

## **FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS**

*Out on the Street*. Directed by **Jasmina Metwaly** and **Philip Rizk**. 2015. 71 min. Colour.

In a makeshift rooftop studio overlooking the city of Cairo, nine men gather for a workshop in which they enact ‘confrontations of everyday life, with the police and at the workplace’, as described in a synopsis on the film’s website (Outonthestreetfilm.com). *Out on the Street* opens with a trance-like segment of grainy footage of a gritty, dilapidated space that we are led to believe might be a disaffected factory. The film is a non-linear collection of scenes shot in a rooftop workshop, a series of fictionalized performances (or re-enactments of common scenarios). It also includes footage shot on a cellphone by a worker who intended to use it as evidence in a court case against his employer.

As the re-enactments seem to imply, the film is a deconstruction and re-piecing together of the struggles of working-class men in contemporary Egypt. The disappearance of jobs, the impact of neoliberal reforms, the aggressive management style of foreign investors, as well as relentless street-level police harassment (as seen in the first ‘confrontation’ that is described and simultaneously re-enacted in the film), are central themes in the film and in contemporary Egypt. To paraphrase one of the worker-actors in the film, the factory is presented as a microcosm of Egypt, a scaled-down version of issues that had been plaguing society as a whole before the 2011 revolution and that continue to do so.

Directed by Cairo-based filmmakers and writers Philip Rizk and Jasmina

Metwaly, *Out on the Street* premiered at the 2015 Berlin International Film Festival and was also included in the program of the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale that same year. In a statement that accompanied the film for its inaugural viewing at the Berlinale, the directors claimed that ‘the idea for this project started with a sense of limitation in the making of documentaries’ (Berlinale). As such, the film resists classification, toying with the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, openly displaying the theatricality with which it reconstructs real-life situations drawn from the men’s everyday struggles.

Metwaly and Rizk have a long history of engaging with social struggle in urban Egypt through visual interventions: ‘Over time we realized that filming, editing, and posting our material online or occasionally screening it in neighborhoods has its limitations in the audience that it reaches and the effect it has on people’ (Berlinale). Their stated goal with *Out on the Street* was to create a filmic artefact that could do more than turn struggle into spectacle, but also reach broader audiences as a result of its oneiric vagueness. The film does indeed present a litany of issues that touch the lives of the urban precariat worldwide. Given the global dimension of the struggles they evoke in the film, the directors hope that the lack of specificity presented by the film’s aesthetics make it translatable to labour struggles in other places.

It is the very absence — or perhaps the tantalizing but inaccessible proximity of the urban behemoth that is the city of Cairo — which seems to loom largest in the film, more so than the labour problems re-enacted by the workers. The city comes into view in brief moments, as if always

existing on the edge of the camera, glimpsed in fleeting shots of the sky above the rooftop, or as buildings visible only in outline against street lights at night. Nevertheless, it is present in almost every scene in the background hum and buzz of the street below and the honking of cars, sounds that seep into all the re-enactments as if to remind viewers that the struggles portrayed by the men are first and foremost urban struggles.

Cristiana Strava  
Leiden University, School of Middle  
Eastern studies, Holland  
[c.strava@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:c.strava@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

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*É o que guardo dele (It's what I keep from him)*. Directed by **Hugo Menezes, Iomana Rocha**. 2017. 25 min. Colour.

*It's what I keep from him* is an ethnographic movie directed by Hugo Menezes and Iomana Rocha, who worked with students from the undergraduate courses in museology and film at the Federal University at Pará, Brazil. The main subjects presented are material culture, affective relationships and the pain of the families of ten black youth murdered on the night of 4 November 2014, in Belém do Pará, the largest city in northern Brazil.

The movie does not clarify the reason for the slaughter. On the day of 4<sup>th</sup> November, a retired police officer, who was then head of a militia group, had been murdered. Known as Cabo Pet, Antônio Marco da Silva Figueiredo was killed in a flurry of 30 bullets. A few hours later, a slew of posts were issued on social networks by militia members ordering a curfew in peripheral neighbourhoods of Belém. All of the posts mentioned revenge. Before the night was over, black cars and

motorcycles were seen conducting shootings that killed ten people — the movie does not specify in which neighbourhoods.

According to the 2018 Brazilian ATLAS of Violence, murder is the leading cause of death of Brazilians between 15 and 29 years old — accounting for 50.3%. From 2006 to 2016, northern Brazil was the region with the biggest increase in murder rates. All of the Brazilian states with increases of over 80% in the murder rate were in the North or Northeast. The rise in Pará was just a bit lower: 74.4%.

The main aim of the movie was to respond to the counter-hegemonic challenge of creating a political space where the victims' families could present a different narrative about these young black males. The movie's strongest characteristic is making visible people who are usually invisible, highlighting one of the biggest social problems in Brazilian cities: urban violence against poor black people, mostly black youth. In the days after the slaughter, the popular local media presented the murdered youth as criminals and linked all of them to drug trafficking, violence and, by deduction, to the murder of the militia leader.

But a parliamentary investigative commission that was created to examine the case found that none of the ten murdered youth had any involvement with Cabo Pet's death, and not one even had a criminal record. This reveals a major problem in Brazil, the inability to make cities safe for everyone, regardless of race, gender or class.

Where did those young men die? Every day, why are so many black and poor young people killed in Brazil? *It's what I keep from him* offers us a good opportunity to consider urban violence as a

problem of social and spatial segregation. The movie depicts the political nature of the relationship between people and goods and thus reveals a highly unequal society. *It's what I keep from him* could be helpful to researchers interested in understanding how the colonization of urban Brazil operates in a contemporary era.

Although *It's what I keep from him* examines material culture and cultural heritage, it focuses on the daily urban experience of violence and exclusion in a city constructed to be unequal. The 'slaughter of Belém' addresses not only violence and crime, but the meanings of the logic of *distinction* in urban Brazil today. The ten murdered youth materialize killable bodies that reveal that the city is not a place for peaceful coexistence or encounters between the different.

Izabella Maria da Silva Medeiros  
Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil  
[bellamedeiros@gmail.com](mailto:bellamedeiros@gmail.com)