
FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

The boss. Directed by **Mehdi Balamissa**. 2019. 11 min. Colour.

In this short documentary, Mehdi Balamissa explores traditional bread-making and delivery on the streets of Safi, Morocco. The documentary centres on the everyday life of ‘the boss’, a middle-age Moroccan man whose epithet gives the short film its name.

The documentary opens with a scene of a baker placing dough into a wood-burning oven. Attention is drawn to the baker’s skilful hands. The background voices make us aware that this way of baking is traditional in the area and has become increasingly rarer to witness. The close-ups of hands, bread, and gestures of the baker make us wonder whether we are watching a documentary on craft and material culture. But that all becomes an aside as ‘the boss’ makes his abrupt appearance in the bakery, riding into the shop on his small motorcycle. The focus then shifts from the bread to the man who delivers it around the city.

Multiple cameras were used to shoot the documentary, which gives us the feeling of being closer to ‘the boss’, whose gaze is absorbed and humble. As we drive with him and his floury load through the city streets, we get a taste of the spatiality of where ‘the boss’ lives and the hard work he does to make a living. Through the movements, traffic noises, moments of silence, and the few sentences pronounced in the short film, we gain a rather poetic view of the labour conditions of this man. As good urban ethnographic accounts do, *The boss* offers insights into how the lives of individuals are entangled with their social and urban surroundings and how people navigate the city in their everyday lives.

The documentary also gives us interesting examples of the issues with which camera-

equipped ethnography is confronted: suspicions, harsh comments, questions on the reasons for filming, and resistance to being filmed. Reactions with which camera-equipped anthropologists are certainly familiar — a sort of a rite of passage, one could say — when exploring the field through a lens.

This short documentary unites urban anthropology, anthropology of craft and material studies, and visual anthropology. It provides food for thought for scholars and students alike.

However, the documentary leaves the audience with some unanswered questions on the life of ‘the boss’ and his surroundings. At the end of the 11 minutes, we wonder, for instance, who is this man and why is he called ‘the boss’? What has this bread — as it is rare — to say about changing ways of baking, which could be related to changes in taste, modes of production, accessibility of materials, and the transmission of skills? The answers to these questions could provide additional insights into the entanglements of urban, national, and global economies, ‘informal’ markets, and articulations between individual and communal lives in urban settings.

Federica Moretti

KU Leuven, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology

federica.moretti@outlook.it

Radio Riders. Directed by **Fabio Corbellini and Paola Piscitelli**. 2020. 24 min. Colour

The short film *Radio Riders* (13’, 2020) weaves together the voices of seven food delivery cyclists in Milan in 2018 who work for well-known and globally widespread delivery companies within the gig economy, such as *Glovo* and *Uber Eats*. The cyclists’ voice-overs punctuate a sequence of night-

time shots of the city evocative of the spaces and practices of urban transit (roads, delivery workers, urban transport, evening panoramic views, pedestrians). The ensemble of voices builds a narrative on the work experience of these riders in three consecutive discursive knots — Log in, Navigating, and Log out. They all point to the significance of digital applications and their mediation in the practices of delivery workers. Their voices are mediated by a sort of radio broadcast, which translates a central element of the cyclists' experience (remote communication) into a cinematographic language. Their voices overlap with scenes of a city that feels endless, threatening, frantic, and hostile all at once. This is an effective editing strategy in a film that serves as a device whereby a dispersed set of 'unheard voices of all exploited workers' (quote from the film's dedication) share the same wavelength — bringing us closer to their views on their working and living conditions.

In 'Log in' (the first section), the protagonists talk about the beginning of their careers as delivery cyclists and the conditions of access to the job — easy if compared to other jobs within the metropolitan labour structure, especially for migrants without a work permit and not fluent in Italian. A few initial requirements — a bank account and an ID at *Uber Eats* — are summed up in the 'sign and go!' motto, which also seems to express comparative advantages scrutinised by the different voices: 'I don't have a boss'; 'it's an access point for work in Italy'; 'if you want to work, you go. Otherwise, you sleep.' Flexibility and precariousness go hand in hand in a type of employment where typically marginalised groups within the labour market are standard: migrants, students and elderly people.

