

# Introduction

Women have made their presence felt in cinema since the silent era, but the twenty-first century in Brazil represents a new era of greater prominence in all sectors of the national industry. Scholarship, however, has lagged behind this effervescence of artistic activity. The primary goal of this anthology is to start to fill that lacuna, casting a wide net in this first attempt in the English language to produce a collection of scholarship and interviews wholly focused on Brazilian women filmmakers and woman-centered film narratives. In addition to a consideration of the labor of women in the industry and the rich film oeuvres that women filmmakers have produced in recent decades, we propose the term *woman-centered cinema*. Woman-centered cinema is filmmaking that places diverse women protagonists at center stage and pays greater attention to common concerns of women in public and private life in Brazil. Often, though not always, woman-centered filmmaking takes a more critical or political, feminist stance on the unique situation of women. Their common experiences and struggles are explored, while films focusing on the intersections of women's gender with other aspects of their identities, such as race, class, sexuality, or political ideology, allow for an understanding of womanhood as an internally diverse category.

A normative approach to the category of woman would thus obscure more than it reveals, since we would not be considering in its totality the production of women's filmmaking in the current century nor what trajectories may lie ahead. Instead, we understand that universality, and by extension the universal category of woman, "has important and strategic use [in that] the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met"

(Butler 1999). Judith Butler posits this view of universality as one that “is defined as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation.” This framework of the universal category of woman allows room for the diversity and evolution of womanhood as it is actually represented in the work of Brazilian filmmakers, acknowledging that the category is changing and cannot be fully captured in one anthology. However, we see the scholarship and interviews gathered here as an important beginning to such a project, exploring important connections between the film form and production of recent women’s cinema in Brazil and the possible futures that may be born out of such connections.

Brazilian women’s filmmaking demonstrates considerable psychological depths, including the “different voice,” “different psychology,” and “different experience of love, work and the family” of women with respect to the work of many male filmmakers (French 2018, 16). According to Kim Munro, women’s filmmaking in general often features autobiographical narratives, which can serve a psychoanalytic function, or what Michael Renov calls “techno-analysis” (Munro 2018, 73). This characterization is confirmed by Kerreen Ely-Harper (2018), who notes that working through one’s own personal trauma, and/or that inherited through the family from previous generations, is a common narrative thread in women’s cinema. In woman-centered cinema in Brazil, in addition to explorations of personal psychology and the interpersonal relationships of a diverse array of women characters and subjects, one can also find a working-through of national trauma, from that experienced by the victims of the 1964–1985 military regime to the trauma of economic crisis and national political conflict and turmoil in recent years. Indeed, personal, intimate, and/or domestic narratives may well be intertwined with or reveal new aspects of national or international ones. This dialectic between the individual, private level and the national, public level is akin to that described by Deborah Shaw (2017, 147) in the work of Argentine director Lucrecia Martel, of whom she writes “[Martel] reveals (trans)national and trans-historical narratives and the power dynamics on which they rest through the micropolitics found in domestic spaces.” Crucial issues impacting women, such as gendered violence, social class relations, employment, and intersections of race and gender experienced at the local level and in quotidian life but often linked with (inter)national struggles of feminism, are featured in many of the films analyzed in the pages that follow.

Related to some of these unique approaches to filmmaking of women in Brazil and elsewhere, and over the course of the scholarly conversations

and filmmaker interviews involved in the editing of this volume, we discovered four general frameworks of cinematic expression and production that run throughout all chapters of this book to a greater or lesser degree. These frameworks, we contend, should provide fruitful avenues for further research on Brazilian women's filmmaking. First, we found attempts to interweave diverse voices in a filmmaking community characterized by collaboration, rather than the traditional approach in male-dominated cinema to focus on a master narrative and the vision of a dominant auteur figure. Second, we found common concerns about state film policy, including the need for policymakers and state officials to continue support for women filmmakers, as well as critical assessments of the current crisis in state film policy in Brazil, the latter often accompanied by cogent considerations of alternative sources of support for production and distribution, from state and municipal governments to new or established online streaming platforms. Third, we found a common emphasis on the importance of the so-called *lugar de fala*, or place of speaking, applied to both filmmakers themselves and the subjects and characters they represent, connected to cinematic theory and practice whose genealogy will be considered further below and in subsequent chapters. Fourth, we found an emphasis on the importance of women as witness-protagonists and the representation of their critical testimonies, in particular as subjects and voices within the documentary genre, as well as the (meta)cinematic testimonies of women filmmakers themselves on their place in their industry and society. The following paragraphs develop these four general frameworks in more detail and are followed by a more detailed overview of the book's structure.

