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9 Night trespassing in contemporary Brazilian cinema

Unveiling (il)legalities in *Neighbouring Sounds*

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“Cities, like cats, will reveal themselves at night”, the poet Rupert Brooke famously wrote in his literary musings on the city of New York (Brooke 2013 [1916], 88). Following in Brooke’s exploration of often neglected aspects of city life that reveal themselves after dark, this chapter discusses the significance of nightscapes of the Brazilian North-Eastern city of Recife, capital city of the state of Pernambuco, in director Kleber Mendonça Filho’s film *Neighbouring Sounds* [*O som ao redor*] (2012). It contends that representations of the nocturnal city constitute a key narrative device in the film’s probing of unspoken social dynamics in their historical connections and in the slippages between legality and illegality. I will take the figure of the trespasser as entry point in this analysis, understanding trespassing in its multifaceted dimensions, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2000):

to enter unlawfully on the land of another, or on that which is the property or right of another [...]; to commit a transgression or offense [...]; to make an improper or uninvited inroad on (a person’s time, attention, patience, etc.); to intrude on or upon the rights or domain of; to encroach on, infringe.

The multidimensionality of the trespasser, as one who disregards boundaries in one way or another, mirrors the nocturnal iterations of a number of key characters in the film. In this way, as it leads the viewer under the cover of night, the film actually exposes many of the limitations of life in Brazil’s contemporary cities.

Neighbouring Sounds was awarded the FIPRESCI Prize in the Tiger competition at the Rotterdam Film Festival, “for evoking an atmosphere of paranoia and menace through a highly ambitious use of sound and cinematography” (in Marsh 2015, 140). First feature-length film of journalist and film critic and programmer Kleber Mendonça Filho, it revolves around the largely mundane daily business of the inhabitants of a non-descript middle-class street in Recife (which we know to be Mendonça Filho’s own neighbourhood of Setúbal). Much of the action takes place after dark, as middle-class inhabitants strive to protect themselves from the perceived menace of what

lurks beyond the barred doors and windows of their domestic spaces. Prominent in the storyline is elderly patriarch Seu Francisco (W. J. Solha), owner of much of the real estate in the neighbourhood, now managed by his grandson João (Gustavo Jahn), and whose power in the contemporary city stems from the family's historic wealth in the rural interior. In some of the most striking sequences of the film, the storyline takes us to the rural property that is still in family hands, contextualising contemporary urban issues against Brazil's historical rural, slave-based economy and the unfettered violence and crimes committed therein, a link that turns out to be pivotal in the film's dramatic nocturnal dénouement.

Thus, if place, understood as space "invested with meaning" (Cresswell 2004, 10), is a central concept in this discussion, I wish to focus on the significance of daily thresholds in engaging with the city after nightfall. The "after hours" city is the most evidently impacted by interpretations of law and order along class and racial fault-lines that determine who can go where and when. Indeed, in the nightscapes that Mendonça Filho's film constructs, social contradictions appear magnified and yet they are also where the contemporary landscape is most poignantly disturbed by spectral interventions of characters trespassing spatial and temporal boundaries.

Although night is a phenomenon that occurs naturally, night spaces are "socially mediated" (Williams 2008, 514). This has entailed the authorities' traditional suspicion of the night and measures taken to control it, while at the other end of the spectrum are the enhanced transgressive, "deterritorializing possibilities of darkness", with which Williams (2008, 520) understands the counter-hegemonic spatial practices that can range from transgression to all-out illegality. The tension between control and transgression, and their connection with issues of legality and illegality, will form the crux of the discussion of this chapter. To this end, I draw on Matthew Beaumont's considerations of the Nightwalker in early modern London "as dramatizing the dialectics of alienation and disalienation in modernity" (2015, 49) to discuss how images of nocturnal mobility in *Neighbouring Sounds* articulate a tension between guilt and retribution in a deeply fractured society, in which justice is uncertain.

