

## Film Review

- *Right now I want to scream: Police and army killings in Rio – The Brazil-Haiti connection*, directed by Cahal McLaughin and Siobhán Wills. Brazil, 2020<sup>1</sup>

The 62-minute documentary feature *Right now I want to scream* addresses the human implications of the violence perpetrated by state forces in the marginalized *favela* communities of Rio de Janeiro, the second largest city of Brazil. The film opens with two daily scenes from these communities, one showing adult women playing soccer and the other depicting girls in a ballet class. Unfortunately, these two moments are tied together by Rio's presence of structural violence: one of the women in the first scene has lost her ballet-loving daughter in an episode of violence committed by Brazilian public security forces. This opening illustrates how the documentary seeks to offer a people-centred approach to address an issue that is strongly connected with the dysfunctional public security institutions in Brazil.

*Right now I want to scream* must be considered against the background of the country's security context, in which structural violence is exacerbated by inadequate public policy approaches adopted by the state. In Brazil, the high levels of violence have structural foundations, reflecting the socio-economic inequalities that deeply affect access to basic rights by a significant portion of the country's population. In this context, violence is selective, with Black youngsters being most exposed to it. According to Human Rights Watch, Black Brazilians are almost three times more likely to be killed by police than White Brazilians. Particularly since the 1980s human rights violations have been committed by police forces against the often Black population in Rio's *favelas*. The so-called pacification processes in these communities, which have adopted the occupation of *favelas* by military forces as one of its central tenets, has clearly proven inadequate to address structural violence, as it overlooks key aspects such as egalitarian access to justice, respect of human rights, and access to decent living conditions.

In a post-screening interview, Cahal McLaughin and Siobhán Wills, the directors of *Right now I want to scream*, have stated that the aim of their film was to build a safe space for people from the *favelas* to tell their stories to an

international audience. This is an important aspect of the film, as the endemic violence in the *favelas* creates an environment of fear that inhibits its population from expressing their feelings and perspectives. The filmmakers adopted a participatory approach based on the concept of co-agency, giving the interviewees a feeling of freedom and ownership of their stories. Throughout the documentary, the interviewees share their painful experiences of living in unsafe spaces, where violent conflicts are a constant reality. These conflicts wake them up in the middle of the night, hinder their children from going to school, and often lead them to have depression and panic attacks. In addition to showing the experiences, emotions and coping strategies of the victims, the film also presents an analysis from different experts (such as human rights activists, police officers and community leaders) of the multiple social and psychological effects of the widespread military and police violence in Brazil.

As the film's subtitle suggests, the documentary connects Rio with Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. Both cities, the documentary shows, reflect the marginalization of poor communities as well as the use of force against them, while the social challenges in these contexts will not – and cannot – be solved with ammunition. Another aspect of the Haiti-Brazil connection is the deployment of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), a peacekeeping mission that took place from 2004 to 2017 and of which the military component was led by Brazil. Indeed, there is a clear overlap between the Brazilian experience in MINUSTAH and the logic of pacification adopted in the context of Rio's *favelas*. In fact, many Brazilian soldiers who served in Haiti were later deployed in Rio, literally transferring part of the peacekeeping rationale based on the use of force that was adopted to confront urban violence in Port-au-Prince to the process of pacification in the *favelas*. Interestingly, *Right now I want to scream* is a continuation of a debate raised by *It stays with you: Use of force by UN peacekeepers in Haiti* (2017), a previous film directed by McLaughlin and Wills. In this documentary, the filmmakers show the negative human implications of the use of force by MINUSTAH peacekeepers in poor Haitian communities. Ultimately, both documentaries shed light on the pernicious social effects of public safety policies and international initiatives that are underpinned by violence.

Admittedly, in *Right now I want to scream* the problematic political context of the military operations taking place in Rio's *favelas* could have been highlighted more. The Brazilian experience in MINUSTAH has paved the way for a gradual flexibilization of the legal framework to support the forceful operations by the military in the context of national public security activities in Brazil. These operations, known as Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO) missions, are carried out exclusively by express order of the Brazilian President, in cases of depletion of traditional public security forces, in serious situations of disturbance of order. However, Brazilian legislation is not clear on the circumstances to adopt GLO operations, which facilitates its use with political purposes and weakens the foundations of democracy. Unfortunately, this issue is

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only partially addressed in the documentary. The effects of violence towards the population could have been further explored, together with an analysis on the institutional variables that are at play in these mobilizations of Brazilian armed forces.

Despite this omission, *Right now I want to scream* addresses the need to replace armed-centred public policy approaches with community-centred perspectives. In so doing, the documentary offers a rich and insightful contribution to advance the debate regarding the normalization of violence towards poor, Black, and marginalized communities. Both in Brazil and in the international sphere, the lethal use of force towards these populations is frequently seen as a valid mechanism to pursue pacification – and *Right now I want to scream* is, like its predecessor *It stays with you*, both important and urgent in showing the very opposite.

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## Notes

- 1 More information on *Right now I want to scream* can be found on the website of the project: <https://itstayswithyou.com/rio/>.