In accordance with the first framework encompassed in this volume's scholarship and filmmaker interviews, women's filmmaking in Brazil demonstrates a *braided voice*, Trish FitzSimons's term for a more collaborative approach to film production as much as a hybrid approach to the formation of film narrative and style, interweaving multiple perspectives more than one master narrative (Munro 2018, 71). In fact, in her interview in this volume, filmmaker Petra Costa uses a similar language, referring to her process of knitting together diverse imagery and narratives with a voice-over in several of her films. For screenwriter and director Moara Passoni, who has also worked with Costa on several films, filmmaking involves collaboration in "a productive creative partnership [which] inspires, displaces, disturbs, provokes and enhances your voice" (Wissot 2020). Further, in her own analysis of Brazilian cinema, Lúcia Nagib (2017, 35) highlights Angela Martin's distinction between feminism

and egocentrism; that is, the call to recognize and represent the personal as political is not merely a call for self-expression and thus is something more than a female auteurism.

In a related point, Nagib emphasizes that women filmmakers' films in Brazil often do not center around one dominant auteur figure but involve a process of collaboration, and this can involve partnerships not only between women but between women and men, or, to put it in less binary terms, between various genders. Nagib also emphasizes, importantly, the increasing influence of television production on cinema since the 1990s in Brazil. Because television is "a realm where teamwork is the rule," this development has "further undermin[ed] the auteurist approach" (2017, 37). She further argues that "because this collaborative tradition has not only continued but expanded in contemporary practices, female presence is felt everywhere," whether or not a film's director is a woman. The latter point is confirmed in various chapters and interviews of this study that reference screenwriting, editing, and producing roles that women have been prominently involved in, while Leslie L. Marsh's chapter focuses specifically on women screenwriters. The notion of a special emphasis on collaboration among women filmmakers also parallels developments in other parts of Latin America. For instance, Claudia Bossay and María-Paz Peirano (2017) develop the metaphor of the "common pot" in Chile, referencing the teamwork involved in making a meal with small contributions from a community of women and highlighting its similarity to collaborative production practices of women in that national cinema with a common scarcity of resources. Women's historically subaltern position in the field of cinema, they find, has helped "women feel more comfortable making documentary films in horizontal, collaborative and relatively inexpensive ways" (Bossay and Peirano 2017, 97). The same has often held true for women filmmakers in various genres in Brazil.

The second general framework to be found in the volume is the one most specifically related to film production, namely, the development of state film policy since the 1990s and the apparent crisis of the post-*retomada*/revival model for state support of the industry. While Cacilda M. Rêgo's chapter discusses this model in more detail, and the directors interviewed for this volume as well as various scholarly contributors generally praise its results for women filmmakers since the 1990s, most of the women filmmakers interviewed or analyzed herein also express serious concerns about the crisis of this model of public investment and partnership in the industry in the late teens of the twenty-first century. These concerns

have only been made more acute by the demotion of the previously independent Ministry of Culture to the status of a subsecretariat within the Ministry of Tourism, under the right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro (in power since 2019). Bolsonaro and his economic minister Paulo Guedes favor the neoliberal model of governance, whose disinvestment in cultural production, and cinema in particular, had resulted in a serious crisis in the early 1990s when a steep drop in production occurred in the Brazilian film industry. The research and filmmaker commentaries presented in this volume tend to agree that there is reason for serious concern about a resurgence of neoliberal policy even though alternative avenues for financing and distribution that have arisen since the 1990s, such as funding from state and municipal governments, international coproductions, and online streaming platforms, still provide hope for the future.