Studies on Mendonça Filho's acclaimed film have homed in on its stark representation of contemporary urban living, imbued with a pervasive sense of fear of violence and criminality, but no study has so far acknowledged the night as a significant chronotope for understanding the vision of Brazil that the film articulates. In fact, the film actually ascribes considerable narrative weight to how night spaces are imagined and experienced, and the night acquires an increasing metaphorical dimension with the film's narrative development. As *Neighbouring Sounds* moves towards its conclusion, the threshold between day and night becomes increasingly blurred, reflecting the fuzzy boundaries between the past and the present (into which the past "trespasses"), where old crimes have gone unchallenged and where, consequently, the present becomes the stuff of nightmares. Thus, I consider how nighttime mobilities are cast

as instances of trespassing in which guilt and retribution are dramatised, to project the city as a haunting and haunted space: “simultaneously living and spectral, containing the experience of the actual moment as well as the many times that have already transpired and become silent – though not necessarily imperceptible – to the present” (Blanco and Preen 2013, 395).

City spaces

The construction of landscapes and spaces in Brazilian cinema has provided an instigating focus for scholarship, and much of the attention has been directed at the recurring *topoi* competing for the camera lens – the urban sprawls and particularly the cities’ shantytowns, or *favelas*, on the one hand, and the rural outback of North-East Brazil, known as the *sertão*, on the other. Critic Ivana Bentes’ now classic chapter “The *sertão* and the *favela* in contemporary Brazilian film” reminds us how they have “always been ‘the other side’ of modern and positivist Brazil” (Bentes 2005, 121). By his own admission, Mendonça Filho aimed “to break the mold” in bringing onto the screen a middle-class neighbourhood, while still aiming to provide an insight into pressing historical social concerns (in Draper 2016, 134). Indeed, *Neighbouring Sounds* reflects a contemporary trend of films, such as *The second mother* ([*Que horas ela volta?*], dir. Ana Muylaert, 2015); or, more recently *Loveling* ([*Benzinho*], dir. Gustavo Pizzi, 2018), that focus on middle-class neighbourhoods, dramas and class conflicts, providing a notable departure from the landscapes of the Brazilian *favelas* that had featured prominently in contemporary productions, particularly in the wake of the international acclaim of Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund’s *City of God* ([*Cidade de Deus*], 2003). Against the background of significant societal shifts in the last decades, with economic prosperity and policies aimed at redressing Brazil’s historic income and privilege inequality being implemented under the governments of former presidents Lula (2003–2010) and Rousseff (2011–2016) and the rise of approximately 30 million people into the middle-class in Brazil, these films hone in on unprecedented social repositions often played out within the domestic sphere (De Luca 2017, 204–205).¹

In the case of *Neighbouring Sounds*, the film contextualises the simmering tensions between the (high) middle classes and their domestic servants within a history of colonial relations with which contemporary social and class dynamics are impregnated (Salles 2019; Rabello 2016; Bras 2017). As Lúcia Nagib (2013) has noted, the film articulates a postcolonial dystopian vision of Brazil precisely by choosing not to showcase landscapes that might hark back to celebratory colonial visions of the “New World” and compressing much of the action into one non-descript urban street. Moreover, significant debunking of colonial imaginaries is achieved thanks to the deployment of stylistic conventions of the horror genre, deployed to convey the climate of paranoia that envelops the middle classes in their prejudices and presumptions of lower-class criminality (Draper 2016).

Rabello has argued that public spaces are notably devoid of living presence (Rabello 2015, 158). Yet, a ghostly presence occupies these city streets, which are imprinted with real, borderline or suspected infringements of the law that re-enact deep-seated associations between the night and cultures of illegality (real or imagined), as will be discussed further in the following section.

Stepping into the night

Matthew Beaumont (2015, 31) recalls how, in a 1927 essay entitled “Street Haunting”, Virginia Woolf describes the feeling of liberation upon stepping out into the city streets after dark when, she tells us, we cease to be quite ourselves, thanks to the “irresponsibility that darkness and lamplight bestow” (Woolf 2008 [1930], 177). Any excuse will do for indulging in this “greatest pleasure” of city life, as Woolf puts it in her fictionalised account of a winter’s evening ramble across London, taken with the pretext of buying a pencil (Woolf 2008 [1930], 2). Rebecca Solnit draws attention to the implications for constructions of identity that Woolf’s nighttime perambulation entails, as “an excuse to explore darkness, wandering, invention, the annihilation of identity, the enormous adventure that transpires in the mind while the body travels a quotidian course” (Solnit 2014). In Woolf’s account, the element of “irresponsibility” implied in the act of nightwalking enables a temporary release from restrictions traditionally imposed on women’s mobility, and throws into focus the possibilities as well as the challenges that come with the cover of darkness.

