

## Urban, Rural, or Someplace Else?

---

### The Slums of the Global South in Contemporary Film

by Christopher Garland



*District 9*, © Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

#### **Summary:**

The article analyzes three popular films which focus on different (fictive and non-fictive) slums: Bombay, Johannesburg, and Rio de Janeiro. The author explores Agamben's theory of biopolitics and his concept of "der Muselmann" concerning the living conditions of the slum dwellers. He shows how these films deal with the aspect that these groups are subject to constant reprisals.

#### **Author:**

Christopher Garland is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Florida. His current research focuses on recent literature and film that depict life in the slums of the Global South.

#### **Keywords:**

slum, biopolitics, India, Brazil, South Africa

#### **Quotation:**

Garland, Christopher (2011) "Urban, Rural, or Someplace Else? The Slums of the Global South in Contemporary Film", in: *manycinemas* 1, 38-52

**D**uring the last decade a trio of internationally popular films depicting life in some of the world's most famous slums were released. *Slumdog Millionaire* (U.K. 2008, Boyle) features Hindu/Muslim violence and the growth of Mumbai's shantytowns in the face of the city's attempts to clear the slums; *District 9* (South Africa 2009, Blomkamp) is a sci-fi alternate history that evokes the apartheid era but also calls to mind the current, ongoing violence toward non-South African blacks in South Africa; *City of God* (Brazil 2002, Meirelles) shows the rise of gun violence and the illegal drug trade in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro since the 1970s. Considering the fact that about one billion people out of the world's total population live in slums, this cinematic attention is particularly timely. Mike Davis calls attention to the fact that by 2008 for "the first time [in human history] the urban population outnumbers the rural" (2006:1). As Davis describes in some length, the greatest proportion of this rural-urban shift has centered on the *über cities* of the Global South, with massive population growth over the last twenty years occurring in the slums of Port-au-Prince, Mexico City, Lima, Manila, and many other locales, constituting what Davis calls "a watershed in human history" (ibid).

While other pieces in this collection more directly address the sphere in-between rural and urban spaces, from the outset this short essay proposes that the slum is not urban, rural, or in-between, but is "someplace else."<sup>1</sup> With large population bases that often consist of many migrants from rural areas, but located in close proximity to formal urban spaces, the informal slum space complicates the easy dichotomy of urban/rural.<sup>2</sup> Yet what I am most concerned with in this essay is how the slum is presented as an exceptional space in these films. The slum is a space associated with the superlative: It is the "worst" place, the most overpopulated, the poorest, and the most crime-ridden. The slums of these films are where drug dealers and gangs operate unimpeded by the rule of law; where the safety net of support from the state falls short; where the extent of poverty and violence is visceral and unmatched anywhere else in the formal city. Although there are many aspects to how the slums of narrative cinema are rendered as a space marked by the superlative, this essay will focus on the slum as a space where the residents are, working from concept of sovereign power acting upon the

modern individual, those subjects “who can be abandoned by the state, whose exclusion defines sovereign power” (Schueller 2009:241). In the course of short discussions about how these films render the slum and its inhabitants, the following pages will explore the connection between these films via Giorgio Agamben’s theorizing of sovereign power and bare life, while considering the possible allegorical readings evoked by the brief image or scene addressed here.

*Slumdog Millionaire* was released worldwide to critical and popular acclaim. Taking its lead from a claim made in the *News of the World*, the film’s marketing describes *Slumdog* as “the feel-good film of the decade”. Britain’s *The Sunday Times* restated this idea, adding that the film is “exactly the kind of exotic, edgy thriller that the new generation of Academy voters on both sides of the Pond absolutely adores” (Christopher 2009). In reference to the impending global economic crisis, *The Montreal Times* dubbed it a “feel-good film for a feel-bad time” (Griffin 2009). Yet not all viewers were so enthralled by the film. Shyamal Sengupta, a film professor in Mumbai, sums up the most pointed criticism of *Slumdog Millionaire* as a text created and viewed via an Orientalist lens: “It’s a white man’s imagined India. It’s not quite snake charmers, but it’s close. It’s a poverty tour” (qtd. in Magnier 2009). The “poverty tour” comes via the film’s language, which contains many highly stylized, rapid sequences showcasing the slum as a mesmerizing physical space. And while these scenes construct a visual feast of the color, overcrowding, and beguiling size of the slum, they also depict slum residents as tainted by criminality and thus subject to the violence of the state.