As a more diverse cross-section of women filmmakers has found space in the industry, in tandem with a more diverse audience making its own demands on filmmakers, the question of how well Brazilian cinema represents the true diversity of the Brazilian population has been increasingly foregrounded. In keeping with these developments, the third framework found throughout the book relates directly to filmic expression and the relevance of Black feminist Djamila Ribeiro's theory of the *lugar de fala* (place of speaking) in contemporary woman-centered cinema. As noted in several chapters in this volume including that of Reighan Gillam as well as Jack A. Draper III's interview of Petra Costa, Ribeiro's (2018) theory of the *lugar de fala* provides a revealing lens for understanding the contemporary politics of representation in Brazilian cinema. The notion of the *lugar de fala* draws from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality, itself preceded by the related theory of the Combahee River Collective emphasizing the overlapping axes of oppression potentially faced by women based on differential racial, gender, class, or sexual orientation identities (Taylor 2017). Over the course of this volume, readers should appreciate that many artists among the generations of women filmmakers active since the 1990s have become increasingly conscientious of the importance of both examining their own place of speaking/enunciation in their works and supporting opportunities for filmmakers from historically oppressed or excluded groups to speak for or represent themselves on film. Further, in the context of Brazilian film studies scholarship, we recognize that an alternative analytical lens sometimes may be—and will continue to be—necessary to capture the places from which women filmmakers express themselves. This includes a greater focus on areas of the

industry neglected by previous scholarship, such as screenwriting (Marsh's chapter), short films online (Vázquez's chapter), series (Gillam's chapter), or transmedia projects that extend beyond films into online platforms (Atencio's interview of Sacchetta).

The final framework of expression found throughout this volume revolves around the figure of the witness and the action of testimony. The filmmakers analyzed and interviewed in the volume, especially those of the documentary genre, produce works filled with testimonies of Brazilian women of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on their experiences, desires, traumas, and struggles for justice and equality. Beyond these testimonies of cinematic subjects, the voices of Brazilian women filmmakers themselves in the interviews documented here and elsewhere, as well as in their own films, speak to historical and contemporary contributions and struggles of women in Brazilian cinema. Filmmaker Anna Muylaert, for one, whose work is discussed most extensively in Jack A. Draper III's chapter, has been one of the foremost critics of women's second-class-citizen status in Brazilian cinema. Many of the filmmakers discussed in this volume may well have had to overcome similar struggles as those described by Muylaert, such as "demeaning remarks from male colleagues, not receiving credit for her accomplishments, a perverse resistance to her (female) authority, and ongoing social barriers limiting women's access to financing" (Marsh 2017, 169). In an interview in *Primavera das mulheres / Women's Spring* (2017), director Isabel Nascimento Silva and screenwriter Antonia Pellegrino's television documentary on the burgeoning feminist and gender activist movement in Brazil, Muylaert expanded on her experience in the industry as a prominent, award-winning female director. Here, she stated that there is a glass ceiling for women in the industry. In her experience, it often takes much longer for a woman to bring a feature film to fruition because it is difficult for her to build and maintain support. She went so far as to say that it could take ten years for a woman from start to finish, while a man could easily go through the same process in one year. Muylaert said she broke through the glass ceiling individually, but at the cost of personal suffering and antagonism in a male-dominated industry. Muylaert's comments are backed up in Rebecca J. Atencio's interview of filmmaker Paula Sacchetta in this volume, in which Sacchetta describes the experience of a female director/producer as a constant "battle" to have her authority taken seriously by men in the industry. Muylaert herself said she came to be perceived as a "dangerous woman" because she also brought public attention to the

systemic discrimination against female filmmakers. However, she does feel that she was able to help achieve some broader progress, allowing for more opportunities for women in the industry.

These insights from one of the most successful female directors in recent decades are revealing of both the situation within which women still have to work in the industry and a certain opening of space and opportunities that were scarcer prior to the *retomada* (or revival) of Brazilian film in the 1990s. This progress is also discussed by Maria Augusta Ramos in her interview in this volume, in terms of the increasing involvement of female producers in the industry and their support for female filmmakers. In addition, Ramos highlights the supportive role women have played for female filmmakers by establishing themselves over the past decade in positions in the national film agency, Agência Nacional do Cinema (Ancine), and developing various programs and funding to support women in the industry. In her chapter, Cacilda M. Rêgo also emphasizes the advances women have achieved in the industry, while she recognizes past and current struggles to find recognition and compete on an equal playing field with male filmmakers. This volume thus makes a significant contribution to telling the often underrepresented tale of women's accomplishments since the turn of the century in cinema, all the more impressive in Brazil's still-patriarchal society.