Picking up on the multifarious significance of the act of nightwalking captured by Woolf’s title, Beaumont, in his cultural history of nighttime in London, notes that:

if to ‘haunt’ a place, a verb derived from the French, originally meant to visit a place habitually, perhaps obsessively, then those who walk at night inhabit the city both in this older sense and in the more persistent, colloquial sense of disturbing it like a spectre.

(Beaumont 2015, 18)

The spectrality associated with the act of being out after nightfall, to which Beaumont refers, and which I will explore further in this chapter, connects to a long history of suspicion surrounding those who step into the shadows of the night. As Brian Palmer has noted, “the night has always been the time for daylight’s dispossessed” (in Beaumont 2015, 32), and the mistrust as to their toing and froing under cover of darkness has entailed being caught up, in fact, in a long history of criminalisation. Indeed, the tendency to criminalise the night and those who frequent it goes back thousands of years and is encoded in the earliest legal traditions. In the very origins of the English justice system, for example, the Statute of Winchester of 1285 criminalised the so-called “common nightwalker” who disregarded the medieval city’s curfews, and authorised the apprehension of individuals out at night who

failed to carry lanterns (who failed to make themselves visible), essentially meaning the poor (Beaumont 2015, 29 and 61).

Historical similarities are found elsewhere, including in Brazil, the focus of this essay, where, Chazkel recalls, the “inability to see a person’s face” lay at the heart of a series of draconian legal measures that in the nineteenth century, and for an uninterrupted period of 53 years from 1825 to 1878, led to the introduction of a curfew – known as *Toque do Aragão* – in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the night became a chronotope shaped by the normalisation of civil and political rights violations that in turn enabled the normalisation of police violence (Chazkel 2017). In a city like Rio de Janeiro, then the busiest slave port in the South Atlantic, 46% of whose population was made up of enslaved people, legislation controlled movement and social gatherings of specific groups, fundamentally criminalising its Afro-Brazilian population and the poor and explicitly sparing people of high profile and of perceived integrity (Chazkel 2013, 40). Studies highlight how legal history has specifically differentiated the night – when supposed crimes were deemed to warrant more severe punishments (Beaumont 2015). Repressive nighttime legislation towards particular social groups (enslaved; the poor), such as making it illegal to whistle in the streets or engage in other activity that could be interpreted as a signal, ended up normalising and legitimising repression against them at other times of day (Chazkel 2013); and similar practices were in place around that time throughout Brazil, including in Pernambuco (Maia 1996), where Mendonça Filho’s film is set.

Echoes of this historical normalisation of racial and class criminalisation through nighttime policing and law enforcement still reverberate today. For instance, despite ongoing controversy and attempts to do away with it, article 59 of the Penal Contravention Law, the so-called “*Lei da Vadiagem*” [Law of Vagrancy],² originally instituted in 1941 during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, criminalises the most disenfranchised sections of society to this day. It determines a possible sentence of between two weeks and three months’ imprisonment for anyone found to “indulge in idleness, despite being fit to work, without having enough means to ensure their subsistence, or found to provide for their subsistence by way of an illicit occupation”.³

The recent polemic surrounding curfews for under 18-year-olds in some municipalities in Brazil, widely covered in the press, testifies to the perceived societal impact of nighttime mobilities – something that is also key to the contemporary Brazilian city featured in *Neighbouring Sounds*.⁴ Indeed, what happens there while the city “sleeps” provides a foray into the complex web of social relations that determine who can be where and when and how guilt and responsibility are apportioned.

