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BORDERING STRANGENESS WORKSHOP

(Security and Sustainability Research Group, Royal Holloway, University of London)
Somerset House, London
2 April 2015

Dr Rodanthi Tzanelli,
University of Leeds

***Slumdog Millionaire's Governmobility:* Managing Strangeness in India's Tourist-Technological Systems**

A common mistake when considering how film reflects social practice and process is to disconnect it from its contexts of inspiration, inception and production. I argue that it is wrong to consider *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008, dirs Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan) a 'love story', along the lines of its global marketing. Based on an adaptation of diplomat Vikas Swarup's Q&A, the film's 'text' (screenwriter Simon Beaufoy), provides a narrative of Mumbai's fast-track urbanisation-as-modernisation, which is built on the obliteration of its external (immigrants) and internal (slum dwellers) strangers on ethno-religious grounds. Mumbai's-India's negotiation of liminal figures, such as the film's Muslim 'slumdog' hero, Jamal Malik from Juhu (slum), is achieved in two stages: first, by failed extermination and later through successful redirection of their (ethno-cultural) difference into consumption circuits.

Taking on board Boyle and his associates' real engagement with the politics of slum poverty (context), I consider *Slumdog Millionaire* as a critique of urban modernity's fundamentalist face in India. In India's multicultural polity strangers used to be managed by physical obliteration and citizens validated through processing by systems of governmentality (Foucault 1997). This management of mentality by the state, eventually internalised by its citizens (Hindus who murder Muslims in the name of ethno-religious purity), is based on religion in the film's clip, which incidentally incited real protests in India. In later scenes (already implied in the selected one), we learn that today's global financial-cultural articulations, strangeness is managed through governmobility (Bærenholdt 2013): systems (such as those of tourism and media/technology) that enable the international mobility of things and humans-as-products.

My presentation draws on the first of three key moments from the film to explore this transition: the Hindu riots and massacres of Muslim slumdweller (inspired by actual incidents) that young Jamal and his brother narrowly escape (The other two involve Jamal and Salim's precarious insertion into India's lucrative tourist industry as Taj Mahal's cunning self-taught tour guides; and Jamal's initiation into Mumbai's telecommunication and media industries as chai wallah-come-telephonic operator and finally quiz millionaire). Jamal appears as Mumbai's 'living' example of government material, which bears witness to India's success at joining the 'civilised' community of modernised nations. During this process, the very idea of 'borders' and its connection to strangerhood and vagabondage, are being replaced by the fast mobilities of technology and fleeting privileged tourisms.

References

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Suggested background reading

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Biographical note

Rodanthi Tzaneli is Associate Professor of Cultural Sociology at Leeds, UK. Her research interests include globalisation, cosmopolitanism and mobility, with emphasis on tourism, migration, social movements and art theory.

Rodanthi has been visiting staff twice at CEMORE, Sociology (Lancaster University) and in 2012 at Anthropology, Oxford University. She currently serves on the editorial board of

journals such as Cultural Sociology, Anuario de Turismo y Sociedad and the Athens Journal of Social Sciences (AJSS), and on the international advisory boards of the Global Studies Community (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), EUMEDNET (Group de la Universidad de Málaga íntegramente a través de Internet) and the Ikarian Center for Social and Political Research, Greece.

She is author of several digital interventions, over 60 academic articles and eight scholarly monographs, including the forthcoming *Mobility, Modernity and the Slum: The Real and Virtual Journeys of Slumdog Millionaire* (Routledge, 2016).

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