JUSTICE

A Film by Maria Ramos



102 minutes / color / 2004 / 35mm Portuguese with English Subtitles

Grand Prize, 2004 Visions du Réel

Best Film, 2004 Copenhagen Documentary Festival

Best Film, 2004 Bordeaux Festival of Women in Cinema

Grand Prize, 2004 Taiwan Documentary Festival

Special Mention of The Jury, 2004 Lisbon Documentary Festival

2006 Award of Merit in Film, Latin American Studies Association

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Synopsis

This fascinating feature documentary, winner of several international prizes, offers an intimate look inside the Brazilian justice system, closely observing the everyday work of attorneys, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals, as well as the defendants passing through the system – a young man caught with a stolen car, another charged with complicity in petty theft, and a teenager arrested for possession of drugs and weapons.

The film follows each case through its various stages, showing the defendants' meetings with public defenders, the reading of the charges and questioning of the defendants by a judge, scenes of their detention in grossly overcrowded cells, and supervised meetings with family members. JUSTICE (Justiça) also extends its view beyond the courtrooms and jails to reveal the personal lives of a judge, a public defender, and the families of the accused.

The film's straightforward observational approach, lacking any voice-over narration, gradually succeeds in revealing a broader social picture, one involving clear implications of police corruption, an oppressive judicial system that basically seems designed to punish the poor for petty crimes, and a penal system characterized by horrifically inhumane conditions. In a very compelling way, JUSTICE reveals the legal system as a sort of public theater dramatizing the social relations and power structures of Brazilian society at large.

Review Excerpts and Festival Awards

"With profound acuity, [JUSTICE] displays, in a very pure form, a relentless judicial machinery, in which all actors - judges, lawyers, and naturally the accused - are prisoners themselves."

—Jury of the 2004 Visions du Réel, including Nicolas Philiber (*Etre et Avoir*) and Diane Weyermann (Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program)

"Boldly eschewing interviews and narration, director Maria Ramos lets her camera tell the story: dozens of prisoners packed into a small cell, a judge laughing off a defendant's complaints of hunger, repeated allegations of police brutality that meet with little reaction. With its resolutely unobtrusive visual style, JUSTICE works as a parody of documentary objectivity..."

—The Village Voice

"Already a master of the objective eye, Ramos uses her unobtrusive camera to uncover the frustrations inherent in a vastly imbalanced society where hope is scarce and the future is dim."

—Variety

"Very clear, powerful and brave! A beautiful investigation of a corrupt and unjust justice system which also speaks to poverty, class and economic differences, and the destruction of family."

—Jury of the 2004 Copenhagen Documentary Festival

The Filmmaker

Maria Ramos (1964) was born in Brasília, Brazil. After graduating at the University of Brasilia (BA in Music/Piano), she moved to Europe where she studied Musicology and Electroacoustic Music in Paris at the Groupe de Recherche Musicale and, after that, in London at City University. In 1990, she moved to The Netherlands where she entered the Netherlands Film and Television Academy (NFTVA), specializing in directing documentaries.

Her first feature documentary **Brasilia**, a day in February was awarded the Prize of the Jury at the International Documentary Festival 'It's all true' in São Paulo and was screened in several international film and documentary festivals. In 1998, she created and directed **Butterflies in your stomach**, a documentary about children in love for the Dutch VPRO Television. These series were nominated for the Grote Kinderkast-televisieprijs, the award for best children's programme in The Netherlands in 1999.

Desi, a Pieter van Huystee production in co-operation with VPRO Television, won the Audience Award at the Amsterdam International Documentary Festival (IDFA) 2000, and the Golden Calf (Dutch Oscar) for best documentary film at the Netherlands Film Festival in 2001.

JUSTIÇA, a Selfmade Films, Limite and NPS co-production, won the *Grand Prix* at the International Documentary Festival 'Visions du Réel' in Nyon, Switzerland (may/2004); *La Vague d'Or* of best film at Bordeaux International Festival of Women in Cinema, France (october/2004); the *Amnesty Award* of Best Film at Copenhagen International Documentary Festival, in Denmark (november/2004), a Special Mention of the Jury at the Lisbon International Documentary Film Festival (november/2004) and the *Grand Prize* of Best Film at the Taiwan International Documentary Film Festival (december/2004).

Maria Ramos is also Adviser of the Dutch Cultural Broadcasting Fund.

Filmography

Justiça

2004, 100min, color, 35mm Script and direction A Selfmade Films, Limite and NPS co-production

Rio, a day in August

2002, 52 min, color, video
Script and direction
A Pieter van Huystee Film in co-production with
the Humanist Broadcasting Foundation
GNT Prize at the International Documentary Festival 'It's all true' 2003

Desi 2000, 90 min, color, 35mm

Script and direction
A Pieter van Huystee Film in co-production with VPRO Television
Winner of the Audience Award at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam 2000
Winner of the Golden Calf for 'Best Documentary' at the Netherlands Film Festival 2001

The secret of the vibrato

1999, 25 min, color, video Script and direction A VPRO Television production

Butterflies in your stomach

1998, documentary series in 6 parts,15 min. each, color, 16mm

Script and direction

A VPRO Television production (Villa Achterwerk)

about children in love.

Nominated for the Grote Kinderkast-televisieprijs in the category non-fiction at Cinekid 1999

Two times at home

1996, 16 min, color, 16mm A VPRO Television production (Villa Achterwerk) about children and anger.

Brasília, a day in February

1995, 72 min, color, 35mm Script, direction and executive production A NFTVA and Fundação Athos Bulcão Production Special Jury Prize at São Paulo International Documentary Festival 1997

Boy and aleid

1994, 50 min, color, 16mm Script, direction and executive production A NFTVA Production

"I think what I want to say is..."

1993, 40 min, color, 16mm Script, direction and executive production A NFTVA Production

Nominated for the Ogawa Shinsuke Prize at Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Japan 1995.

Filmmaker Statement

Brazilian born, but living in the Netherlands for 15 years, I wanted to provide an oppressive picture of the current Brazilian judicial system by putting a camera where many Brazilians have never been – a criminal court in Rio de Janeiro. In *Justiça* I followed the daily routine of several characters involved in court life. I used the camera as an instrument to observe the social theatre and the structures of power that revolve around the court and the justice system. I wanted to show that the legal System in Rio de Janeiro can be used as a metaphor for Brazilian society.

Credits

written and directed by maria ramos
director of photography flávio zangrandi
sound valéria ferro
editing virgínia flores | maria ramos | joana collier
sound editing and mixing denílson campos
research paola vieira
production brazil limite produções
director of production martha ferraris
pos production coordinator cleber cruz
executive producers jan de ruiter | luis vidal
producers niek koppen | jan de ruiter | renée van der grinten
commissioning editor nps cees van ede

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