The protagonist of *Slumdog* is Jamal Malik (Dev Patel), a young man from the Mumbai slum of Juhu, who is one correct answer away from winning the grand prize on India’s version of the quiz show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Before the film transitions into a series of flashbacks that work as chapters to explain how Jamal came to know all the answers - a largely chronological narrative strategy - the opening scene shows him being interrogated by police because the show’s producers believe that he cheated his way through the contest. Like the flashback scenes that show the growth of Jamal and his brother Salim (Madhur Mittal) from childhood to young manhood, the opening scenes cut between what begins as an aggressive verbal

interrogation session and then transitions to full-blown torture. In this sequence, there is a matching of shots between Jamal on the show's main stage and the post-show Jamal who has been detained and is subject to increasingly violent physical abuse. A close up of Jamal's face as he is in conversation with the show's host is juxtaposed via jump-cut to a shot of Jamal's face being smacked by his captor, the dim-witted, chubby Sergeant Shrivastava (Saurabh Shukla) whose dumpy appearance is in contrast to his handsome and initially ruthless superior Police Inspector (Irrfan Khan). This matching of shots is echoed through the humiliation of Jamal on both the show's stage and in the police cell: When Jamal has his head shoved into a bucket of water to simulate drowning and thus incite him to talk, the action cuts quickly back to Jamal being mocked by the show's host for being a *chai-wallah* (tea boy) at a call center. Shortly after this rapid cut, the most heinous of the torture begins: Jamal hangs from the ceiling while the Police Inspector orders him to be non-fatally electrocuted, issuing one of the film's chilling lines: "A little electricity will loosen his tongue!"

This image of Jamal being hung from the ceiling is the first example of how the state's violence operates upon the slumdog. Jamal, who has managed to acquire a job in Mumbai's formal economy, is relentlessly tortured by those who are charged with employing the rule of law in the hope that he will provide the "right" truth. Marie-Jose Mondarín argues that "undoubtedly we must consider images in their physical reality and fictional realities; we must admit that images stand halfway between things and dreams, in a quasiworld where our bondage and liberty are perhaps at stake" (2009:22). The quasiworld of the filmic image, which evokes both physical and fictional "realities" is also open to allegorical interpretation. In his theorization of the function of allegory in narrative cinema, Phillip Wegner claims that "allegorical representations also have the capacity to condense different historical levels and conflicts [...] enabling a kind of relational thinking that is not as readily available in other forms of expression" (2009:7).<sup>3</sup> Coming four years after the revelation of numerous cases of prisoner torture by U.S. soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, this shot of Jamal hanging from the ceiling reminds us of the images of torture that were disseminated after the leaking of hundreds of digital photographs taken at Abu Ghraib military prison complex, images that were circulated worldwide.<sup>4</sup> As

Susan Sontag asserts, in “our digital hall of mirrors, the images [of prisoner torture] aren’t going away” (2004). The photographic evidence of torture by the U.S. military during its War on Terror uncannily and undeniably haunt this shot in *Slumdog*, particularly when bearing in mind how a single image - the black-hooded prisoner with arms outstretched and placed aloft in a stress position came to epitomize the whole body of these photographs - came to epitomize the various and many atrocious acts committed at Abu Ghraib. As with the aforementioned image of the dead Iraqi prisoner, the treatment of Jamal by the police speaks to torture as a practice that reaches beyond the acts committed by one being upon another. In *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, Marnia Lazreg argues that the torture situation is not summed up by a torturer and his victim thrown together in a room with a few instruments. It is “a structured environment with a texture of its own, a configuration of meanings, a logic and rationale without which physical, let alone psychic, pain is incomprehensible and ineffective” (2008:6).