Considering the structure of this volume more closely, the chapters are clustered under three central themes: (1) breaking ground and making space in the industry, (2) politics of public and private spaces, and (3) intersecting identities. The scholarship and interviews included in each section are strongly tied together by these themes, yet these clusters are by no means rigid, and the reader will find that these themes resonate throughout the book alongside the four general frameworks for women's filmmaking in Brazil outlined above. The first themed section broadly represents women filmmakers' efforts to find space to work in Brazilian cinema—not only in front of and behind the camera but also in professional organizations, in state institutes making film policy, and in a variety of online forums as well. The second section combines discussions and analysis of representations of private and public spaces in both documentary and fictional films, collectively demonstrating how the public and private realms mutually define and interpenetrate each other even as the distinctions between these spaces continue to be socially and politically relevant in the present, with deep roots in the colonial and postcolonial history of the racialized and gendered hierarchy of Brazilian society.

The third section includes chapters with the greatest focus on how the gender identity of women intersects with other important identities that differentiate women's experiences. In particular, the unique experiences of Black and Indigenous women, transgender women, and women of different generations are centered here. Again, it is notable that many of these themes cannot be isolated to the work of a particular filmmaker or group of filmmakers featured in this book. One example of this fluidity of themes throughout the volume is the discussion of Paula Sacchetta's work in a scholarly chapter in part 2, chapter 5 as well as an interview in part 3, chapter 12. While Sacchetta's work certainly focuses on the more universal feminist concern of violence against women in Brazilian society, the array of women's voices in her film *Faces of Harassment* (2016) represents, in her own words, "as diverse a range of experiences as possible." Similarly, while this volume focuses on certain filmmakers in one section or another, the reader will likely find that their works nevertheless dialogue with those of filmmakers in the other sections of the book.

Considering the sections more closely, part 1, *Breaking Ground/ Making Space in the Industry*, begins with Cacilda M. Rêgo's look at the generation of women who were at the forefront of the cinematic revival of the 1990s. In chapter 1, "Recognizing Women's Contributions to Brazilian Cinema," she asserts that, with a few significant exceptions, the contributions of Brazilian women to national cinema are still under-recognized. Rêgo provides an overview of the limited extent to which these contributions have been analyzed in previous scholarship in Portuguese or English. Then, taking the cinematic revival of the 1990s as a point of departure, she offers an overview of the industry dynamics as a framework for a more nuanced understanding of women's participation in national cinema as well as the substantial challenges to their commercial success and to their recognition in a historically male-dominated field. Specifically, the chapter addresses the lack of attention given to Brazilian female directors. It also discusses how Globo Filmes, the production arm of Globo TV Network, has altered the landscape of the Brazilian film industry to the detriment of small and/or independent productions, which form the bulk of female-directed features. It shows, however, that industrial constraints (from access to funds for production to distribution and exhibition) have not curtailed artistic creativity—in fact, women have had a significant impact on documentary as well as on fictional cinema in recent years—nor have they (thanks to access to new platforms and formats) limited the reach of works by women, as exemplified by the growing number of



new productions by a generation of younger (and especially Black) female filmmakers. Indeed, the increase in collective, grassroots, and popular filmmaking associated with video and new media technologies and the proliferation of film festivals, blogs and websites, and professional groups aimed at recognizing and promoting women's contributions to film culture have meant greater participation by women in filmmaking (28 percent in 2018) in twenty-first-century Brazil.