Nocturnal intrusions

The film’s opening, made up of a montage of old black and white photographs set in Brazil’s rural interior, accompanied by the sounds of country wildlife, then a tractor and eventually drum beats, initially seems disjointed from the polished, sleek survey of contemporary urban life that follows. Yet, it

provides some clues to the historical context that underpins many of the urban relationships and tensions we will witness later on in the film and that have their roots in Brazil's history of violence on the land. Together with the still photo montage, a series of vignettes set in present-day Recife form a preamble to the subsequent three-part narrative (all revolving around the theme of private security) in which contemporary living comes under scrutiny.

Suspicion, paranoia, fear of violence, frustration, surveillance and isolation scar the daily existence of those living behind barred windows in the high-rise contemporary city. Extreme low and high-angle shots in the opening vignettes seem to critique the vertiginously swift verticalisation of city living, concurrently suggesting the film's deliberate defamiliarisation of this otherwise mundane urban setting. The car crash that takes place in this same quiet and unassuming neighbourhood, in the closing vignette, thus becomes the metaphor for the film's questioning of "normality". A subsequent cut to a nighttime view of the same street signals the start of the narrative proper, with part I entitled "Guard Dogs".

Following an establishing shot of the deserted nighttime street, we are taken to the home of Bia (Maève Jinkings), a frustrated middle-class housewife who is kept awake by the neighbour's barking guard dog. Bia is sitting alone at the kitchen table, when her son appears to fetch a glass of water and suggests she take her usual sleeping tablets. This brief exchange and her subsequent ploy to disguise a sleeping pill into a piece of meat thrown over the boundary wall establishes the night as a time of insomnia, of anxiety and of scheming, when the barriers between private and public spaces, inside and out appear most porous. Mendonça Filho's use of the horror aesthetic as he films Bia plunging the knife into the piece of meat she will feed to the dog suggests the intensity of her anger towards the uncontrollable "nuisance" that lies beyond the barred windows but cannot be kept out. Borrowing from the crime/horror genre aesthetic in portraying Bia also serves to complexify the legal status of her actions, for which she will never be duly reprimanded.

The allusion to the hapless canine implied in the subtitle "Guard Dogs" is clear, but a connection is also implied with the group of security guards, led by Clodoaldo (Irândir Santos), who later on in the film set up business promising nighttime security to a neighbourhood feeling increasingly under siege from perceived external dangers. Poignantly, the opening night scene establishes the paradox implicit throughout the film that those tasked with providing protection are at once the underdog and a perceived trespassing menace. It also sets the tone for the film's exploration of the unspoken violence and impunity that run along the racial and class fault-lines.

Thus, in the "morning after" sequence, the scene shifts to a high-rise apartment, home to João, the oldest grandson of the local real estate magnate, Seu Francisco, and serves to underline exactly where criminality is actually to be found. In the scene that introduces the contemporary high-rise setting, we see the family's long-serving black maid, Maria (Mauricéia Conceição), entering by the back door of the apartment, the so-called "área

de serviço” [i.e. the servants quarters] – in traditional Brazilian home layout this includes the kitchen and laundry areas, the maid’s miniscule bedroom and bathroom. The camera captures Maria hovering behind the partition wall separating the kitchen from the plush sitting room, as João and his new girlfriend, Sofia (Irma Brown), scuttle naked into the bedroom, having spent the night partying. Maria is clearly aware of the unspoken demarcation of spaces within the home, and the fact that her work-shift begins as her wealthy boss recovers from a night of indulgence is also subtly made.⁵ A visual rhyme seems to comment on the vacuous living enjoyed by the affluent classes when a play on scale is made between the window view of high-rise buildings outside and the clutter of empty bottles scattered on the table.

At breakfast, talk soon turns to overnight events and mention of criminal activity is soon to follow. Yet, crucially, the only crime of which there is news as day breaks is one committed by a member of the upper class, Dinho (Yuri Holanda), the small-time criminal grandson of Seu Francisco, and João’s cousin. Suspicion is rife amongst the street inhabitants that Dinho is the person responsible for breaking into Sofia’s car and making off with her car radio, but a wall of silence falls whenever witnesses are asked to come forward, ensuring that the impunity he enjoys remains unthreatened. A police patrol vehicle is filmed driving by just as the night porters uneasily refuse to incriminate Dinho, underlining just who is above the law. A counterpoint to Dinho is provided by the character of Sidiclei (Alex Britto), the maid Maria’s nephew, who struggles to make ends meet despite working gruelling night shifts as cashier at a local supermarket.