Torture is not limited to the torturer’s ability to do what he wishes to the victim in a vacuum; rather, in the torturer we see the conduit of a network of power. Although Jamal’s identity as a Muslim Indian is not necessarily foregrounded in the film’s larger narrative, his “Muslimness” is not an insignificant consideration in reading this opening scene: It is part of the “configuration of meanings” of the torture situation, the very conditions for his torture. Returning to Wegner’s idea of allegorical representations in film as enabling a relational thinking for “different historical levels and conflicts,” while considering Mondarin’s notion of the “quasiworld” between the imagined and the tangible, I revisit the shot of Jamal hanging from the ceiling, his torturer engaged in electrocuting the prisoner. With the Hindu Seargeant Shukla in charge of the direct physical punishment of Jamal, this image also evokes the violence perpetuated against Muslims in India by Hindu nationalist groups - including *Shiv Sena* (Army of Shiva), a political party that has been accused of organized attacks on Muslims - while also foreshadowing a later scene, where Jamal’s mother is killed by an anti-Muslim mob rampaging through the slum.<sup>5</sup>

On another related level, the scene depicting Jamal’s torture calls to mind Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “*der Muselmann*” (the Muslim). In an at-

tempt to understand the functioning of Western sovereignty, Agamben employs the Greek ideas of *zoe*, “the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)”, and *bios*, “the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group” (1998:1). In Ancient Greece, this division between the “natural life” of *zoe* and the “qualified” and “particular” life of *bios* meant that *zoe* was relegated to the home and separated from the *polis* (state). Agamben argues that the entry of *zoe* into the *polis* is central to Western sovereignty and constitutes the “foundational event of modernity” (4). The presence of *zoe* within the *polis* allows for that bare life, which was originally far from political realm, to become indistinct from *bios*, creating a state “where man as a living being presents himself no longer as an *object* but as the *subject* of political power” (9). To provide an example of “bare life” and the extremity of the sovereign power’s biopoliticization of the human subject, Agamben turns to the actions of Nazi Germany and the Jews killed in that regime’s concentration camps. The physical space of the camp “was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation” (171). Agamben provides a distinction between the figure of bare life of the camp prisoner and the subject, drawn from Primo Levi’s writing, who is referred to as *der Muselmann*: “a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic (hence the ironic name given to him)” (185).

I refer to Agamben in length here not because I am simply equating Jamal, a young man from the slums who finds himself at the mercy of some of the state’s most extreme disciplinary power, with Jews who were imprisoned and killed in concentration camps. Rather, I employ Agamben’s theory of “bare life” because “the Muslim” (here, literally *a* Muslim) is the exemplar of the sovereign power’s ability to produce a subject who is in a state of complete abjection. At the start of *Slumdog Millionaire*, Jamal’s torture continues until he is unconscious; unable at that point to even express outrage, pain, or to give his torturers “what they want”, the rule of law has reduced him to absolute bare life. Although his torturers are momentarily stunned by Jamal’s unconscious, apathetic state, their main concern is with how this might cause further bother, with the Police Inspector exclaiming that “soon we’ll have Amnesty International here pissing their pants.” While

Jamal is eventually raised from unconsciousness, his torturers and captors have shown Jamal that he is at their mercy: Jamal's prior protestations of innocence mean little when the torture instruments diminish him to absolute bare life met with the violence of the state's power: Already a Muslim from the slum, the state's violence reduces Jamal (if only briefly) to *der Muselmann*.

A later scene in *Slumdog* also evokes this notion of the slumdog as *der Muselmann*. The third question Jamal faces on the game show concerns the Hindu God Rama and what, in popular depictions, he is holding in his hand. The film then cuts from the show's stage to one of Jamal's memories, where he is with Salim and their mother as she washes clothes in a communal bathing area. Verbally identifying those in the slums as "the Muslims", a mob crosses a railway track - one border of this slum indicating its separation from the rest of the formal city - and begins a series of vicious attacks. A number of close-ups, which are intercut with shots of the boys escaping through the narrow streets of the slum, show the beatings by the anti-Muslim mob upon the bodies of the slum's residents. If there is a space that comes close to Agamben's description of the Nazi concentration camps as a paradigm of "the most absolute biopolitical space" where "human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime," then this slum might come close (171). The Muslim protagonists' mother is clubbed to death, her body falling into the water where the slum's residents perform essential domestic duties; another resident is set afire and runs, engulfed in flames, out of the slum; when the boys reach the "safety" of a group of policemen, they are ignored and told to go away. The position of the film's slumdogs as those who have been stripped of their rights so completely that they are beyond the protection of the law is underscored in one particularly disturbing shot from this sequence. The man who was set alight by the mob runs past the police, who, like the legal residents of Mumbai, fail to react to the spectacle. Reduced to bare life, this Muslim subject is not merely the subject ignored, but is in fact the subject unseen.

