



Brazil on Film

The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão

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A vida invisível de Eurídice Gusmão

Director: Karim Aïnouz

©: RT Features, Pola Pandora,

Sony Pictures, Canal Brasil

Production Companies: RT Features, Pola Pandora,

Sony Pictures, Canal Brasil, Naymar

Associate Producer: Uno Filmes

Supported by: Medienbord Brandenburg, Banco

Regional de Desenvolvimento do Extremo Sul,

Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual, ANCINE

Executive Producers: Camilo Cavalcanti,

Viviane Mendonca, Mariana Coelho,

Cecile Tollu-Polonowski, André Novis

Produced by: Rodrigo Teixeira,

Michael Webber, Viola Fügen

Associate Producer: Michel Merkt

Assistant Director: Nina Kopko

Script Supervisor: Carol Ao

Castling: Marina Franco

Screenplay: Murilo Hauser

Co-screenplay: Inés Bortagaray, Karim Aïnouz

Based on 'A vida invisível de Eurídice Gusmão' by:

Martha Batalha

Director of Photography: Hélène Louvart

Editor: Heike Parplies

Art Director: Rodrigo Martirena

Costume Designer: Marina Franco

Make-up: Rosemary Paiva

Original Music: Benedikt Schiefer

Music Supervisors: Guilherme Garbato,

Gustavo Garbato

Direct Sound: Laura Zimmerman

Sound Mixer: Björn Wiese

Sound Editor: Waldir Xavier

Cast:

Carol Duarte (*Eurídice*)

Julia Stockler (*Guida / Gisele*)

Antonio Fonseca (*Manoel*)

Bárbara Santos (*Filomena*)

Flávia Gusmão (*Ana*)

Gregório Duvivier (*Antenor*)

Cristina Pereira (*Cecília*)

Nikolas Antunes (*Iorgos*)

Flavio Bauraqui (*Macedo*)

Gillray Coutinho (*Afonso*)

Maria Manoella (*Zélia*)

Fernanda Montenegro (*Eurídice*)

Hugo Cruz (*Feliciano*)

Brazil-Germany-USA 2019©

140 mins

Digital

Director's statement

I was deeply moved when I discovered the book. It triggered vivid memories of my own life. I was raised in the conservative Brazilian Northeast in the 60's, in a family with a majority of women – a matriarchal family in a hyper machista context. The men were either gone or often absent. In a patriarchal culture, I had the great chance of being part of a family where women ran the show – they had the leading roles.

What drove me to adapt *The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão* was the desire to render visible many invisible lives, like those of my mother, my grandmother, my aunts, and so many other women from that time. Their stories have not been told enough, neither in novels, history books nor cinema. How did a woman in the 50's react when she had sex for the first time with her new husband? How was it to not want to get pregnant before the advent of contraceptive methods? How could a single mother raise a child in an environment that excluded her so horribly? We cannot take these questions for granted. The challenge was to tackle them from an intimate standpoint – and that is what the novel does so with such brilliance.

Melodrama has become diluted and made precarious in Brazilian television with telenovelas. However, they move millions of viewers every day, proving melodrama can be very powerful. Here I sought to celebrate melodrama as a radical aesthetic strategy to draw a social critique of our times, one that is visually splendid and tragic, grand and raw. I wanted to craft a story that sheds light on an invisible chapter of women's history.

I was determined to tell a tale of solidarity, a story that underlines the fact that we are much stronger together than we are alone, no matter how different we might be. With *The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão*, I imagined a movie with very saturated colours, with a camera close to the characters, pulsating with them. I imagined a film full of sensuality, of music, of drama, tears, sweat and mascara, but also a movie pregnant with cruelty, violence and sex; a movie that didn't fear being sentimental, bigger than life – a film that beats with my two beloved protagonists' hearts: Guida and Eurídice.

Production notes

'The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão' reviewed at Cannes

Adapted from a novel by Martha Batalha, the film is billed as 'a tropical melodrama', and certainly the material has all the requisite ingredients in terms of narrative. In the early 1950s, in Rio de Janeiro, the Gusmão sisters are fairly inseparable, but also quite different; Guida, 20, is the more headstrong, and thrilled by the attention she is getting from a handsome Greek sailor, while the seemingly more cautious and innocent Eurídice, 18, is diligent in her piano practice, hoping to win a place at a conservatory in Vienna.

Their stern, strait-laced baker father, unsurprisingly, favours his younger daughter, and is irate when Guida leaves a note saying she's sailed off to Athens to get married; Eurídice, for her part, feels abandoned and resentful at

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her sister's departure, and goes along with her parents' plans to marry Antenor, the son of a business associate of her father. It's the start of a lengthy separation for the young women, who hope that the letters they send one another via their mother are ending up at the appropriate destinations in Austria and Greece; and even though neither of them ever receives a reply, such are their feelings for each other that both continue to write for many years.

Had the exchange of letters been fruitful, the sisters would have been aware that they were living in the very same city; we the audience see how their respective lives pan out through the 50s, but thanks to the cruellest of ironies – very much a consequence of their father's shame and anger at Guida's wayward behaviour – Eurídice and Guida never get to find out how the other is faring.

This kind of situation, of course, is very much the stuff of melodrama, and could have resulted in some fairly formulaic plot developments. Karim Aïnouz, however, keeps an admirably tight grip on the proceedings, allowing what might have been genre stereotypes to turn into complex, fully rounded characters. And while he never lets us forget that so many aspects of the women's lives are shaped and constrained by an unashamedly patriarchal society, even Antenor and the sisters' father are depicted as properly sentient (if woefully self-centred and unimaginative) individuals rather than caricatures.

The film is undoubtedly full-blooded, but that doesn't mean it lacks subtlety or nuance; indeed, as it progresses through the 50s, chronicling the changes in the two siblings' lives, it explores, to richly rewarding affect, notions of family and friendship, love and loyalty. Aïnouz's direction is highly expressive but never lurid or hyperbolic; his use of mirrors and frames within frames speaks of entrapment and self-image, while one scene set in a restaurant, where the sisters' paths almost but don't quite cross, is composed, paced and edited with an unflashy brilliance. The evocation of female solidarity, in scenes involving Guida and a woman who befriends her, is both plausible and moving; the sequences featuring music are generally very well done; and a present-day coda involving the veteran actress Fernanda Montenegro crystallises all that has gone before with a directness and simplicity of great emotional power. If this is melodrama, it is so only in the best sense of the word.

Geoff Andrew, *Sight and Sound*, [bfi.org.uk](https://www.bfi.org.uk), 25 May 2019