curse fall first on Banning's father Stephen (Felix Aylmer), who driven mad by the horrors witnessed in the East[10] is murdered by the marauding mummy of Ananka's high priest (Christopher Lee) who has been spirited into the country by devotee Mehemet Bey (George Pastell[11]). As the story unfolds, the focus of the curse of the mummy falls on Banning's own wife Isobel (Yvonne Furneaux), emphasising once more that the dangers of exposure to the "other" threaten, not only the individual, but that there are terrible consequences to bear for the wider culture and community.

On the surface, the simple good versus evil story is embodied in the characters played by Hammer film's most emblematic actors. Peter Cushing as Banning and Christopher Lee as the mummified Kharis, stand off against each other several times, and their dynamic and physical battles provide some of the film's most memorable moments. The fight between the two that takes place in Banning's study is one of the film's highpoints, with Banning driving a spear through the mummy's chest, a moment replicated in the film's iconic poster[12].

As thrilling as these muscular scenes are, the film's most significant encounter is the late-on conversation (taking place immediately before the film's memorable swamp-bound climax) between John Banning and his Egyptian nemesis - Mehemet Bey - who is secretly orchestrating the nocturnal exploits of the reanimated Kharis. The intellectual sparring, between Banning and Bey crackles with tension and barely concealed hostility. Their discussion centres on the clash of civilisations that emerges from the processes and practices of the imperial encounter and, unsurprisingly confirms the basic tenets of colonial discourse, once again emphasising the key aspects of essential difference and otherness.

Bey's insistent questioning of the ethics of Banning's archaeological activities in Egypt is abruptly rebuffed by the frosty and superior logic of his English counterpart. In response to accusations of profanity and desecration, Banning effortless rejects them and ridicules the primitive rites associated with the followers of the Egyptian deity, Karnak[13]. Banning here clearly inhabits the "positional superiority" that Said (1979) discusses in his classic *Orientalism* thesis, as he asserts his mastery of knowledge and expertise over the native subject[14]. This is reflected in the response given by Bey to the news that Banning's father has been found murdered. Despite challenging Banning's assertions about the moral and scientific imperatives of Egyptology, Bey is nevertheless compelled to admit to the primitive nature of his own culture and religion;

Bey: Please forgive my apathy. In my country, violence is quite commonplace. It doesn't leave the same impression as in this peaceful community.
Banning: The history of your country is steeped in violence.
Bey: Indeed it is.

This passage of dialogue, clearly evokes the core principles at the heart of colonial discourse; that the fundamental difference between "them" and "us" is both inevitable and unchanging. The character of Bey is presented as a man who is on the surface at least, educated and erudite, neatly dressed in a western suit and conducting himself with proper "English" manners. The film's narrative however makes it clear that this educated façade (it seems that Bey has received something of an English education) cannot mask the essential otherness hidden beneath. Although on the surface the fierce debate between Banning and Bey appears to be that between participants of equal status, the latter is eventually reduced to his subject position conferred by colonial discourse. This again resonates with the emblematic representation of the "revealed"

Thug, both in terms of actual cases reported in newspapers and scholarly books and repeated instances in popular novels and tales.

Furthermore, this verbal encounter in *The Mummy* evokes a central aspect of the British anti-Thug campaign by replicating the processes of confession and conversation that were crucial to the exposure and prosecution of the criminal cult. Such practices emerged out of one of two "extraordinary" legal measures adopted by the British administration that were key to the success of the anti-Thug campaign. The first of these was to establish Thuggee as a crime of association – meaning that an individual could be convicted simply of being identified as a member of a Thug gang rather than for any specific crime – and the second was to allow Thugs to be prosecuted and convicted solely on the basic of the confessions of others[15]. This latter innovation went contrary to the established Moghul legal principles but was justified by the British as the means to dismantle and prosecute the most "extraordinary" of crimes.

The thousands of prosecutions and convictions carried out by the British relied almost entirely on the confessions of around one hundred Thug "approvers" who turned King's evidence in order to avoid the ultimate punishment of execution by hanging[16]. The remarkable dispassionate and prescribed depositions of the Thug approvers were cited in British accounts (Thornton 1837, Hutton 1856) as further evidence of the shocking and inhuman nature of these native criminals. That these initial confessions were followed by a further series of ongoing "conversations" between the British captors and their Indian convicts, reveals the importance of knowledge gathering in shaping colonial representations of essential racial and cultural difference[17] (Lloyd 2007, Brown 2014). It was during such "conversations" – many of which are recorded in William Sleeman's *Ramaseeana* – that the religious, mythological and cult aspects of the crime of Thuggee were revealed. In the confessions used as the basis of conviction during the anti-Thug campaign, there is an absence of religious or cult motivation behind the crimes supposedly committed by the Thugs. As the conversations progressed