As with the concentration camps, where the stripping of prisoners' rights is representative of the sovereign power's omnipotency, the slum of *Slumdog* is an exceptional space where the residents have been abandoned by

the state. Agamben argues that the camp was not an isolated example of absolute biopolitics, but rather that its existence set a historical precedent that signals the political space of modernity (174). Reiterating that I am not meaning to crudely equate the conditions of the mega-slum in a major city of the Global South with the Nazi concentration camp, Agamben's own definition becomes useful when considering how power works upon bare life without mediation (171). If the essence of the camp is the manifestation of the state of exception and the subsequent creation of a space "in which bare life and the juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction," then the virtual presence of the camp is manifested every time this kind of space materializes (174). No matter who perpetuates the crimes, what those crimes are, and against whom those crimes are committed, the violent confrontation of bare life and power may not replicate but nonetheless evokes the concentration camp. When the police ignore the ethnic cleansing of the slum by a rampaging group of club-wielding Hindus, they are acting as an extension of the sovereign power with the ability to decide on the bare life of the slum's Muslim inhabitants. In the slum of *Slumdog Millionaire*, the civil liberties and human rights that the nation-state's constitution claims apply to all Indians are lifted, or, perhaps, never present at all. At the conclusion of the scene, when Jamal and Salim escape to a hill overlooking their former home, they watch the slum being razed and the smoke drifting in the air; one cannot help but imagine if Mumbai's other residents claiming ignorance about the acts of terror committed within their own city, just as other citizens of other modern nation-states ignored atrocities committed under the auspices of other modern sovereign powers.

Keeping Agamben's theory in mind, I will now turn my attention to another recent "slum film", *District 9*, where the slum virtually evokes the presence of the camp, and also where one can read representations of bare life and sovereign power. *District 9* is a sci-fi film that tells the story of a slum on the outskirts of Johannesburg that has come to be populated by aliens. Marginalized by greater South African human society, the aliens (derogatorily referred to as "prawns") exist under the kind of dehumanizing system of surveillance, interrogation, and police brutality that allegorizes the country's apartheid past. The film's central protagonist is Wikus van der Merwe (Sharlto Copley), an Afrikaner who is hired by Multinational Unit



(MNU), a private military company that has been responsible by the South African government for evicting the aliens from District 9, the government refugee camp where they have resided for over twenty years.<sup>6</sup> During a raid on one of the aliens' residence, Wikus is exposed to a substance that begins to transform his body and DNA into that of an alien. After he literally begins transforming into an Other, Wikus is soon reduced to a state where bare life is acted upon by MNU, a military force that is unimpeded by the nation state's overarching sovereign power. Allegorically calling forth the heinous actions taken by doctors under the auspices of Nazi Germany and in the name of science, Wikus is subjected to a battery of tests. Neither human nor fully alien, he is examined through the lens of biopolitics where, as Agamben argues about the treatment and attempted extermination of European Jews, "the police and politics, eugenic motives and ideological motives, the care of health and the fight against the enemy become absolutely indistinguishable" (Agamben 1998:147). Wikus' realization of the confluence of motives in MNU's "care" causes him to flee the laboratory and seek anonymity amongst those Other, liminal subjects of this imagined South Africa: the inhabitants of District 9.

