

Slumdog Millionaire: A Transnational Imperial Project

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Slumdog Millionaire is a 2008 British movie directed by Danny Boyle. It is inspired by the novel *Q and A* (2005) written by an Indian author and diplomat Vikas Swarup. *Slumdog Millionaire* is set and filmed in India. It tells the story about how Jamal Malik, who grew up in Juhu slums of Mumbai, finds a childhood lost love by appearing at the Indian version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. The movie won eight academy awards (2009), seven BAFTA awards (2009), five Critics' Choice Awards (2009), four Golden Globes (2009) and many other prestigious awards¹.

In 2009 I was startled to read an article titled “‘*Slumdog Millionaire*’ enlightens a darker truth” in the website www.oregonlive.com. The author, Jenna Roberts, writes –

“*Slumdog Millionaire* might be registered as a fiction, but it has more reality to it than most documentaries. The most tragic details are a small dose of the shocking state of the world in India. Regardless of how many Oscars it wins this Sunday, the film has served a relevant purpose despite the contention it has caused.... It is harder to be sympathetic to those who cry that the film glorifies the worst of the country's problems. How is it "poverty porn" ([TimesOnline](http://www.timesonline.com), 1/14/09) to tell a story that involves the brutal facts of life that millions of people experience each day? "Slumdog" reminds us of the tenacious fortitude that street kids learn early. If any one of them were to trade places with a middle-class American today, they would have the capacity to take over the world.... Rather than exploiting poverty to give an edge to his film, Boyle insidiously

¹ Awards for *Slumdog Millionaire*, retrieved 11 January 2011 from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1010048/awards>.

took advantage of a good story to shed some light on a corner of the world that is far too neglected. Let's hope that their burdens are someday lightened from it.”²

I was astonished to find Robert’s very baldly worded commentary on the movie. I remembered Woollacott’s argument that the imperial community always believes in trustworthiness of stories³. I wondered who gives Ms. Roberts the authority of claiming the “truth” about the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, how she knows that *Slumdog Millionaire* portrays nothing but the “reality” and “brutal facts” about Indian lives, how she becomes so confident that Indian slum kids would have been nurtured perfectly in a middle class American environment, and how she defines the location of India at the “corner of the world”.

The making of an imperial movie, such as *Slumdog Millionaire*, can be compared to the act of making colonial maps. It constitutes knowledge about a particular territory, establishes truths, and legitimizes the conquest of it. In McClintock’s term, it can be interpreted as “a technology of possession, promising that those with the capacity to make such perfect representations must also have the right of territorial control”⁴. That is why I believe that Robert’s comments about the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* and the movie as well are powerful continuations of a colonial understanding of India. They represent an essential “First World” response to the movie, and thus act as vehicles for authorizing validity of imperial actors over determining truths about the “Third World”.

Danny Boyle, the director of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, can be compared to a colonial explorer who travelled a long distance and came to India, learnt local cultures and

² Roberts (2009)

³ The Times; quoted in Woollacott, 2006, p. 61.

⁴ McClintock, 1994, p. 28.

languages, scrutinized Indian landscape and its features in depth, and cast himself in a heroic position through his artistic technological devices that described his discovered Indian moments⁵. His critical judgements about Indian people and their performances can be criticized as a disciplined imperial gaze, which is inadequate and captivated. A transnational and postcolonial analytical framework, which entails comparative analysis between movements of groups, goods, technology and people across borders⁶, can effectively interrogate how the imperial project of Boyle and the movie itself homogenizes and eroticizes the Indian life. It can also analyze relationships between *Slumdog Millionaire* and its affiliated actors across the global South and the North.

In my discussion I extend the framework of “imperial social formation”. This framework is pioneered by Sinha who uses it to analyze how Mayo’s imperial project “Mother India” is constituted by multilayered global dynamics and results in a transitional political event⁷. I believe that utilization of the “imperial social formation” framework in my analysis eloquently excavates the role of imperial philosophies in shaping interdependent and interconnected dynamics of *Slumdog Millionaire*. It elaborates that debates surrounding *Slumdog Millionaire* are not a mere binary conflict between imperialism vs. nationalism. It excavates how transnational actors, who are involved in the process of politicization of this movie, are constituted by a “globally articulated imperialist system”⁸. This framework also explains how a creative art piece

⁵ Idea driven from Woollacott, p. 64-65.

⁶ Bayly, Chris et. al. (2006)

⁷ Sinha, 2006.

⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

can interpret culture, politics or economics of a particular society and while doing so, how it mediates and articulates meanings about social realities⁹.

The colonial journey of *Slumdog Millionaire* reveals a contradiction. It discovers new geographical spaces such as Indian slums for the “First World” audiences. However, these spaces are portrayed as backward and traditional in historical time compared to the modern and concurrent time of the “First World”. McClintock’s theorization of “anachronistic space”, which refers to spaces where indigenous people are symbolically moved from their spaces of origin and authorized by a technology of surveillance, can be utilized in this regard¹⁰. The colonial maker of *Slumdog Millionaire* captures the movie screen, displaces day-to-day Indian lives from there, exercises administrative authorities over these lives, and places them in a symbolic “anachronistic space”. The empty space of the movie screen is then replaced by an exotic caricature of Indian lives. Bhaba’s conceptualization of “mimicry”, which refers to “flawed identity imposed on colonized people who are obliged to mirror back an image of the colonials but in imperfect form”¹¹ can be utilized in order to explain the politics of this caricature. We find that Ram Mohammad Thomas, the central character in Swarup’s novel who belongs to all religious groups (or does not belong to any specific religious group), becomes a boy named Jamal Malik from the Muslim minority group in *Slumdog Millionaire*. Boyle’s ambivalent imperialist discourse situates Ram Mohammad Thomas at an anachronistic space and fills up the vacuum by reconstructing Jamal Malik (and also other characters such as Prem Kumar, Salim or Nita from Swarup’s novel). They resemble their characters of origin but still remain different in

⁹ Ideas driven from Sinha, 2006.

¹⁰ McClintock, p. 30.

¹¹ McClintock, p. 62

many ways. That is why they stay, in Bhaba's term, "in the slippage between identity and difference", and generate ambivalence.¹² The purpose of my analysis is to utilize the potential of this ambivalence with a view to questioning the colonial authority that lied in the making of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*.

It is important to question why many of the Indian subjects (such as Indian actors, co-director, song writer, composer, and many other people who are associated with the *Slumdog Millionaire* team) consciously decided to cooperate with the imperial direction team of *Slumdog Millionaire*. I believe the direction team realized that the indigenous culture of India would be best captured if it could employ some Indian eyes to watch on behalf of it. These Indian eyes were trained to comply with the imperial understanding of Indian lives. However, the collaboration between the imperial direction team and its compliant Indian subjects is not possible to explain in a straight forward way; the collaboration was, in fact, ambivalent in many ways. It entailed some possibilities to subvert the meaning of imperialism. A. R. Rahman, the music composer of the movie, won two Oscars for original score as the first Indian. Gulzar, the lyricist of the song "Jay Ho" also won the Oscar Best Song Award. So, Oscars received by the movie triggered a rush of national pride across India¹³. Residents of Dharavi slums, where the film was shot, were reported to be glued to television screens during the Oscar award ceremony¹⁴. The success in the Oscar ceremony proves potentialities of India, a country in the global South, as a productive ground with capable and creative crews for making high quality art pieces. It also enables India's movie industry, particularly the Bollywood industry in Mumbai, to

¹² Ibid., p. 63

¹³ Jha (2009)

¹⁴ Ibid.

further deepen its dominance over other inter-territorial and transterritorial movie industries in the global South.

Although *Slumdog Millionaire* is associated with the national pride of India, its generic boundaries are not rigid at all. The cinematography of this movie is a “curious amalgam” between Hollywood and Bollywood¹⁵. BBC reports that it is a British movie since Danny Boyle, the director of the movie, is a British. Hollywood considers it as an American movie because it enters the mainstream category of the Oscar instead of the category of “foreign films”¹⁶. In some online blogs people claim that nationality of the director or producer does not necessarily define the genre of a particular movie; genre should be rather determined by the movie’s setting and casting, which makes *Slumdog Millionaire* an Indo-British movie¹⁷. So, framework built on a nationalist understanding of identities fails to capture the transnational imperial politics undergirded in *Slumdog Millionaire*. It is necessary to imply a lens, which is built on a transnational understanding of neo-imperialism, in order to analyze gendered and racialized philosophies embedded in the making of the movie.