however, it was “revealed” that the Thugs were not committing the crime of murder simply in order to rob their victims but were actually offering up sacrificial victims to the goddess Kali. This focus on elements of native superstition and religious mythology emerged entirely from the British interrogators who were able to piece together the various stories and anecdotes from their willing charges to feed into existing narratives of essential racial and cultural difference (Singha 1988, Brown 2002). Such conversations provided rich (and thrillingly macabre) “evidence” to underline the notions of essential difference that were crucial to the functioning of the increasingly powerful colonial management of the British in India. As well as fuelling the knowledgeable mastery of the British over their native subordinates, it also confirmed and cemented the subject status of the indigenous Indian population.

These aspects clearly help shape and inform the encounter between Banning and Bey in *The Mummy* and are a reminder of the ongoing importance and influence of the figure of the Thug in fictional tales focusing on the colonial encounter. Although the locale (Egypt rather than India) and religious allegiance (Karnak rather than Kali) of *The Mummy* are seemingly far apart from the history of Thuggee, the story nevertheless replicates many of the aspects of colonial difference arising from the archetypal representations of the criminal cult. In particular the fixing of the racial “other” as the subject of European knowledge and power is a striking element of *The Mummy* that clearly evokes the representational tropes of Thuggee.

Conclusion

The two films directed by Terence Fisher towards the end of the 1950s which coincided with Hammer films rise to global prominence, clearly tapped into existing representations of racial and cultural difference arising from established patterns of colonial discourse. The explicit reference to and reproduction of the historical “facts” of the anti-Thug campaign in *The Stranglers of Bombay* evidences the ongoing fascination in the moral and military

challenges of the colonial encounter. Whilst *The Mummy* the focuses on a smaller canvas, it replicates many of the representational themes associated with the colonial encounter as well as the more specific tropes of the Thug. The rather more claustrophobic setting of *The Mummy*, exposes the viewer to a more complex narrative and delves deeper into the psychology of the two key protagonists of Banning and Bey. Whilst the character of Capt. Harry Lewis is portrayed as an unreconstructed colonial hero – noble, strong and morally upright – there is much more room for ambiguity reflected in John Banning; revealed most acutely during his verbal joust with his Egyptian nemesis Mehemet Bey. Whilst Banning's confident mastery over the history and culture of Bey's native Egypt may be interpreted as the dominant force during their exchange, the nuances of dialogue and performance are such that alternative readings are made available to the audience. Bey's impassioned defence of the sanctity and importance of his own Egyptian heritage is such that his position can been viewed with some sympathy – particularly when contrasted with what could be considered the indifference, arrogance and as Bey asserts – "intolerance" of the British archaeologist[1]. This ambiguity is perhaps particularly apparent for contemporary audiences living some years after British de-colonisation[18] but also testament to Jimmy Sangster's skilful dialogue (the sequence between Banning and Bey is arguably amongst his best work) and pitch-perfect performances by Peter Cushing and George Pastell.

The underlying themes of both *The Stranglers of Bombay* and *The Mummy*; the fear of the "other" and the fundamental threat of cultural and racial mixing, emerged from pre-existing colonial discourse and continued to resurface in the horrors, not only of Hammer studios, but also many of their competitors. In terms of the immediate filmic legacy of these tales, it was the psychological and claustrophobic narrative of *The Mummy* that would be most influential

[1] Although in many ways the character of Mehemet Bey is little more than a colonial archetype he is somewhat more nuanced that Pastell's subsequent portrayal of the high priest of Kali in *The Stranglers of Bombay.* In the latter film, Pastell is limited to some rather ripe dialogue such as 'Kali – kill kill!' whereas in *The Mummy* he is able to work successfully with some more carefully developed dialogue.

rather than the old-fashioned "boy's own" action of *The Stranglers of Bombay.* The resurfacing of themes surrounding the perils of the colonial "taint" and the hidden horror of the "other" hidden beneath the surface of apparent civility would surface again in Hammer horrors such as *The Reptile* and *The Plague of the Zombies* and in competitor titles such as British Tyburn's *The Ghoul* (1975). The latter explicitly revisits the themes of *The Mummy,* featuring another poignant performance by Peter Cushing, playing Dr. Lawrence, another haunted colonial mourning the mysterious death of his wife[19] and hiding the terrible truth about his horrifically afflicted son. These films are testament to the ongoing articulation of racial and cultural difference that lies at the heart of the powerful discourses of the colonial period and beyond. Such is the power of these depictions that the mythological and mysterious archetypes of the colonial "other", such as that represented in the figure of the Thug, continue to haunt and shape our collective imaginations of the potential horrors both "out there" and, much closer to home.