But rather than focusing on the scenes where Wikus is subject to the sovereign power's attempt to ensure South Africa's racial purity and conclusively mark Wikus' Otherness,<sup>7</sup> I turn to one of the film's main *paratexts*: the DVD cover. Gerard Genette defines the paratext as the "zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public" (1997:1). If the cover of a paperback novel constitutes a place where the public can be influenced and "sold" on a particular text, the DVD cover serves a similar purpose. The design is part of the strategy of enticing audiences to view the film, a way of selling the film's credentials (with reference to the film's director and stars) and its subject matter. Another reason to look at the DVD cover as the crucial paratext of a film is because of the audiences (and thus revenue) garnered through the



German DVD Cover *District 9*,  
©Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

release of a home-viewing option: since its December 2009 DVD release, there have been 1,826, 449 units of *District 9* DVDs sold, accounting for U.S. \$31,002,307 in sales (“The Numbers”:2010).<sup>8</sup>

The image on the front cover of the *District 9* DVD includes the large spaceship from which the aliens emerged over twenty years before hovering in the air. Behind the spaceship is a non-descript cityscape; in the mid-ground, below the spaceship, is the slum, complete with corrugated-iron shacks that make up the majority of housing in the shantytown. In the foreground, there is barbed wire fence that provides the border between the formal city and the space of the camp. In the immediate foreground, below the film’s title and the spaceship, is a sign with an encircled depiction of an alien and the words “NO HUMANS ALLOWED.” Without viewing *District 9*, the cover conveys a straightforward visual entrée to the film’s diegesis: The aliens who have emerged from the spaceship live in a fenced off camp, set apart from the rest of the human city. On viewing the film, however, the cover’s paratextual function as a location of transaction and transition takes on a different meaning. Besides from Wikus, who starts living in the camp after his “pure” humanness is defiled by exposure to the transformative alien substance, *District 9* is not only populated by aliens.

One of the film’s main subplots concerns a gang of Nigerians, led by a paraplegic named Obesnadjo (Eugene Khumbanyiwa) who believes that by eating the aliens he will be able to control their advanced weaponry, living and operating within the shantytowns of the alien refugee camp. Demonstrating again the relational facet of allegory, the Nigerians in *District 9* evoke contemporary issues of tension and violence between South Africans and immigrant others. There were a number of vicious attacks on non-South African blacks - largely Nigerians, but also Mozambicans and Zimbabweans - only a year prior to the theatrical release of *District 9*; So-called “foreigners” were identified and subsequently assaulted, with groups of black South Africans accused of murder, rape, and looting “directed at the bodies and belongings of non-South Africans” (Hassim, Kupe, and Worby 2008:3). When *District 9* allegorically reminds the audience of apartheid South Africa, it also evokes a contemporary form of violence aimed towards another Other.

One could argue that the presence of Nigerians in the District 9 camp reinforces stereotypes of Nigerians as violent and criminal Others. Not only are the Nigerians associated with the “prawn” aliens by living in their camp, they are also gangsters who are under the guidance of the psychotic Obesnadjo. Is the depiction of the Nigerians a critique via parody of the recent, murderous xenophobia in South Africa? Or is the characterization of Nigerians in the film an example of a continuation of racial tension and racist attacks in the New South Africa? As with the other films discussed in this piece, the allegorical strands of the film narrative are open to interpretation. Perhaps how one frames a reading of the film as a whole determines an interpretation of *District 9*'s Nigerians. Julian Schürholz, like many other critics, acknowledges the “thrilling similarities between events during the time of the South African apartheid regime and the [film's] story” (2010:1). Yet Schürholz also contextualizes his reading of the film, arguing *District 9* is a “mockumentary” that critiques aspects of post-apartheid South African society. For example, Schürholz identifies the fictional MNU as a commentary on the proliferation of private security forces in South Africa today. However, even if one reads *District 9* as a parody, the characterization of the film's non-South African blacks - who are eventually killed by Wikus - remains a troubling aspect of the film.