Notwithstanding the lack of evidence of widespread nighttime lawlessness and despite actual evidence of criminality perpetrated by the most comfortably off in the neighbourhood, a team of nighttime security men is contracted to keep watch from 7 P.M. Part II, entitled “Night Guards”, opens with Bia’s family sitting round the dinner table commenting on the new private security firm recently contracted to keep them safe. The howling of the next-door guard dog we hear intruding into the family’s conversation works as a haunting reminder of Bia’s guilt from the earlier sleepless nighttime scene as well as of the impossibility of shutting the outside world out completely from the comfort of her home.

If part I introduces the motif of the night as chronotope of magnified social inequality and misplaced criminalisation of the poor, perceived as “strangers” and “inner enemies” (Simmel 1908), part II of the film is almost entirely set at night and endows the motif with a historical dimension. Two scenes portraying instances of nightwalking (or we could define them trespassing) happening under the watch of the new security guards are particularly revealing of this, and I will discuss them in some detail.

The first of these scenes is again focused on Bia, who is again unable to sleep, this time disturbed by her husband’s snoring. She gets up, and the camera follows her up the stairs as she makes her way to the apartment’s terrace overlooking the city’s night skyline. A dissolve transition between shots

creates a ghostly atmosphere of insomnia. As she leans onto the parapet, the extra diegetic sound of a helicopter hovering above suggests her character is deep in thought and disconnected from her surroundings. This is the same disturbing sound commentary that is introduced in the opening scene of the film as the camera captures a man working on metal bars protecting a window overlooking a children's playground – suggesting her thoughts are drawn to issues of security. It is as she looks distractedly out into the night that the camera suddenly captures a dark-skinned trespasser crawling along the rooftop of the building opposite. Always on all fours, something quite animal-like is invoked by the moving silhouette slithering along the rooftop. His features are not clearly distinguishable under the cover of darkness, but the muscular figure we see with a bare torso and light-coloured shorts harks back to stereotypical images of black male bodies from classic colonial iconography. The abrupt interruption of the sound commentary and the fact that we are not given a follow-up glimpse into the wanderings of the intruder underscores the possibility of it being a figment of the imagination (or fears) rather than a real intruder.

This scene cuts to Seu Francisco, whom we see leave his heavily guarded high-rise apartment block to take a dip in the sea. Elliptical editing of his movements from leaving the house to the beach suggests his freedom to elude surveillance and his real power to negotiate geographical and temporal boundaries. A dissolve transition capturing Seu Francisco's figure heading down the street adds a spectral quality to his characterisation. The camera is careful to pick up the sign warning against swimming due to the shark-infested waters, something that Seu Francisco ignores in his assertion of seemingly unquestioned power and disregard for others' authority. The foundational sea repeatedly referenced and critiqued in Brazilian cinema (Nagib 2007) appears to be referenced here, too, represented as a space at the city's edge where historic power and rigid social structures are reaffirmed in present-day Brazil through the character of Seu Francisco, who appears to have metaphorical ownership of it. If, as Beaumont states, "to walk at night is to yield to, or embrace, an outlaw status" (Beaumont 2013, 120), Seu Francisco's purposeful city nightwalk is rather a reassertion of his perceived position above the law. The confrontation that takes place that same night between the similarly disreputable characters of Clodoaldo and Dinho, when the latter warns the former that the road belongs to "gente grande" [important people], reinforces the point that the right to occupy nocturnal city spaces is demarcated along historical class lines. The fact that Bia is only visualised inside the domestic space after dark adds a gender dimension to how disjunctions in the right to the nocturnal city are portrayed. The cover of darkness does not provide scope for a geography of resistance, that is "to create alternative spatialities" (Pile and Keith 1997, 3) to those shaped by the dominant white, patriarchal order.