The following chapters in this volume take up different aspects of women's contributions to and participation in current film and media culture. Their common goal, within a wide divergence of methods and approaches, is to critically examine the creative work of women screenwriters, producers, and directors, especially those working in more marginal areas such as Black and/or nonmainstream cinema. Bringing to light the common areas of concern on the part of these women filmmakers, these chapters discuss how women have forged more visibility by seeking innovative ways of approaching filmmaking and creating new spaces that set their (and other marginalized) voices and visions in circulation beyond the traditional exhibition landscape of multiplexes, art houses, and film festivals. Together these chapters help illuminate several institutional questions—of production, distribution, exhibition, and outreach—and in so doing they not only fill a gap in the existing scholarship but extend the field beyond the framework of mainstream feminist film studies. Leslie L. Marsh in chapter 2, “Behind the Scenes: Brazilian Women Screenwriters in Film and Television,” charts the current landscape of Brazilian cinema through a focus on the work of female screenwriters. As she argues, although there has been significant research in film studies celebrating female screenwriters and directors in Hollywood, there is yet very limited scholarship on this vital area of production associated with Brazilian women. Pointing to the necessity of further research on the creative work of female screenwriters, the chapter briefly maps the state of the profession of screenwriting in Brazil as it has evolved in recent decades, concentrating thereafter on issues of female screenwriters' authorship and agency and the different contexts (of film, television, and the new media) in which this creative practice by Brazilian women has emerged and thrived. Shifting the discussion to include important emerging women-led initiatives, chapter 3, “Resistance and Online Activism: Brazilian Women Filmmakers' Initiatives (2014–2017),” by Daniela Vertzman Bagdadi, focuses on the political, social, and technological conditions that have enabled filmmaking by women to take place in the new millennium, such as the establishment of cine

clubs, film festivals, and professional organizations, and the development of online groups across the country. As she concludes, although initiatives by women are not a new phenomenon in Brazil, these new contemporary groups have developed innovative and pioneering actions through their activism on Facebook. In chapter 4, “Interview with Maria Augusta Ramos,” Jack A. Draper III, Cacilda M. Rêgo, and Gustavo Procopio Furtado address questions of belonging and non-belonging for the director (she lives between the Netherlands and Brazil), current women’s production in Brazil, national trends, and how politics have informed her work. She also reflects on the democratization of production financing access (thanks to public incentives) as well as new media access, how women filmmakers are increasingly relying on the system of (transnational) coproductions, and the rising number of film productions by women that have been facilitated by Ancine in more recent years.

Part 2, Politics of Public/Private Spaces, begins with chapter 5, “From Tweets to the Streets: Women’s Documentary Filmmaking and Brazil’s Feminist Spring.” Here, Rebecca J. Atencio remaps women filmmakers’ engagement with gender-related protest movements, both online and in the streets, that have occurred in recent years. As Atencio argues, while largely associated with the social media and city streets, these protest movements—which became known as Brazil’s Primavera Feminista (Feminist Spring)—were “amplified by the documentary filmmaking of emerging women directors, some of whom played an instrumental role in helping bridge the divide between the two spaces, virtual and physical.” Taking two recently released documentary features—Paula Sacchetta’s *Precisamos falar do assédio* (*Faces of Harassment*, 2016) and Amanda Kamanchek Lemos and Fernanda Frazão’s *Chega de fiu fiu* (*Enough with Catcalling*, 2018)—Atencio points out the intrinsic links between filmmaking and social media and, ultimately, the power of their narratives in giving voice to women’s agency on- and off-screen. In so doing, Atencio notes, they call for women’s political engagement, summoning women to take action (against misogyny, racism, classism, and patriarchy) in the same tradition of feminist filmmaking in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing on Donna Haraway’s notion of “making kin,” chapter 6, “Motherhood and Making Kin in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema” by Jack A. Draper III, examines how Anna Muylaert’s *Que horas ela volta* (*The Second Mother*, 2015) and Sandra Kogut’s *Campo Grande* (2015) follow two different trajectories of women and children “making kin” in the multi-class context

