

Today at Mediático we are delighted to present a post on *Brazilian Cinema in the Time of Corona Virus* by regular contributor, [Stephanie Dennison](#) Professor of Brazilian Studies and director of the Centre for World Cinemas and Digital Cultures at the University of Leeds. Together with *Tori Holmes* (Queen's, Belfast) and *Sara Brandellero* (Leiden) she founded REBRAC (European Network of Brazilianists Working in Cultural Analysis)

On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020 Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles's critically acclaimed *Bacurau* (2019) opened in New York's Lincoln Center to considerable attention and swift business at the box-office, a sold-out Q and A with the directors and star Sônia Braga, and a film retrospective, *Mapping Bacurau*, scheduled to accompany the film's run, curated by the directors themselves. But within six days the COVID-19 pandemic had forced cinemas across the US to close, bringing *Bacurau's* theatrical release to an abrupt end. And to make matters worse, it seems the future of the Lincoln Center now hangs in the balance. Could *Bacurau* be the last film to be screened at the iconic film theatre?

As good fortune would have it, *Bacurau's* distributor in the US, the World Cinema specialist Kino Lorber, set up the Kino Marquee platform, an innovative scheme designed to grant its films a theatrical release (albeit virtually) and share revenue with independent cinemas across the US. As the first film to be part of this initiative, *Bacurau* will have "screened" in 150 film theatres by the end of its run, in mid-May 2020.

In the UK, *Bacurau* didn't even get the chance to start its run at cinemas, given that its release coincided almost to the day with cinema closures across the country. It has, however, done brisk business on MUBI, a site available for free to most students and academics, and one currently offering temporary free membership.

*Bacurau* enjoyed a lengthy run in cinemas in Brazil before shutdown, selling well over 700,000 tickets. Other films haven't been so fortunate: for example, Wagner Moura's long-anticipated and controversial *Marighella* (2019), after a series of hold-ups believed by many

to be politically motivated, finally secured a release date for May 2020. However, despite the Brazilian government's confused and rather piecemeal attitude to lockdown and isolation, all cinemas in Brazil are now closed, and given the precariousness of the film industry and government support for the Arts, it is feared that many arthouse theatres will simply not reopen.

As a result of cinema closures, subscriptions to VOD providers such as Telecine Play and Netflix Brasil have increased. Brazilian film festivals, when they are not being postponed, are migrating to online platforms. And in a gesture of moral support similar to those offered by a great many artists across the globe, a number of Brazilian filmmakers and smaller production companies have made their films at least temporarily available to view online for free.

It is in the light of this shift in film exhibition to online platforms brought about as a result of COVID-19 isolation measures that REBRAC, a European network of Brazilianists working in Cultural Analysis, has compiled a list of Brazilian films that are currently available for viewing online for free or at minimal cost, at least from within the UK.[1] While certainly not exhaustive,[2] the sizeable list does range from the more commercial fare to be found on Netflix (Brazilian films and series account for the one of the largest volumes of non-English-language content on the platform) to more specialist, and therefore more interesting films to be found on platforms such as Afroflix, with content by Afro-Brazilian filmmakers, and the indigenous film and video initiatives of the Vídeo nas Aldeias collective. The three examples cited here have in fact existed since before the days of enforced quarantine and cinema closures, but their film catalogues have expanded, and the REBRAC list provides viewing recommendations on what can otherwise be overwhelming sites to navigate.

Many of the films currently available to view for free are short films, an extremely strong filmmaking tradition in Brazil that is frequently overlooked by researchers and film fans alike. There is, in fact, little excuse for this: the short film portal Porta Curtas has been

home to over one thousand Brazilian short films to view for free for years, and of the Brazilian Association for Film Critics' list of 100 greatest *curtas*, almost all are available to view for free online (on Porta Curtas, YouTube and so on).[3]

Like many of the sites on the REBRAC film list, the films on the Porta Curtas portal tend not to be subtitled, thus limiting considerably the reach of Brazilian films abroad. As well as the linguistic challenges facing potential viewers of Brazilian films, many viewing opportunities (rightly omitted from the REBRAC list) can, frustratingly, only be accessed by Brazil-based internet users. Sites such as the São Paulo City Council-funded Spcine Play, a platform which currently offers a variety of Brazilian feature films to view online for free, cannot be accessed without a Brazilian National Insurance number (the infamous CPF, without which it is almost impossible to make online bookings and purchases in Brazil).

The Brazilian film industry in Brazil took a massive hit in 2016, with the post-impeachment austerity government led by Michel Temer, and then Jair Bolsonaro. Both have been responsible for a politics of reversal of the diversity and inclusion initiatives developed by the Workers Party (PT), including investment in the cultural industries. The old patrons of film culture, such as the banks and Petrobras, the much-maligned state oil company, are no longer investing in film projects. The film industry, as a result of withdrawal of investment and the beginnings of a worrying trend of censorship, is on its knees.

The huge problems facing the film production, exhibition and distribution sectors will only be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the vaguest of reassurances that funding will be made available to support out-of-work technicians and so on. Many jobs in the sector in Brazil, like over here, have already been lost. So while it might seem great that we are getting the opportunity to see many cool films on online platforms, many Brazilians may still struggle to afford a reliable and good quality internet connection, or cable TV subscriptions. Coupled with likely independent cinema closures, the danger then, is that the

dream of democratisation of access to cinema in Brazil will be lost for good.

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[1] The list is available here:

<https://rebrac.net/2020/04/29/brazilian-film-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-list-of-films-to-view-online/>

[2] The list omits illegal download sites and unauthorised uploads of films to YouTube, for example.

[3] See Cleiton, “Os 100 Melhores Curta-Metragens Brasileiros de Todos Os Tempos”, *Medium* 1 August 2019. Available at:

<https://medium.com/@cleiton/os-100-melhores-curta-metragens-brasileiros-de-todos-os-temp-os-ed61631defc9>

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