



## Brazil on Film

# The Second Mother

**The Second Mother** Que horas ela volta?

Director: Anna Muylaert

Production Company: Gullane

In co-production with: Globo Filmes

In association with: Africa Filmes

Producers: Débora Ivanov, Caio Gullane,

Fabiano Gullane, Anna Muylaert

Casting: Patrícia Faria

Written by: Anna Muylaert

Director of Photography: Barbara Alvarez

Editor: Karen Harley

Production Design: Marcos Pedroso,

Thales Junqueira

Costume Design: Andre Simonetti, Claudia Kopke

Music: Fabio Trummer, Vitor Araujo

Production Mixing: Gabriela Cunha

Sound Design: Miriam Biderman, Ricardo Reis

Cast:

Regina Casé (Val)

Camila Márdila (Jéssica)

Lourenco Mutarelli (Carlos)

Karine Teles (Bárbara)

Michel Joelsas (Fabinho)

Brazil 2015

112 mins

Digital

The screening on Tue 16 Jun will be introduced by Cine Brazil

The tensions in the life of the enterprising and affectionate housekeeper-cum-nanny protagonist of Anna Muylaert's accomplished *The Second Mother* are identified from the very opening of the film. She is watching over the small son of her employers by the family pool while talking to her absent daughter on the phone. The matronly Val is identified as the child Fabinho's second mother as he plainly asks 'What time she will return?' – *que horas ela volta?*, the film's original Brazilian title. It's a telling question that is picked up when we next see the household over a decade later. It refers to the now adolescent Fabinho's busy professional mother Bárbara, but it resonates with Val and even, during the course of the film, with Val's daughter Jéssica and the latter's own relationship with her baby son. Indeed, Muylaert's film functions by skilfully crafting a web of parallel situations between the different parent-child pairings across a lean, adroit narrative charting the disruption that ensues when the clever, motivated Jéssica becomes a cuckoo in the middle-class family's nest.

Displaced family relationships abound. Val comforts Fabinho on numerous occasions, while it is to Carlos, Fabinho's 'arty' father, that Jéssica gravitates. Val offers Fabinho physical affection, while Carlos provides Jéssica with the books and conversations about architecture that she craves. However, Lourenco Mutarelli's Carlos is an infantilised adult – with a languid lack of purpose that his son has evidently inherited.

Muylaert's feature suggests a great deal about the household's attitudes to class through the deployment of a number of visual motifs that slyly comment on the wider issues of privilege underpinning Brazilian society: Fabinho's favourite ice cream, which Jéssica takes when her mother isn't looking, much to Bárbara's annoyance; the mobile phones that the wealthy family play with at the dinner table as they evade direct conversation; the swimming pool that Bárbara tellingly declares out of bounds because she supposedly spots a rat in it soon after Jéssica uses it.

*The Second Mother* impressively avoids delivering judgements on characters that could all too easily have become clichéd stereotypes. Karine Teles's modish Bárbara is driven by a sense of purpose and energy that suggests clear analogies with Val. Both have fixed ideas about what they see as socially acceptable. Both share a demanding work ethic: Bárbara is interviewed at home for a television item about successful professionals; Val is seldom seen standing still or sitting – if not doing household chores, she is walking the dog, guiding the more hapless maid Edna or finding time for Fabinho. There is a wonderful warmth to Brazilian star Regina Casé's performance as Val. A wide, toothy smile, slightly hoarse voice and good humour render her an endearing figure. Casé expertly conveys both Val's excitement at Jéssica's arrival and her frustration as maternal loyalties are challenged by her daughter's refusal to unquestioningly accept her value system.

The film deftly exposes the sidelining of Val by the supposedly liberal and progressive family she dutifully serves, but in Fabinho's easy relationship with Jéssica, the latter's spectacular triumph in the university entrance exam and Val's crucial decision at the end of the film, *The Second Mother* concludes on an optimistic note that suggests change is imminent.

Maria Delgado, *Sight and Sound*, September 2015

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## Director's Statement

*The Second Mother* is a film about a set of social strictures which have been in place in Brazilian culture since colonial times, and which continue to affect the country's emotional architecture to this very day. I started writing this script 20 years ago, when I had my first child and realised how noble a job it is to bring up a child. At the same time, I also noticed the extent to which this task is devalued by Brazilian culture. More often than not, rather than looking after your own baby you hired a live-in nanny and outsourced most of the work that was considered tedious or draining. What we sometimes forget is that those nannies very often leave their own children with someone else in order to fit into that scheme. This social paradox struck me as one of the most significant in Brazil because it's always the children who lose out – both those of the employers and those of the nannies. There's a major problem in the bedrock of our society rooted in how we raise our children. Can there really be an upbringing without affection? Can affection be bought? And, if so, at what price?

*The Second Mother* is a film that's developed over the last 20 years. The original screenplay, called *The Kitchen Door*, was more about the employer-nanny relationship with a film style that most closely resembled magical realism. Five years after the first incarnation, we decided to go for something more realistic and so I had the nanny's daughter come to Sao Paulo to share in her mother's fate: leaving her world behind in order to take up a low-paying job. Along the way, however, I felt the need to inject some sense of hope into the character without having the film slide towards some false happy ending. Around the same time, Brazil elected a president from the Worker's Party and things actually began to change, and labour law amendments were introduced over the next few years that virtually eradicated live-in labour. In 2013, just as the film was going into production, I decided to sit down and completely re-write the script in such a way that reflected these changes and debates that were happening around me. Instead of portraying the nanny's daughter as hapless and meek – a faulty cliché – I gave her a forceful personality, made her noble and headstrong enough to stand up to the separatist social rules grounded in Brazil's colonial past.

*The Second Mother* was supposed to be my first feature film project. I decided to make it after becoming a mother in 1995, when I was confronted with the reality in Brazil – that raising a child is often considered a second-class job, almost completely ignored by fathers, and many times given by the mother to a low-salary nanny. At the time, all of the complicated familial and social issues that this film touched on felt too personal and I thought that I probably had to be more mature to take this film on. So I decided to make a few other films first – *Durval Records* in 2001 and *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* in 2008.

As I said, almost 20 years later I came back to this project, feeling that it was the right time to address its complexity. My two sons were adults, the country was changing for the better, its people developing more self-esteem and getting stronger. Likewise, I had also learned a lot about writing and directing films as well as working with actors. For all these personal, social and professional issues, this is a lifetime project that reflects the recent history of the country as well as choices that I have made in my own life. I hope all the love and care that is in this film's DNA can go further and maybe, in its own small way, help people find new and better places for themselves in the world.

Production notes