of domestic employers and workers in contemporary Brazil. As Draper argues, while “*The Second Mother* traces the process of the empowerment of a nanny in relation to her employers’ family through the catalyst of her own biological daughter’s influence, . . . an inverse process is established in *Campo Grande*, in which a middle-class mother must fill in for the absence of a former employee’s daughter, looking after a poor boy and girl as they search for this woman, their biological mother.” In chapter 7, “The Many Mirrors of Maria Augusta Ramos: Landscape, Institutions, and Everyday Lives in Contemporary Brazil,” Paula Halperin concentrates her analysis on the documentary films by Maria Augusta Ramos, including her highly acclaimed and more recent award-winning film *O processo* (*The Trial*, 2018). Viewed in conjunction, Halperin argues, Ramos’s works are built around distinctive structures and spaces within which the characters’ stories and experiences are framed. In her words, Ramos’s “work explores menial aspects of daily life, but through character building, dramatization, and mise-en-scène, she transforms the common and simple details into an unusual and complex portrayal of contemporary Brazil.” In chapter 8, “Interview with Petra Costa,” Jack A. Draper III, in conversation with Petra Costa, discusses her documentary practice in the context of Brazilian society today. Costa, who belongs to a generation of filmmakers who released their first films in the 2000s, initiated her career with a poignant rendering of her grandparents’ relationship in the short *Olhos de ressaca* (*Undertow Eyes*, 2009). A decade later she came to international prominence following her Oscar-nominated documentary feature *Democracia em vertigem* (*The Edge of Democracy*, 2019), in which she casts a critical eye on the social and political crisis that swept Brazil starting with the June protests of 2013, ultimately leading to President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016 and paving the way to Jair Bolsonaro’s presidency (2019–).

Chapter 9, “Conditions for a Twenty-First-Century Black Woman Cinema in Brazil: The Politics and Aesthetics of Yasmin Thayná’s Audiovisual Practice,” begins part 3, *Intersecting Identities*, and deals with filmic and cultural representation by Black women directors. Taking Yasmin Thayná’s short film *Kbela* (2015) as a case study, María Mercedes Vázquez Vázquez brings to light the complicated status of Black female identities and subjectivities through cinematic practice. By so doing, she problematizes what constitutes the defining aesthetics (and politics) of films made by Black women, doubly marginalized in Brazilian society, and their role as political and social agents. In her words,

Although Thayná’s filmmaking career is short, her work is proof of the positive effects of left-wing cultural policies for the advancement of diversity, and the impact of her work is a sign of a new sensibility in Brazilian filmmaking and society at large toward race and gender. Besides this, Thayná is not only a filmmaker but also a cultural activist and intellectual who seeks to understand cultural processes regarding the Black presence in Brazil’s audiovisual industries and therefore deserves close attention.

Chapter 10, “Afro-Brazilian Women Creative Workers Speak: Juliana Vicente’s Standpoint Cinema (Cinema of *O Lugar de Fala*)” by Reighan Gillam, establishes a dialogue with Vázquez Vázquez’s discussion of gender and race representation in filmmaking by women of color. Informed by Djamila Ribeiro’s notion of *lugar de fala* (place of speaking, or standpoint) as a form of empowerment for women in front of and behind the camera, Gillam reflects on the *Afronta! (Face it!)* video series by Juliana Vicente. As she writes,

These short videos in the *Afronta!* series constitute short life stories, narratives, or testimonies about one’s life and work, and they voice the life experiences of a particular group of young Black female workers in the cultural industries. By recording their statements, editing the content, and presenting the videos together, Vicente brings into view a group of cultural workers who have little representation in Brazil and in ways that Black women are rarely seen: young Black women who work in the culture industries and pursue their interests through music, style, acting, filmmaking, and dance.

In chapter 11, “Interview with Mari Corrêa,” Gustavo Procopio Furtado brings to light the interconnection between gender, self-representation, and filmmaking in Indigenous communities in an interview with Mari Corrêa who, although relatively unknown in film circles in Brazil, has produced remarkable work in the area of documentary filmmaking with Indigenous people. In closing the volume, chapter 12, “Interview with Paula Sacchetta” by Rebecca J. Atencio, contributes to our understanding of the various “faces of harassment”—the spoken (and, often, the unspoken) violence suffered by women within both the private/domestic and public spheres—eloquently captured by Sacchetta in her documentary feature

*Faces of Harassment*. Identifying herself as a feminist filmmaker, Sacchetta explains that her film, in both its subject and form, was inspired by and conceived in the context of increasing participation of women filmmakers in gender-related protests and/or initiatives that emerged in Brazil (and elsewhere), and she explains how she became committed to creating a film around the personal stories of women in order to expose the systemic violence against them in the public and private arenas.

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