The relationship between the sovereign power of the state, race, and criminality is also a central thematic in Fernando Meirelles' *City of God*. After the film's opening sequence, which introduces us to the protagonist Rocket (Alexandre Rodrigues) who lives in a *favela* in Western Rio de Janeiro named *Cidade de Deus* (City of God), the plot moves on to a series of events that occurred a decade before. The Tender Trio is a group of robbers who target small-time local business owners. Although the film's narrative focuses on the warring between different gangs and drug dealers, the story about the Tender Trio introduces a significant facet of *City of God*: how the sovereign power has the ability to transform those who live in the *favela* - those individuals who are “expressions of a restricted, hierarchised and fragmented citizenship” (da Silva qtd. in Viera 2005:xiii) - into *hominess sacres*, lives “that may be killed without the commission of homicide” (Agamben 1998:159). After a robbery goes awry, a young gangster associated with the Tender Trio shoots a number of innocent people, and the police in-

crease their attempts to capture the group, even though they are not responsible for the murders. Sensing that they will not be safe if they remain, the trio decides to leave Cidade de Deus. Ultimately, the police, operating under the auspices of Brazil's racist military dictatorship, murder (rather than arrest) one of the trio, Shaggy, as he attempts to escape the *favela* with his girlfriend.



*City of God* (source: DVD Constantin)

While these films are grouped together here because all feature as a main location the exceptional space of the slum, in terms of genre they all differ significantly. In particular, *City of God* was marketed not as a traditional piece of fictional narrative cinema but as being “based on a true story” - Paulo Lins’ 1996 novel, *Cidade de Deus* (translated into English in 2006). There are a number of significant differences between Lins’ book and how the narrative plays out in the filmic version - including, for example, the sheer number of characters - but one of the major differences is the emphasis on the acts of violence committed against the *hominess sacri* of the slum. In the novel, the police officer who kills a number of residents in the slum is an omnipotent figure allegorically evoking the sovereign power. Harkening back to foundational allegorical texts like Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), where a character’s name literally describes his or her nature, the police officer in *City of God* (novel) is referred to only as Boss of Us All. Marking a number of the young gangsters for death, Boss of Us All operates without oversight of the rule of law, treating the *favelados* (residents of the *favela*) in a manner where, as is the case with Agamben’s definition *homi-*

*ness sacri*, “no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime” (Agamben 1998:171).

In the film version, Boss of Us All is replaced by two policemen, both of whom work as the extension of the state’s violence against the slum’s *hominess sacri*. Alongside the killing of the unarmed Shaggy, the police also chase down and shoot an innocent young man before casually framing him for a crime. As with the presence (and killing) of the drug-dealing, gangster Nigerians in *District 9* and the torture of Jamal in *Slumdog Millionaire*, the murder of Shaggy by a policeman at the start of *City of God* is a single image that evokes a relational allegorical interpretation. Shaggy’s murder speaks not only to the violence inherent in the confrontation between the state’s power and *favelados*, but also the “the military and police corruption” that continues to protect the drugs and arms trade in the *favelas* (Jabor qtd. in Viera xvii). Like *Slumdog Millionaire* and *District 9*, the state’s power in *City of God* does not provide protection; instead, it renders the slum dweller as the kind of Other to whom, in the words of Agamben, “no act could appear any longer as a crime” (171). Reading the slum resident as biopolitical subject is not to suggest that these films depict those individuals as without agency. Rather these films are connected by how the “quasiworld” of a single filmic image - evoking both physical and fictional realities - lends itself to exploring how, as Jorge Hardoy argues, the “vast majority” of slum residents in the Global South’s major cities “see the law as a tool which the wealthy and well-connected can use against them” (1989:16). Further critique of the many other “slum films” I have not mentioned here is a prime location to explore how this physical reality of the slums may play out in cinematic representations.

