

BELLATRIX: THE AWAKENING OF FEMINISM



A FILM BY

LUCAS COSTANZI

52 mins / Color / 2019 / Portuguese, English Subtitles / Brazil



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FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

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Intl SocioEnvironmental Film Festival of Nova Friburgo (FRICINE)

AmazoniaDoc - Festival Pan-Amazônico de Cinema

Mostra Sesc de Cinema

MICGénero



SYNOPSIS

Scholars, experts and activists explore gender issues, the politics of sexuality and the impact that they have on women's lives.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Lucas Costanzi is a Brazilian journalist specializing in documentaries, certified by the ESEC-École Supérieure d'Études Cinématographiques, Paris. Director of a series called Conexão 360 of reports around the world for Brazilian Television. He owns the production company Sabujo Filmes. He is the director of the documentaries Tormenta (2015) and Bellatrix (2019) as well as the director of institutional documentaries for many clients.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

The return of medieval conservatism in Brazil

Ideological war

Brazil is experiencing a very strange moment. Brazilians are very engaged in political discussions. Conversations in bars, formerly about football teams, are now about Supreme Court decisions or bills being voted by the National Congress. However, the quality of this debate is extremely low. Rationality and enlightenment have given way to religious obscurantism and prejudice. Issues like feminism, sexuality, and arts have become the battlefield of an ideological war between left and right.

Nazis in Brazilian Culture

The corruption that took place at the center of the Partidos dos Trabalhadores (PT), which occupied power in Brazil from 2003 to 2016, gave room for part of the public opinion to turn against leftist parties.

Influenced by a reactionary wave and promoted by parliamentarians linked to religious movements, old politicians previously sympathetic to the PT jumped on the opportunity to resurrect an old enemy: communism. But according to them, the Brazilian 'communist' abandoned the class struggle. Now they are dedicated to perverting culture, the arts and family values, in addition to defending Human Rights which, according to their thinking, only serves to protect criminals.

The current Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro was one of the voices that rose within this scenario in the elections that brought him to power in 2018. Along with him a range of closeted reactionaries now express their hatred without feeling the weight of their words, following the spirit of 'if the president can, I can too.' Many of them are still hiding behind the anonymity of the internet, while others are inside the government. This is the case of former Culture Secretary Roberto Alvim who, to the sound of Richard Wagner, copied the speech of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. The secretary was exonerated from his post after his statements due to negative repercussions. But the question is how did a Nazi come to become the secretary of culture? Certainly by his **relationship** with his superiors.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/17/world/americas/roberto-alvim-brazil.html>

Sexuality and feminism

In this reactionary and religious wave that is sweeping the country, the most common targets are sexual freedom and female empowerment. Everything that does not fall within the 'good customs of the traditional family' is attacked and labeled 'communist.' One famous example was an attempt at censorship by the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Marcelo Crivella, to ban the circulation of the comic book "Avengers: The Children's Crusade" which contained a drawing of a gay kiss. The comic book was being sold at a city fair and the mayor claimed that the book contained sexual content aimed at minors. "Books like this need to be packed in black plastic, sealed, and labeled with a warning on the outside about its content."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/07/world/americas/rio-gay-kiss-comic.html>

The attempt by government officials to dictate what is right and wrong in terms of sexuality is very serious, but there is an even bigger problem that resides between the lines of these

authoritarian attempts. It is the inability to expand thinking beyond ideological issues. Authoritarianism is a reflection of the inability to understand issues that are outside the dogmatic spectrum. Dogmatic blindness even prevents the interpretation of texts. In 2015 the ENEM, the National College Entrance Exam, contained a question that used the famous quote by Simone de Beauvoir: "Nobody is born a woman: she becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, economic destiny defines the form that the human female takes within society; it is the group of civilization that elaborates this intermediate product between the male and the castrate that qualify the female." After the exam, a group of city councilors from Campinas, in the state of São Paulo, made a motion of repudiation addressed to the Ministry of Education protesting the test that included an excerpt from the book *The Second Sex*. "They went to look for information from a philosopher from a thousand years ago and put it in there to impose a gender discussion on us. How can someone be a man in the morning and a woman at night?" asked councilman Campos Filho. "The vast majority are in favor of the law of nature, man is man, woman is woman," he argued. This type of response is proof of the inability to interpret the philosopher's text, which comes loaded with a context that is completely ignored by parliamentarians.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/03/debate-over-essay-question-and-role-brazils-admissions-exam>

Bellatrix, A Warrior

In defense of rationality and an open discussion without prejudice and dogma, the Brazilian production company Sabujo Filmes released a hybrid documentary called *Bellatrix*. The film presents the awakening of feminism in a young woman named Laura, played by Elisa Heidrich. Laura is perplexed by the inability of some politicians (in the case mentioned above) to reflect on the book *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. From there she embarks on a journey to discover feminism.

The film sheds light on the issue by presenting historical facts and reflections by academics and experts. The film eschews pamphleteering and presents the theme as an achievement by humanity.

Back to the past

If it were not enough to hark back to Nazism, President Jair Bolsonaro wants to return to an even more distant past, yearning for the Dark Ages. To add to the stew of this ideological war, Bolsonaro appointed the evangelical pastor Benedito Guimarães Aguiar Neto as the most recent president of the National Academic Body CAPES, an agency linked to the Ministry of Education. Aguiar defends creationism in opposition to Darwin's Theory of Evolution: "we want to put a counterpoint to the Theory of Evolution and establish the idea of intelligent design in primary education, so that we may, with scientific arguments, discuss creationism." Note that the proposal is for primary education, thus being able to form a new nation, an evangelical nation.

<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/educacao/2020/01/novo-presidente-da-capes-defende-criacionismo-em-contraponto-a-teoria-da-evolucao.shtml>

It seemed as though some idea had already been put in their place in history. Nazism was something that should never be repeated or honored. Creationism and flat earth are ideas from several centuries ago and have no scientific value, feminist achievements were

established in the 20th century and continue to advance in the 21st, but it seems that in Brazil today we are moving towards a dark past. And we have learned the lesson that the price of any progress is eternal vigilance.

By Lucas Costanzi



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Written and Directed	L. S. Costanzi
Producers	L.S. Costanzi Amanda Gatti
Director of Photography	L. S. Costanzi
Assistant Director	Amanda Gatti
Production Sound	Lucas Costanzi Juan Quintáns
Editor	Paulo Padilha
Assistant Editor	Joana Bernardes
Director of Post Production	Felipe Klovan Alexandre Moraes
Assistant Directors of Post Production	Guilherme Leal Lima Eduardo Leal
Original Music	Manu St Jean
Sound Design	Juan Quintans
Graphics and illustrations	Cintia Duarte
Color Timing	Leonardo Candian
Assistants	Gustavo Soares da Silva Fernando Rotta Neves
Cast	
Elisa Heidrich	Laura
Lucas Prado	Fábio
Felipe Fiori	Tiago
Jéssica Barbosa	Bruna
Marcos Verza	Astronomer

Interviewees

Mariana Selister Gomes – Professor and Researcher at Federal University of Santa Maria
Luciana Genro – Lawyer and Politician
Telia Negrão – Executive Director of NGO Coletivo Feminino Plural
Maria Lucia – NIEM Researcher (Interdisciplinary studies of Women and Gender)
Elena de Oliveira – Professor at Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA)
Clara Corleone – Public Relations Coordinator at Rede Minha Porto Alegre
Débora Oliveira – Psychologist
Tatiana Bastos – Police Commissioner
Bárbara Penna – Victim of Violence
Lívia de Souza – Researcher at NEPEM (Group Studies and Research on Women)