Rising son

Lula, the Son of Brazil (2009)
Directors – Fábio Barreto & Marcelo Santiago. 130 mins, Costa Films & Globo Filmes

Glauber Rocha’s 1964 film Black God, White Devil stunningly captured the arid unforgiving scrubland of Brazil’s North-East otherwise known as the sertão. It is from this impoverished landscape that Fábio Barreto’s film starts. Sadly Lula, the Son of Brazil lacks the artistic verve of Rocha’s depiction of religion, violence and the last days of the cangaceiros, the bandits who roamed the sertão. The film instead adopts a more formulaic path as it charts the birth of Brazil’s first working class President from his poor origins in rural Pernambuco state through to the pivotal role he played in the mass strikes of the metal workers in São Paulo during the 1970s.

Lula, the Son of Brazil is an adaptation of the book of the same name by Denise Paraná. Luis Inácio Lula da Silva was born in 1945. He was the seventh child of his parents

Aristides and Dona Lindu. His rise to become President of Brazil is in itself an astounding story given the gross inequalities of wealth which pervade in Brazilian society. In 1952 his mother took the family on the well trodden migration route away from the North-East as they followed Lula’s father to São Paulo’s port of Santos in the industrialised south of Brazil. It is here that the young Lula in the film first works in the street as a shoe shine and selling oranges. Much to his alcoholic father’s disgust Lula and his siblings are enrolled by their mother in primary school where he flourishes. She later ensures that he trains as a metal worker.

This is very much a film about the influential relationship between the young Lula, portrayed in the later parts of the film by Rui Ricardo Diaz, and his mother, played by the veteran Brazilian actress Glória Pires. We are taken as far as 1980 in the film’s narrative during which time Lula endures personal tragedy and in 1975 is elected as president of the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema. The backdrop to this period is the dark days of Brazil’s military dictatorship which remained in power from 1964 to 1985.

The best parts of this uncritical biopic are where rarely seen clips of documentary footage of the mass strikes and protests led by Lula are interspersed with the film itself. Lula himself was arrested and imprisoned for his role as an influential union leader.

As with Glauber Rocha’s Black God, White Devil, this film does not offer up a depiction of those Brazilian tropical cliches of football, carnival and beaches. The only glimpse of the exotic is when the young Lula goes to the cinema in São Paulo where he catches a brief sight of some newsreel showing the cable cars on the Sugar Loaf and a couple playing on a beach in Rio de Janeiro. It is a world away from his urban struggle to survive, the metal workshops and the dangers of taking a highly visible role in the trade union movement in the face of a repressive military dictatorship, all of which proved so formative in Lula’s later political emergence.

Lula’s two terms in office as President of Brazil began in 2002. The documentary Entreatos by João Moreira Salles offered up an insightful backstage depiction of Lula’s 2002 campaign for presidency. This is not to be found in this film. Lula left office at the end of 2010 with approval ratings of 80 per cent having been credited with lifting at least 20 million Brazilians out of absolute poverty owing to social

Below: The actor Rui Ricardo Dias plays President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Fábio Barreto’s film.

Reviews
Poisonous headlines

Ricin! The Inside Story of the Terror Plot That Never Was
by Lawrence Archer & Fiona Bawdon

The day before news of the ricin find made the headlines, government scientists had established definitively that no poison had been found!

The book goes into some detail to highlight the fictional reporting that took place both at the time of the police raids in September 2002 and January 2003 and the lack of reporting during the trial when inconveniently to the media the conspiracy started to unravel. The book also gives an in depth account of the impact that wider events had before and after the trial on the men at the centre of this case and a chronology of the events that led to their arrests. These were not to be found in newspaper articles. This unique collaboration also demonstrates the importance of the jury system which is able to stand up to the mighty of the Government in order to protect the fundamental cornerstone of due process and the spirit of those who look beyond the headlines for the real story. This is the real story and one that needs to be read.

Sophie Khan

Poisonous headlines

T he ‘war on terror’ orchestrated by the Bush administration to justify regime change in Iraq was sadly the reason why five Algerian men were prosecuted in this country for a conspiracy named the Wood Green ‘ricin plot’. Had the five men been found guilty by the jury at the Old Bailey on 8th April 2005 we would no doubt have seen an immediate shift by the Blair Government to bring in draconian measures to crackdown on our freedoms and permanently change the landscape of our civil liberties. Fortunately, the truth prevailed and the misguided prosecution of these Algerians based on seeds, recipes and photocopies delivered what could only be said as an attempt by the Government to meddle with due process and create a false perception of a risk to public safety for their own benefit. However if you were to read the news headlines after the trial you may be mistaken for thinking that there actually was a ‘ricin plot’, especially as the Government made no attempt to rectify this misconception. Instead story upon story were propagated about the continued risk to the public and both Government and police spokesmen fuelled this further by stressing an urgency in the change of the law to allow for longer periods of detention.

Although the Blair Government lost the vote on proposals for 90 days detention without trial later in the same year, it should not be forgotten that controversial Control Orders were introduced in March 2005, while the Old Bailey jury deliberated. The same evidence that had just been tried and tested was then used to invoke the Control Orders against all those who would be subjected to this pseudo-imprisonment, even though the jury came back with the verdicts that found no network of North African extremists directly involved in planning to use toxic chemicals in the UK. Regardless of that, those were the grounds of each of the ten Control Orders that were issued by the Home Secretary in March 2005.

Tim Potter

Poisonous headlines

The record of Lula’s Workers’ Party in government during his time in office was by no means perfect. The Workers’ Party, or Partido dos Trabalhadores as it is called in Portuguese, was rocked by the mensalão corruption scandal in 2005 when opposition votes were found to be being bought in Congress. There is also the criticism that high levels of income inequality did not decline sufficiently under Lula.

Credit must be given to Lula and his foreign minister, Celso Amorim, for their fierce opposition to the US attempt to deal in many ways under Lula. ‘The US would probably have dared to intervene more openly to overthrow Chávez,’ observes in her October 2010 article for Red Pepper on Lula’s legacy, ‘it would be mistaken to see Lula’s programme as the mere continuation, with a more humane face, of the neoliberal policies implemented by his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Credit must be given to Lula and his foreign minister, Celso Amorim, for their fierce opposition to the US attempt to turn the whole of the Americas into a single free trade area – the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) – by 2005.’

However, as Sue Branford observes in her October 2010 article for Red Pepper on Lula’s legacy, ‘it would be mistaken to see Lula’s programme as the mere continuation, with a more humane face, of the neoliberal policies implemented by his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Credit must be given to Lula and his foreign minister, Celso Amorim, for their fierce opposition to the US attempt to turn the whole of the Americas into a single free trade area – the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) – by 2005.’ Branford further notes that without Lula’s support for Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez, ‘the US would probably have dared to intervene more openly to overthrow Chávez.’

Brazil has changed a great deal in many ways under Lula. This film does not look at Lula’s time as President. It is a film about the power to change society through trade union struggle and about a man’s relationship with his mother.

Tim Potter

Poisonous headlines