The "aesthetic of layers", to which Marsh (2015, 141) refers, conveyed through recurring shots of images of confinement such as barred windows

and gates, also translates on a narrative level to “coexisting narrative lines” that suggest the proximity and threat of the other (Marsh 2015, 141). Yet, these layers are also evoked metaphorically in the spectrality of past violence glimpsed in the contemporary streets of Recife.

Temporal trespassing

The spectrality of the night introduced in part II is further developed in part III, entitled “Body Guards”, which entails the final showdown for Seu Francisco. As the film moves towards its conclusion, the transitions between daytime and nighttime scenes become more fluid, edging towards the final nocturnal scenes, where the present and the past violently collide. Contributing to this motif is the tension created through two nightmare scenes that produce an atmosphere of fractured temporality.

The first involves the nightmare experienced by Bia’s daughter, Fernanda (Clara de Oliveira), in which she dreams of her home being invaded by scores of anonymous black male figures. Visions of these trespassers jumping over the garden wall convey her terror alongside images of their black silhouettes crowded into a narrow, cell-like space – which, as Marsh suggests “exposes the psychosocial process that naturalises the criminalisation of the young, black, male body” (2015, 155). Thus, in part III, the fear of the night (and of what lurks in the darkness) intensifies to terrifying nightmares, while daytime coincides with the disturbed sleep of the privileged while others work. In fact, in one of the film’s most striking scenes, João recalls a trip to his grandfather’s *fazenda* [farm] and visualises himself under a blood-red waterfall. The connection between historic racial violence and exploitation on the land and the reality of contemporary urban Brazil is made when the shot of bloodied waters cuts to João lying in bed back in his Recife flat. It is broad daylight, and he wakes up and opens his eyes to see the maid’s young black granddaughter laughing at him as she recites the well-known nursery rhyme that is actually intended to frighten children into submission – “Boi da cara preta” [Bull with the black face], which is ironically goading him to go to sleep. The child’s laughter implies that sleep will elude him, and that his family’s past will haunt him into a living nightmare.⁶

The night as metaphor for fractured temporalities, of spectral incursions where past and present collide, chrystallises in the penultimate scene of the film. Here, we learn that one of Seu Francisco’s loyal henchmen, Reginaldo, who had given him protection and guarded his interests in the interior over many years, has been killed. Francisco suspects this to be a revenge killing and attempts to contact Clodoaldo to discuss concerns about this, yet Clodoaldo does not return his calls. They finally meet in the street just as Seu Francisco is returning home from a nighttime family birthday close by, when he summons Clodoaldo back to his house with a view (as we will soon discover) to discuss a special request regarding his personal protection. Clodoaldo turns up at Seu Francisco’s accompanied by his brother Claudio (Sebastião Formiga),

who arrives uninvited. Tension builds as Clodoaldo and Claudio reveal to Seu Francisco that they were in fact implicated in Reginaldo's murder, as they concurrently reveal their true identity to him: they are the sons of Seu Antônio, who, Clodoaldo reminds Seu Francisco, was murdered under his orders by his own henchman Reginaldo over a land dispute – “por causa de uma cerca” [because of a boundary fence].

Clodoaldo refreshes a clearly oblivious Seu Francisco's memory of the date of the assassination – it was the year of 1984, coinciding with Brazil's gradual (as we know now, all too fragile) emergence into democratic rule that would end 21 years of dictatorship. This provides a poignant comment on the limitations of Brazil's difficult transition to democratic rule and the shortfalls in attempts to address past injustice.

The night here is when the nightwalker as trespasser, that is Clodoaldo, is able to transpose the boundary of Seu Francisco's safe house (under false pretences). As Marsh (2015) points out, the film carefully elides any visual reference to Seu Francisco's murder by the two body guards in his own home, but this is, however, implied through the sound of popping fireworks being let off outside – a sound commentary and metaphor for the invisibility of violence that is, nonetheless, pervasive.