## References

- Agamben, Giorgio (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Christopher, James (2009) "Slumdog Millionaire Review", on *Times Online*, available at [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/film\\_reviews/article5461351.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/film_reviews/article5461351.ece) [Accessed: 13 March 2011].
- Davis, Mike (2006) *Planet of Slums*, London: Verso.
- The Numbers (2009) "District 9 DVD Sales", available at <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2009/DIST9-DVD.php> [Accessed: 17 March 2011].
- Gennette, Gérard (1997) *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Griffin, John (2009) "Slumdog Millionaire: Feel-good Film for a Feel-bad Time", on *Montreal Gazette*, available at <http://www.montrealgazette.com/entertainment/Slumdog+Millionaire+Feel+good+film+feel+time/1092031/story.html> [Accessed: 12 January 2011].
- Hassim, Shireen, Tawana Kupe, and Eric Worby (2008) *Go home or die here: violence, xenophobia and the reinvention of difference in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Hardoy, J.E. and D. Satterthwaite (1989) *Squatter Citizen: Life in the Urban Third World*, London: Earthscan.
- Lazreg, Marnia (2008) *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lins, Paulo (2006) *City of God*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Mondarin, Marie-Jose (2009) "Can Images Kill?", in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 36(1), 20-52.
- Magnier, Mark (2009) "Indians Don't Feel Good about Slumdog Millionaire", on *LA Times.com*, available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/24/world/fg-india-slumdog24> [Accessed 12 March 2011].
- Schueller, Malini (2009) "Decolonizing Global theories Today: Hardt and Negri, Agamben, Butler", in: *interventions* Vol. 11(2), 235-254.
- Schürholz, Julian (2010) *Mockumenting South Africa? Race and Segregation in District 9*, Norderstedt, Germany: GRIN Verlag.
- Sontag, Susan (2004) "Regarding the Torture of Others", on *The New York Time Magazine* 2004/05/23, visible on: *The Corner*, available at <http://www.thecorner.net/c/courses/Publish/Torture.pdf>.
- Viera, Else R.P. (2005) *City of God in Several Voices: Brazilian Social Cinema as Action*, Nottingham: CCCP.
- Wegner, Phillip E. (2009) *Life Between Two Deaths: U.S. culture in the long nineties*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

## **Filmography**

*City of God*, Brazil, 2002, dir. Fernando Meirelles, Original: *Cidade de Deus*, Brazilian Portugese.

*District 9*, South Africa, 2009, dir. Neill Blomkamp, English.

*Slumdog Millionaire*, U.K./India, 2009, dir. Danny Boyle, English and Hindi.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Hardoy asserts that it is “arbitrary and misleading” to “divide a nation into ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ - whether in terms of rural and urban population, settlements, resources or economic activities” (1989:6).
- <sup>2</sup> Although this essay discusses the representation of the slum in these particular films, I am not meaning to merely reify the notion of the slum as abject and its residents as without agency. The slum is a real place, often within the larger city, where people live in often illegally constructed housing and are tapped into a largely informal, alternative economic system. Hardoy refers to the residents of the slums as “the unnamed millions who build, organize and plan illegally [and are therefore] the most important organizers, builders and planners of Third World cities” (ibid).
- <sup>3</sup> In “It is a very rough game, almost as rough as politics”: Rugby as Visual Metaphor and the Future of the New South Africa in *Invictus*, an essay included as a chapter in *Hollywood’s Africa After 1993* (Ohio University Press, 2011), I use Wegner’s notion of allegorical as allowing a relational interpretation of the film’s final image of young South African blacks playing rugby. In the same essay, I make reference to the violence against non-South African blacks that is allegorically evoked in *District 9*, citing the excellent work by Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe, and Eric Worby.
- <sup>4</sup> These images were first made public on an April 2004 broadcast of *60 Minutes II*, a CBS show that had its final airing just over a year after breaking the Abu Ghraib torture story.
- <sup>5</sup> The single subtitle that accompanies the shot of the raucous mob reads “They’re Muslims - get them!”
- <sup>6</sup> In another nod to the apartheid era, the eponymous District 9 draws its name from District 6, a well-known shantytown in Cape Town.
- <sup>7</sup> In an forthcoming essay for *Screening the Past* (<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/>), a film journal based out of Australia, I specifically analyze these scenes.
- <sup>8</sup> In the age of High-Definition plasma screens, professional quality home sound systems, and an increasingly short duration between the release of the cinematic debut and subsequent DVD release, DVD sales now account for a major share of a film’s overall earnings. An image of the DVD cover accompanies the synopsis and public reviews on websites that sell DVDs - Amazon and Best Buy, for example - and is part of the transmission of the film’s narrative at the spot of transaction.