

Underdown

“Underdown” is a documentary following three stories of people living in Beirut. All stories show the impact of poverty on the daily life and self-perception of the portrait persons.

The documentary starts with a family living in a suburban area of Beirut. A young man, living with his aunt and grandmother since his mother died, explains that they are the only family in the neighborhood without a decent housing. The family struggles to afford a surgery for his grandma that suffers from a glaucoma and is almost blind. As a result of their situation his family turns to heavy drinking as a coping mechanism.

The second person is a Palestinian taxi driver. After fleeing the massacre in the refugee camp in Tel el-Zaatar he lived on the street in Beirut. Now he works as a taxi driver in a car he rented and in which he sleeps during the night. During the documentary he repeatedly points out how he is happy and in peace with himself. On the other hand he bursts out in anger every time something does not go the way he intended it. He strongly insults most passengers in his taxi as well as the owners of the shops he regularly visits to buy alcohol. “Chaos fits me” he points out, because in this chaotic city the police won’t find out that he never drives sober.

The third group are three children, living on the street in Beirut. Mohammad, the youngest of them, fled the place he was living at with his family after they found out he was smoking. The other two, a couple, try to take a little care of him which he strongly rejects.

The connection between the three groups is the complete absence of any structure helping those that the competitive society of Beirut has failed. The documentary displays how misery produces a consciousness of defeat, leaving people with the idea that nothing is to be expected from the future. It furthermore shows, how the lack of perspective turns the frustration inwards. The homeless children start cutting themselves, the family engages in binge drinking and the taxi driver is disgusted with himself to a point that he does not meet his family that lives in Beirut as well and tells his girlfriend that he would shoot himself would she ever see him sleeping on the street.

The strength of the documentation is that people speak for themselves. The personal stories and anecdotes as well as the unfiltered perspective of the people on themselves allows the documentation to present the hardship of the poorest people of Beirut without decaying into **misery porn**. Additionally, the documentary does not try to whitewash the stories for the sake of a more pleasant experience. It provides an honest and emotional insight into the day to day life of people that are strongly connected to the rest of the city but in whose life no one seems to be too interested.

“Underdown” provides honest, emotional and intimate insights into a life that is strongly under-represented and gives a voice to people that are usually just object, not a subject in documentaries.