Spaces of movie theatres where *Slumdog Millionaire* is showed, different online blogs where its viewers express their reactions, public media where reviews of the movie are discussed etc. turn into different “contact zones”, a phrase coined by Pratt to refer to “the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion,

¹⁵ The Hindu (2009)

¹⁶ Lekhni (2009)

¹⁷ Ibid.

radical inequality, and intractable conflict”¹⁸. Viewers from diverse historical and geographical backgrounds face each other at these spaces, become engaged in contentious and dialectical relationships, and generate multidimensional debates. One of the mostly debated aspects that aroused in those contact zones centers around the imperial nature of cinematography of *Slumdog Millionaire*. I choose to explore this particular aspect in my analysis with a view to addressing how imperial philosophy creates a distinct pattern of Indianness and in this way constructs gendered and racial narratives of colonized lives.

McClintock argues that imperialism expels certain groups and obliges them to inhabit “the impossible edges of modernity”. These groups have been termed as “abject groups” who are rejected by the imperial ruler; however, they are still necessary to attain the political project of imperialism¹⁹. I believe the hidden politics of *Slumdog Millionaire* also complies with McClintock’s understanding of the politics of imperialism. Its cinematography portrays the Indian life as an abject life, which inhabits threshold abject zones such as slums or brothels. However, this depiction of an exotic Indian life style is also necessary for the imperial maker of the movie in order to entertain the “First World” audience and maximize his profit.

The imperial cinematography of *Slumdog Millionaire* situates the imperial childhood in disrupted spaces, such as slums, and portrays the Indian child as “half devil and half child” in Sen’s term²⁰. We see that young Salim steals and sells his brother’s collected autograph of Amitabh Bachchan, a legendary Indian actor, without his permission. We watch that both of the

¹⁸ Pratt, 1992, p. 8.

¹⁹ McClintock, p. 72.

²⁰ Sen, 2005, p. 1.

brothers are pick-pocketing in an opera show and stealing food in a train. We find that adolescent Jamal and Salim are cheating tourists at the Taj Mahal, and stealing their shoes and valuable parts of their cars. The movie establishes these incidents as normative for slum children and in this way presents distorted images of impoverished Indian child. These images contrast Western viewers' imagination of a child who is supposed to be at home²¹ and elaborate how drastically the Indian child differs from the Western child.

Slumdog Millionaire not only distorts Indian childhood but also inflicts colonial imagination on it. We find that slum children are frequently communicating with each other in fluent English and studying the novel "The Three Musketeers" by Alexander Duma in a school, which are extremely unlikely scenarios in Indian slums. The teacher is teaching from an expensive original binding of the book; there is no evidence of a pirated copy. In these ways the imperial project of this movie constructs an imagined childhood and inscribes artificial and political meanings on the body of the Indian child.

If we explore how the cinematography of *Slumdog Millionaire* represents imperial femininity in different disrupted spaces, we encounter similar difficulties as Ghosh faces while analyzing gendered patterns of families in colonial India. Ghosh articulates, "Identifying women has been one major obstacles; the other methodological problem has been finding women's voices"²². There are several agential female characters in the novel "*Q and A*", who are erased or transformed in *Slumdog Millionaire*. For example – Smita Shah (or Gudiya), the lawyer of Ram Mohammad Thomas, rescues him from police violence and wants to know his life stories that

²¹ Sen, p. 3.

²² Ghosh, p. 20.

help him to answer all questions in the quiz show. Neelima Kumari, the famous actress popularly known as “the tragedy queen”, employs Thomas as a servant in her apartment at one of his crisis moments. Both of them are not accommodated in the movie. The only available female character is Latika, who is none but a caricature of the character Nita in *Q and A*. Latika is portrayed as a very ambivalent character, who is neither fully submissive nor totally resisting. She, at first, denies fleeing with Jamal from Javed’s (the leader of an underground gang) den and said, “It is too late, Jamal”. Afterwards, she flees from the den and tries to meet Jamal despite her prior refusal to do it. Again, when Salim gives Latika the key of the car and suggests her to leave Javed’s place, she hesitantly says, “Salim, I can’t!” However, she flees finally. If we compare Latika to her original character Nita, a sex worker in a Mumbai brothel, we find that Nita is comparatively more vocal, confident and agential than Latika. It is Nita who courageously replies Thomas’s query about whether she likes being a sex worker by articulating, “Why? What’s wrong with it? It is a profession, like any other”²³. We also find proof of her critical consciousness about own social position, which occurs to her because of being a beautiful daughter in a Bedia tribal family, when she says to Thomas, “Now I am in this brothel. This is the price I have to pay for beauty. So, don’t call me beautiful”²⁴. *Slumdog Millionaire* partially restores Latika from the character of Nita with a view to portraying imaginative “Third World” or “non-western” subjectivities which, in Ghosh’s term, “are often seen to suffer through multiply oppressive regimes.”²⁵