'Navigating' (the second section) shows how these dimensions of access and labour flexibility are modulated in the experience of the cyclists by their working conditions. The polyphony of voices reveals extended working days, long routes, tight schedules, and extreme weather conditions. Moreover, work management in these food delivery companies encourages self-exploitation (e.g., the allocation of schedules based on performance ratings). The darkest side of the link between flexibility and self-exploitation is the precariousness and insecurity.

The experiences of precariousness constitute the core of the film, especially in its last section, 'Log out'. We hear stories of work accidents, occupational diseases, sick leave and forced retirements, which exemplify how their bodies bear a pressure that is not held back by a supportive network when it finally explodes. These are workers with no social security or accident and occupational disease insurance (at least until the enactment of Law 128/2019, which made insurance mandatory for cyclists in Italy, as mentioned in the film).

As an iconic image in (and of) the contemporary metropolis, '*Radio Riders*' reflects a city that makes cyclists both necessary and helpless at the same time. This short film is an excellent example of visual anthropology combining relevant, subtle ethnography with the interesting cinematographic editing of voices. However, it somehow yields to the narrative and visual *cliché* of the dehumanised city (such as the over-emphatic use of the soundtrack). It reawakens the classic audio-visual genre of urban symphonies, in which Ruttmann, Vertov, and Richter portrayed the hidden face of progress in European cities of the interwar period, leaving an indelible mark on global

urban imaginaries. In twenty-first century Milan, linked to commercial logistics and algorithmic mediations, 'Radio Riders' transforms the symphony into a signal that is truly worth hearing.

Montserrat Cañedo and Diego Allen-Perkins

Department of Anthropology, UNED
mcanedo@fsf.uned.es

Afrosampas. Directed by **Rose Satiko, G. Hikiji and Jasper Chalcraft**. 2020. 43 min. Colour.

Afro/Sampas, a film by Rose Satiko and Jasper Chalcraft and production of the Laboratory of Image and Sound in Anthropology (LISA) at the University of São Paulo (Brazil), promotes the meeting between Brazilian and African musicians who dialogue through music in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Issues of transnational immigration and ethnographic research as an intercultural dialogue permeate the film. The relationships among different types of musicality from different African references frame the montage and approach of the research, which dialogues with the field of ethnomusicology and the issue of dynamic traditions that incorporate learning from 'the other'.

The narrative consists of musical dialogues among Yannick Delas (Congolese musician), Lenna Bahule (from Mozambique), Edoh Fiho (Togo) and Brazilian musicians Meno del Picchia, Chico Saraiva and Ari Colares in São Paulo, Brazil. Taking musical improvisation as the methodology of the encounters, the film finds in music a common language between different worlds. The sensitivity of listening to others for musical dialoguing is something that music, more than anthropology, teaches.

The encounter of different rhythms, the relationship between the Mozambique Group

in the state of Minas Gerais (Brazil) and the country of Mozambique and other musical references to Afro-Brazilian rhythms permeate the film but are not investigated in depth. Mentions of Afro-Brazilian culture reaffirm the differences between each of the national musical formations/influences.

In percussive encounters with singing, drums, tambourine and marimba, the film produces music. Lenna Bahule plays her percussive instrument with Yannick Delas' guitar, both with voice. Everyone follows each other. The Congolese musician says that there is no longer a presence of traditional popular music in large Congolese cities, but he searches the internet for images of the festivities that he knows with their songs.

The strong point of the film is exactly the ethnographic method that initiates with the different musical repertoires incorporated by the musicians. Anthropology is understood in this study as a collective creative act that proposes knowing 'others' in order to dialogue with them, having 'difference' as a condition and possibility of the encounter.

The film documents the presence of African immigrants in the city of São Paulo from the premise of the diaspora, configuring a metropolis that welcomes different traditions and enables dialogues. It is in the metropolis where music can be transformed through encounters with different elements engaged in dialogue. In this film, the city is a social space of cultural exchanges and inventions of traditions. Instead of opposing social integration/disintegration, Rose Satiko and Jasper Chalcraft's film addresses exchanges that would only be possible in the metropolis.

Ana Lúcia Ferraz

Universidade Federal Fluminense
analu01@uol.com.br