Endnotes

[1] Prior to the release of *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957, Fisher was the archetypal Hammer director, working on films across a range of genres (including crime, science-fiction and thriller). Following the success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, Fisher's output at Hammer focused exclusively on gothic horror. *The* Stranglers *of Bombay* and *The Sword of Sherwood Forest* – both released in 1960 were the last films directed by Fisher that fall outside of the genre he has become most associated with.

[2] Goodman later became best known for scripting some of the most memorable (and notorious) films of the 1970s such as *Straw Dogs* (1971) and *Logan's Run* (1976).

[3] The film was one of the most successful British film releases of 1958, spawning a successful Panther novelisation and a sequel *The Secret of Blood Island* (d. John Gilling) in 1965.

[4] This narrative trope can be seen in subsequent films that feature Thuggee, such as Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) which features a scene where the lead character has the historical "facts" of Thuggee explained to him at a lavish (and disgustingly barbaric) banquet with the Maharaja of Pankot.

[5] For example, William Sleeman's grandson James named his written account of the anti-Thug campaign; *Thug, or a Million Murders* (1933).

[6] Writing in *Ramaseeana*, Sleeman writes that:

> On hearing that the Hurree Singh of the list sent to him of noted thugs at large in the Duckan was the Hurree Singh of the Sudder Bazar, Captain Reynolds was quite astonished, for so correct had he been in his deportment and all his dealings, that he had won the esteem of all good gentlemen of the station. Sleeman (1836: 34)

[7] Maitland was an Indian born character actor whose dark complexion ensured a succession of roles as playing characters with a variety of ethnic identifications. In *The Camp on Blood Island* he plays a sadistic Japanese prison guard and in *The Terror of the Tongs* a Chinese gang breaker.

[8] A line from a memorable exchange between and John Banning (Peter Cushing) to Mehemet Bey (George Pastell) in *The Mummy.*
[9] Two such notable tales are Conan-Doyle's proto-Holmes story *The Mystery of Uncle Jeremy's Household* (1887) and Louis May Alcott's *The Fate of the Forrests* (1865). Both stories focus again on the figure of the miscegenated Thug whose influence brings tragedy and disruption to the genteel setting of the English homeland.
[10] It is Stephen Banning's discovery of the "scroll of life" that unwittingly releases the mummy Kharis back into the land of the living. The appearance of the mummy is terrifying enough to induce madness in the senior Banning; another stark reminder of the perils of delving too deep into the mysteries of the East.
[11] Pastell was a Cypriot born actor who made a successful career as a character actor specialising in a range of "ethnic" roles. As well as playing the high priest of Kali in *The Stranglers of Bombay*, he appeared in dozens of well-known films including *From Russia With Love* (1963).
[12] Cushing was later to claim (Gullo 2004) that the poster was produced before the film began shooting, despite no instruction in the script that might explain such an injury. According to the actor, it was his upon his suggestion that he should thrust a spear through the mummy's chest, an idea that was readily adopted by Terence Fisher and executed to great effect by make-up artist Roy Ashton and special effects chief Bill Warrington.
[13] A deity invented by Sangster, the name borrowed from the Karnak temple complex found at Luxor, Egypt. This tomb complex – one of Egypt's most visited archaeological sites – contains the impressive Amen-Ra temple.
[14] Whilst dismissing Karnak as a "third rate God" and indicating that any of his followers to be of "low intelligence" Banning underlines his own expert and scientific knowledge, stating that; "I've studied extensively this so-called religion. It's based upon artificial, ludicrous beliefs".
[15] These two principles were formalized in a series of acts towards the latter part of the 1830s; the crime of association by Act XXX of 1836 and guilt based on confessions in Act XIX of 1837 but had been in widespread usage throughout that decade.
[16] Between four and five thousand men were arrested for crimes relating to Thuggee, 500 of these were hanged and a further 3,000 imprisoned or transported for life and 200 died in prison.
[17] The first popular novel on Thuggee, Phillip Meadows Taylor's bestselling *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) draws directly on the practices of confession and conversation employed by the British during the anti-Thug campaign. The novel tells the story of a convicted Thug Ameer Ali whose narrative follows his confession to an unnamed British administrator.
[18] Given the Egyptian/British conflict at the heart of *The Mummy* and the close historical proximity to the Suez crisis a few years before the film was made, the theme of colonial power in decline may well have helped frame some of the ambiguities in the script as Peter Hutchings (1993), for example has argued.
[19] At Cushing's request, the photograph of Dr Lawrence's wife in the film is a picture of his own recently deceased wife Helen. A scene where his character speaks of the love for his dead wife reportedly had to be shot several times due to the distress experienced by both actor and crew. (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073042/trivia: accessed 23/03/16)

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