According to Palmer:

The night can be grasped historically as both a figment of power's imaginative fears, a dark designation illuminating the historical traumas of hegemonic regimes, and as an actual place and space in which the ubiquitous contestations of everyday life were fought out on a terrain that afforded slightly more opportunity for engagement by the oppressed and the exploited.

(Palmer 2000, 454)

If, as Williams argues, the night has traditionally provided more opportunities for deterritorialisation, that “in everyday practices ... in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas” (Williams 2008, 167), against oppression and injustice, Mendonça Filho's film deliberately focuses on the limitations that even the potentiality of darkness affords.

Thus, to conclude, in *Neighbouring Sounds*, the cover of darkness allows old scores to be settled, but the film also exposes the limitations of dealings not carried out “às claras” – in the open – given that we do not see Seu Francisco's actual murder, nor him being brought to justice for having blood on his hands. In this sense, the figure of the nocturnal trespasser that is implied to have the upper hand in the end dramatises the interplay of guilt and retribution against the background of a history of slavery and authoritarian rule in Brazil, still unresolved.

In dramatising this interplay, the city at night becomes a key chronotope that exposes the fragile foundations of law and order and the slippages between legality and illegality that come into play behind the veneer of

respectability of “normals”, everyday life. Recalling Rupert Brooke’s nocturnal city, Mendonça Filho’s home city of Recife seems indeed to reveal itself most eloquently at night.

In actual and metaphorical terms, the night is a chronotope of potential transgression, but where justice is rarely to be found. As the nightmare scenes that accentuate the film’s closing section suggest, the night crystallises most powerfully the experience of spatial and temporal trespassing: seen either in the anger directed at, and fear of, those traditionally denied their rightful place in society or in the past that returns to haunt the present. The camera itself, whose point of view we share, often positions itself as an unnoticed intruder, spying onto the life of a seemingly unassuming urban street. In so doing, it invites us to peer under the cover of darkness and, thus, into the murky boundary between legality and illegality that has shaped the past, shapes the present and points to an uncertain future.

Notes

- 1 On this issue, see also Marsh, Leslie, and Hongmei Li, *The Middle Class in Emerging Societies: Consumers, Lifestyles and Markets*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015.
- 2 All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.
- 3 “Entregar-se alguém habitualmente à ociosidade, sendo válido para o trabalho, sem ter renda que lhe assegure meios bastantes de subsistência, ou prover à própria subsistência mediante ocupação ilícita.” See www.jusbrasil.com.br/topicos/11736424/artigo-59-do-decreto-lei-n-3688-de-03-de-outubro-de-1941. A Member of Parliament for the Workers Party attempted to revoke the legislation in 2004, but this motion was shelved by Senate in 2019. See Brazilian Chamber of Deputies records at www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=273651.
- 4 For coverage of the issue of curfew for unaccompanied minors, see, for example, the 2009 *Correio Braziliense* editorial “Toque de recolher para menores”, www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/brasil/2009/08/20/interna-brasil,136513/toque-de-recolher-para-menores.shtml.
- 5 The fact that the second maid we meet later in the film (we are told Maria is about to retire) shares the same moniker with the earlier character emphasizes the continuity of this domestic setup in Brazilian society. The second, younger maid (now a *diarista*, i.e. employed on a daily basis and no longer a full-time domestic servant for a single household) is notably more laconic and seemingly more resentful of her marginal role within the home, suggesting gradual change in domestic labour dynamics and possibly the improved expectations for young black Brazilian women that labour, social policies being developed at the time facilitated. This reflects the film’s structure of disjunctures and continuities.
- 6 The nursery rhyme belongs to Brazilian folklore and it references a legendary black-faced bull, invoked to capture a terrified child. The racial prejudice implied in the rhyme is evident, as these lines suggest: “Boi, boi, boi / boi da cara preta / pega essa menina / que tem medo de careta [...] Pega esse menino / que não gosta de dormir” [Bull, bull, bull / bull of the black face / catch this girl / who is frightened of your

scary face [...] Catch this boy / who does not like to sleep]. The fact that the rhyme is sung to João by a black child suggests this is a time of postcolonial reckoning, a nightmare from which he (and the class he represents) cannot easily escape until justice has rightfully taken its course.

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