²³ Swarup, 2005, p. 254.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 255

²⁵ Ghosh, p. 21

It is also important to examine how Latika is graphically represented as an oriental sex symbol in *Slumdog Millionaire*. Nita's entrance in the novel is situated in a small room with a bed in the center; the bed sheet is "dirty, with strange splotches and stains on it"²⁶. However, adolescent Latika's entrance in the movie, despite being set in a brothel, is completely different from that of Nita. Latika is portrayed as a "young virgin", as described by Maman (the gang leader), who is still untouched and unconquered by any man. She wears an erotic choli-ghagra, which widely exposes her adolescent waist, chest and back. She is adorned in exotic jewellery and learns classical Indian dance from his master with an exotic music "ringi ring ringa, ringi ring ringa". In addition, sexual appeal of her adolescent body is vividly portrayed in a scene when she comes out from the bathroom with no cloth on the upper half of her body to take a towel from Jamal. In these ways the voyeuristic imperial project of *Slumdog Millionaire* subsumes the child body of Latika within the sexual appeal of a woman's body²⁷.

In Boyle's movie both Jamal and Salim have surnames – "Malik". But we do not find any surname for Latika. Namelessness detaches Latika's affiliation from her origin. It proves that her subjective identity is not much essential for being recorded²⁸. Nita also does not have any surname in "*Q and A*". However, she is conscious about how her exclusion from the naming practice ensures her marginal status and subjectivity. She says, "Prostitutes don't have surnames. Like pet cats and dogs, we are called only by our first names"²⁹. Latika is never found to make such a statement. Therefore, based on a comparison between the character of Latika in *Slumdog*

²⁶ Swarup, p. 250.

²⁷ Idea borrowed from Sen, p. 4

²⁸ Idea driven from Ghosh, p. 18-19.

²⁹ Swarup, p. 250.

Millionaire and characters of Nita, Neelima or Smita in *Q and A*, it becomes apparent that Swarup challenges constraints of hegemonic feminine identities through his multiple female characters who demonstrate their capacity of leading an independent life devoid of patriarchal supervision; whereas, Boyle merely reproduces constraints of hegemonic feminine identities through depiction of his only substantial female character in the movie.

Boyle's portrayal of an Indian modern girl through the character of adult Latika is quite different from Swarup's depiction of female characters. Neither Latika nor Nita is represented as "dutiful daughter, mother and wife" - roles that a modern girl appears to disregard³⁰. However, there are significant variations with regard to their colonial incarnations. For example – in the very first scene when we encounter Nita, she is described as wearing a "shocking-pink sari. She is dark and beautiful, with lovely kohl-lined eyes, luscious painted lips and long black hair plaited with fragrant white flowers. She wears excessive make-up and her arms and neck are bedecked with jewellery"³¹. Nevertheless, Latika does not wear any "shocking color" dress. We find her wearing the latest model of Indian tops with jeans pant. She is short haired; her make-up is never loud and very measured. She is distinguished from Indian female figures commonly seen in slums, brothels, workplaces, or at homes through her appearance and attire.

According to Barlow et. al, the newly emergent term "Asianization" is potential for explaining how an image of exoticized Asian aesthetic is portrayed as "modern"; however, it also involves complexities in demarcating aesthetic features³². Boyle's continuous effort of

³⁰ Barlow et al., 2008, p. 1.

³¹ Swarup, p. 250.

³² Barlow et al., p. 15.

producing and selling an “Asianized” image “modern” Latika also creates contradictions. For example – in the last scene of the movie we watch that Latika wears a sleeveless white top with blue jeans, which is commonly perceived as a modern girl’s attire in India, and covers her head with a yellow *dopatta* or scarf, which is usually perceived as a traditional girl’s attire. In this way the character of Latika portrays an interesting amalgamation of an Asianized modern girl who also adheres to some traditional cultures. Instead of Bollywood’s tall and fair skinned actresses, Boyle chooses an actress for the character of Latika who represents “cosmopolitan aesthetic” by owning a range of racial markers such as medium height, darker skin, stylish eyes and thick lips of an Indian woman³³. This modern girl nods her head in shyness when her lover touches her cheek but does not hesitate to kiss in a public rail station in Mumbai. According to Barlow, modern girls are “historical agents who produced and performed new appearances and subjectivities by incorporating elements from disparate locations, and to *representations* of these new appearances and subjectivities”³⁴. We find that Boyle’s Asianized modern girl produces new appearances but does not perform new significant subjectivities that can distinguish her from the “traditional” girl. So, the modern girl depicted in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* does not necessarily represent an Indian modern girl. She is an imagined modern girl whose visual representation attains the imperial project of representing an exotic oriental womanhood for First World viewers.

