



GATE #5
(Al-Hawd Al-Khamis)



A fascinating look at the lives of those working at one of Beirut's busy ports (Rolling Stone Middle East)

CONTENT

They were young, loved adventures and had choices. In the 1960s and 70s thousands of young Lebanese left their villages and searched for a new life in the city as countless like-minded people around the globe. The port of Beirut, the city's economic lung and central urban district, provided work for truck drivers - a job that stressed masculinity and became a lifestyle. The income allowed the young men to participate in the vibrant urban life, to enjoy their time at the always busy Burj Square with its many cinemas and restaurants as well as to start families.

During the years of the civil war (1975-90) the drivers were needed to maintain the supply of food, goods, and sometime weapons between the divided sectors of country. Some were humble, others were heroic, yet all were adventuresomeness and felt free.

After the war ended the once popular Burj Square, the city's centre, was demolished, privatized and rebuild for the affluent. Lebanese economy was reorganized, thus globalized. Today fancy restaurants in the new downtown charge in Dollar and sometimes in Euro.

The truck drivers' universe shrunk to the port where they offer their skills as day laborers now. Yet mostly they kill time and take long journeys in memory. One of them, Najm El Habre, is too sick to join his friends. He found a different way to carry on.

CREDITS

Simon El Habre, Lebanon/UAE 2011,
84 min, color, Arabic with English subtitles

Director Simon El Habre | Producer Georges Schoucair - About Productions | Co-Producers Paul Scherzer - Six Island Productions; Irit Neidhardt ꞑ mec film | Line Producers Abla Khoury, Lara Chekerdjian - Ginger Beirut Productions, Sabine Choucair | Assistant Producer Myriam Sassine | Production Supervisor Christian Eid | Assistant Director Jowe Harfouche | Cinematographer Bassem Fayad | Sound Operator Chadi Roukoz | Editor Carine Doumit | Assistant Editor Gilbert Cherfane | Sound Design & Mixing Emile Aouad





FILM-MAKER

Film-maker Simon El Habre

Born in Beirut in 1975, he obtained his Diploma in Audiovisual Directing from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) in 1998 and graduated from Femis (Paris) in Film and Video Editing in 2000. Since 2001, he has been teaching film and video editing and documentary film-making at ALBA and at Lebanese University. He is also a member of the cultural association for the development of Arab cinema, Beirut DC.

Simon El Habre has built a strong reputation in Lebanon and the Middle East as an editor and worked, among others, with Ghassan Salhab on his video Posthumus (2007) and his documentary 1958 (2009). He has directed a large number of commercials and TV reports. In 2008, he wrote, produced and directed a full-length documentary, The One Man Village.

The movie was highly acclaimed by festivals, press and audiences internationally. It was screened at more than 30 festivals, including Berlinale, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Jeonju International Film Festival and Vision du Réel.

The film also received the Best International Feature award at HotDocs 2009 and the Special Jury Award at the Dubai International Film Festival 2008.



FILMOGRAPHY

- 2011 Gate #5, Regie, Dokumentarfilm (Libanon, 83 min)
- 2011 Planet of Snail, Schnitt, Dokumentarfilm (Korea, 70 min), Bester Langfilm, IDFA
- 2010 Stray Bullet, Schnitt, Spielfilm (Libanon, 75 min)
- 2009 Once Again, Schnitt, Spielfilm (Syrien, 96 min)
1958, Schnitt, Dokumentarfilm (Libanon, 66 min)
- 2008 The One Man Village, Regie/Schnitt, Dokumentarfilm (86 min)
- 2007 Posthumus, Schnitt, Experimentalfilm (Libanon, 28 min)
- 2005 Abu Khalil, Schnitt, Dokumentarfilm (Palästina, 90 min)

FESTIVALS

- Dubai International Film Festival
- Arab Film Festival Tuebingen
- Monaco Charity Film Festival
- Edinburgh International Film Festival
- Tous Ecran Beirut



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I wanted to make a film about the port, but here I was face to face with my father.

Weakened by disease, he wanders the city streets in his taxi, driving customers from one region to another, from one suburb to another, from one end of Beirut to another. He sometimes takes the sea route which runs alongside the port and bypasses it. But he almost never ventures into this space with which he had an adversarial relationship back from the 1970s till the 1990s. Yet it is those years that fascinate me. Their violence, but also the complexity of the stories generated from these decades. It is those years that I want to rebuild through the testimonies of the truck drivers.

Their stories allow us to retrace a part of the history of the Beirut and the country. A physical, almost organic, connection binds the drivers to the port, whose rhythm forces theirs.

The film is also the reflection of my own nostalgia, and a fascination with this line of work that I developed when my father used to take me for long rides across the country in his truck. A truck is not only a large instrument of economic development, but also a wide playground for a child's imagination. By the time I was a teenager, I wanted to become a truck driver too. I wanted to stay on the road, to move from one place to another, to be neither entirely here nor entirely there, to hit the road every day and come back again.

However, by the 1990s, I had begun to witness the impact of the change in the economic system on the financial status of my father. The privatization of the majority of the port turned it into one giant company where drivers, crushed by the capitalist system, had a hard time integrating themselves. Even the trucks, which have given way to giant cranes, have lost much of their virility. Yet these men, who are now between 50 and 60 years of age, still wake up at dawn every day hoping to get their share of the pie, a delivery that will allow them to resist the invasion of a place that used to be a source of considerable income for them.

My father fell ill in the late 1990s and decided to leave the business for good after he was forced to sell his trucks and his last remaining one was stolen. I watch him today; his long days driving his taxi are interrupted by regular visits to the hospital. His determination inspires me. I tell myself that my father carries in him bits of the history of this country, bits of its cracks and fissures. He is sort of a History Bearer.



SOCIOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

There is no official historiography in Lebanon, each of the many confessions has an own narrative, if at all. Whilst from the outside the sectarian dissection of the country causes curiosity and is often regarded as interesting and authentic Lebanese, living without a common definition of the past causes permanent tension, fear and eruption of violence.

The lack of writing history includes day to day life. The general amnesty that was declared with the ending of the civil war in 1990 caused a general silence about the past.

Most young people in Lebanon have no idea about how even day to day life was like in the war and pre-war time. Over the past years a number of artists and intellectuals started collecting stories and reflecting the war-torn past of their country on the level of national grounds, thus inclusive for all parts of the society.

The work of Simon El Habre is part of this informal movement that reflecting the universal aspects of the local stories without denying the realities on the Lebanese grounds.



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