It is also necessary to analyze how binary and mutually exclusive categories of the “modern Western masculinity” and the “traditional Indian masculinity” are constructed in Swarup’s and Boyle’s portrayal of male characters in their novel and movie. Because of the

³³ Idea driven from Barlow et al., p. 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

broader scope that a novel allows, Swarup explores a wide variety of masculinities and sexualities in his book. Boyle does not have the scope of picking up all these multidimensional masculinities and sexualities within the two-hour-limit of his movie. He incorporates only a few selective male characters. Nevertheless, the motivation behind his selection of male figures requires critical scrutiny in order to unpack his imperial project. An examination of colonial masculinity, a phrase coined by Sinha, portrayed in *Slumdog Millionaire* reveals how intersecting ideologies of race and sexuality shape multiple axes of domination and subordination³⁵. Boyle's male characters sharply contrast images of Bollywood male heroes as hypermasculine, strong and martial men. The colonial project of Boyle effeminizes them. They are not muscular and winner; and they do not always get applause from viewers.

Procida articulates that gun served as an instrument of British conquest and dominance and as a symbol of Western mastery over the colonized other during the British colonial period in India³⁶. In Swarup's depiction Thomas stole a gun from one of his customers in Jimmy's Bar and used it to kill a robber. However, Boyle seizes the ownership of the gun from his lead male character Jamal and handles it to Salim. Drawing on Procida's articulation, it can be argued that this simple but significant incident sustains the colonial mastery over the colonized subject and adequately effeminates its character. It is Salim who is associated with hypermasculine activities such as murder, rape, vindication, deployment of physical force or involvement with underground leaders in the movie. On the other hand, Jamal is portrayed as a controlled, emotional and passionate person who does not watch breasts of a girl even if he is offered the chance (whereas Thomas in *Q and A* has sex when he is offered it from Nita), never forgets a girl

³⁵ Idea driven from Sinha, 1995, p. 11.

³⁶ Procida, 2001, p. 456.

whom he met in his childhood, and waits for her for years after years until he meets her again (whereas Thomas meets Nita at the age of seventeen and seems to be practically less passionate about her). In these ways Boyle romanticizes his construction of neo-colonial masculinity and creates an imagined Indian man accordingly who is very appealing to Western viewers for his exotic poverty, helplessness and passionate love for a sex worker.

Boyle exposes an overtly sexual atmosphere of the Indian society in *Slumdog Millionaire*. For example – Boyle’s kaleidoscopic colourful shots portray an Indian brothel where male customers are roaming around in search of sexy girls, girls are presenting themselves to customers in erotic manners, customers are having sex in small congested booths, and young kids of sex workers are moving around. Again, the moment, when Salim forces his brother Jamal to leave Latika with him alone so that he can have sex with her, surprises Western viewers about the frequency of sexual violence against adolescent girls and women in Indian households. In the later part of the movie, Latika is found as a kept woman of Javed, the underground gang leader. Javed is also found to be involved in erotic foreplay with other Indian girls. These depictions of excessive sexual indulgence promote an imperial impression of lack of manly self-control of Indian men³⁷.

Sinha points out that “in the popular colonial imagination homosexual practices were associated with the favoured ‘manly’ and ‘viriled’ native races”³⁸. The statement clarifies why homosexuality is less expected to be found in imperial discourses about colonized and effeminate men. *Slumdog Millionaire* is not an exceptional imperial creation. In Swarup’s book

³⁷ Idea driven from Sinha, p. 18.

³⁸ Sinha, p. 19.

we find three evidences of homosexual practice of men. First, the famous film actor Armaan Ali approaches Salim with a homosexual desire. Second, Mr. Gupta, the deputy warden of the Juvenile Home, regularly does have homosexual intercourse with young boys staying at that home. Third, Father John, a homosexual priest, does have intercourse with Ian and some other men. However, *Slumdog Millionaire*, which is based on heterosexual love and sexual practices, totally omits homosexual relationships that are not very uncommon in Indian lives. In this way it serves an imperial perception of less virile and less manly Indian people to its Western viewers.

Racial identities are constituted and sustained through cultural, economic and geographic assumptions imposed on Indian lives throughout *Slumdog Millionaire*. For example – the movie establishes an essentialist racialized notion of corrupted race about Indian people. From the very beginning of the movie we see that a gang of Indians abduct poor slum children and make them crippled so that they can earn more money by begging on streets. We watch intergroup conflicts in the underground world where the killer of the enemy is considered as a friend (as articulated by Javed when Salim reports him that he has killed Maman, his enemy). We find that empty bottles are filled up by tap water and then served as mineral water in restaurants; a young girl (Latika) is sophistically forced to stay with the underground gang leader against her will; and the presenter of the program “*Who Wants to be a Millionaire*” provides wrong answer to a contestant in order to mislead him so that he cannot win his deserved money. My aim is not to deny the prevalence of poverty, corruption or violence in Indian lives. I would like to argue that if these occurrences become metonymies of lives of a particular racial group, they ignore diverse constituencies of that group and eventually promote the Orientalist agenda.

Slumdog Millionaire portrays that violence is central in lives of the Indian race. This violence is primitive and voyeuristic in nature, which are obliged to horrify Western viewers about primitive features of Indian lives. For example – the movie starts with a detailed depiction of Hindu vs. Muslim riot that kills a large number of people. A man with burning flames on his body is captured by close shots. We see how a young child is chloroformed and then hot oil is poured on his eyes so that he becomes blind and can earn more money by begging on streets. We also observe inhuman and uncivilized evidences of police violence. For instance, we watch how a police violently hits a kid (Jamal) in his eye for stealing car parts and how the kid’s eye terribly swells. An American tourist couple witness this violence. Jamal tells the tourists, “You wanted to see a bit of real India? Here it is!” In reply the female tourist replies, “Well, here is a bit of real America, Son”, and gestures her husband to give Jamal a \$100 bill. I believe no other dialogue in the movie can better prove its imperial project than it.

The spatial feature of portrayed violence in *Slumdog Millionaire* is also very significant. In the movie violence takes place in different contact zones³⁹ where people from different origins come and contact with each other. For example, violence occurs in a torture cell where the cheater confronts the police, in an isolated jungle where children encounter kidnappers, or in an apartment where a girl from brothel encounters a boy who forcefully wants to have sex with her. In these ways *Slumdog Millionaire* describes imperial contact zones as dangerous spaces to Western audiences.

The philosophy of capturing imperial violence in celluloid tapes can be explained by deploying Smith’s argument that visual practices “have long served as a kind of technology of

³⁹ Pratt, p. 8.

belonging, expressing the collective will at the same time that they create it”⁴⁰. So, voyeuristic depictions in *Slumdog Millionaire* establish “social hierarchies anchored in new visual truths”⁴¹. Its cinematography not only reflects what is imagined but also reproduces what exists⁴². In these ways it creates an imagined Indian community for first world audiences, which is structured by gender, race, and class hierarchies.

Lastly, we can argue that Boyle applies two powerful but ambivalent premises in his imperial construction of Indianness in *Slumdog Millionaire*. First, he assumes a homogenous Indian community with common class, gender and race attributes. Second, he draws a straightforward boundary between the imperial India and the Western world. However, none of these premises can reflect colonial realities. It is necessary to consider, in Stoler’s terms, “internally homogenous and externally distinctive and bounded objects”⁴³ with a view to addressing multiple realities of Indian lives. *Slumdog Millionaire* fails to do so and constructs an imagined India where actors ambiguously move across imperial divide lines and identify tensions embedded in the empire-building process.

Boyle’s work actually disrupts the “interior-frontier”, a phrase coined by Stoler to refer contradicting moral predicates on the basis of which a subject affiliates her/his identities with the empire, of the Indian life⁴⁴. I believe this is a significant reason that may explain why there are so much controversies surrounding *Slumdog Millionaire*. On one hand, this movie seeks to mimic

⁴⁰ Smith; quoted in Razack, 2008: 67

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Idea driven from Smith, quoted in Razack, Ibid.

⁴³ Stoler, 2002, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 80

intangible moralities of the Indian life. On the other hand, it tries to do so while being faithful to its imperial mission. That is why whereas *Q and A* becomes successful in “retaining national identity despite location outside the national frontier and despite heterogeneity within the nation-state”⁴⁵, *Slumdog Millionaire* fails to become the voice of the Indian people. Instead, it promotes an imagined, imperial, gendered, and raced propaganda, mocks (trans)national sentiments in both obvious and sophisticated ways, and fuels immediate and long-term controversies.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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