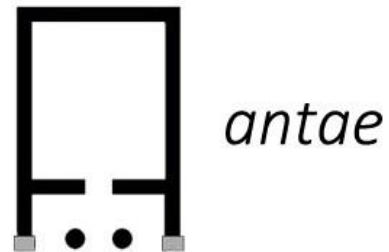


**A Review of *Portugal's Global Cinema: Industry, History and Culture*,  
edited by Mariana Liz**

José Duarte

*antae*, Vol. 6, No. 2-3 (Dec., 2019), 247-250



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**A Review of *Portugal's Global Cinema: Industry, History and Culture*,  
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*ULICES-ULisboa*

At the heart of *Portugal's Global Cinema: Industry, History and Culture*—edited by Mariana Liz, published by I.B. Tauris in the series ‘Tauris World Cinema’, and totaling 283 pages—lies a (rather recent) tendency to look at other cinematic cartographies, in particular the so-called “cinema of small nations”, as opposed to the more conventional, Hollywood-adjacent productions. Noticing the ‘obvious gap in literature’,<sup>1</sup> the editor sets out to explore ‘the international meaning of contemporary Portuguese film’ and, indeed, Liz, along with the other contributors, achieve more than that.<sup>2</sup> The introduction begins with a broad overview of the last four decades of Portuguese cinema, in which the editor explores its national cinema within a global context and a transnational framework. As part of a growing interest in Portuguese cinema, *Portugal's Global Cinema*, written in English, is instrumental in moving towards a better understanding of the struggles, the context, and, at the same time, the possible solutions that national cinemas have adopted in order to survive. The volume achieves this by balancing the analysis of a more political and *auteur* cinema with more popular and mainstream productions, providing the reader with a wide range of topics.

Organised into fourteen chapters, in addition to the introduction and bibliography, the volume has many different layers of meaning regarding the (present) contextualisation of Portuguese cinema: its role in contemporary Portugal, its appeal at an international level, its modes of production, its key issues, and its relevance in cultural, political, and social terms. Although its chapters are not ordered in a clearly identifiable way—that is, not divided into specific sections—it is not difficult to find cohesion and connections between the diverse entries. The fourteen chapters can be divided into three main categories. The first four chapters—in order, ‘Filming Narratives Becoming Events: Documentary “Emplotments” of the Carnation Revolution’ (Luís Trindade); ‘*Our Beloved Month of August*: Between the Filming of the Real and the Reality of Filming’ (Rui Gonçalves Miranda); ‘Political Oliveira’ (Randal Johnson); and ‘Portugal, Europe and the World: Geopolitics and the Human Condition in Manoel de Oliveira’s Films’ (Carolin Overhoff Ferreira)—all focus on political aspects of the films in question, from the ways these engage with particular historical moments—like the Carnation Revolution—to the difficulties of making films in Portugal, the marginalisation of Portuguese cinema, and the specific strategies, approaches, and aesthetic choices made by some directors (that evidence common features in the cinema of “small nations”). These chapters also showcase how Portuguese Cinema has a desire for making cinema and, at the same time, is itself a cinema of resistance, revealing a deep concern for humanity and human issues. Through their individual approaches, these four authors explore the diversity and

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<sup>1</sup> Mariana Liz, ‘Acknowledgements’, in *Portugal's Global Cinema: Industry, History and Culture*, ed. by Mariana Liz (London & New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Mariana Liz, ‘Introduction: Framing the Global Appeal of Contemporary Portuguese Cinema’, in *Portugal's Global Cinema*, pp. 1-10, p. 2

transnationality of Portuguese cinema by looking at (inter)national *auteurs*, like Miguel Gomes, or the master, Manoel de Oliveira.

This is even more obvious in what I consider to be the second section (and the longest of the book), which is centered around two key ideas: the nation being filmed and the nationals filming the nation. In terms of the former idea, this section focuses on how some (mostly foreign) directors perceive certain aspects of the nation: its icons, its cultural history, and its place(s) and space(s). The latter idea may be considered a continuation of the previous one, but this time with (mostly) national directors, each of whom looks specifically at the country via different perspectives: social, economic, and political.

Thus, section two opens with the fifth chapter—'Amália (2008): Stories of a Singer and Tales of a National Cinema' (Anthony de Melo)—and examines a key figure in national culture through Amália's cinematic portrait, the film being a good example, according to de Melo, of a narrative cinema that respects the *auteur* tradition. Indeed, at a national level, *Amália* was a very successful film in terms of box office, and so too was the film analysed in the following chapter, 'La Cage Dorée/The Gilded Cage: A Franco-Portuguese Comedy of Integration' (dir. by Ruben Alves), which was a success both in Portugal as well in France. In this chapter, Ginette Vincendeau observes Alves's skillful directing of the French comedy tradition while simultaneously making a self-conscious film regarding the Portuguese immigration culture. This work is also proof of the filmic quality—one that successfully articulates the 'complex issues of cultural identity in a accessible format for a wider audience'—that can emerge from international cooperation, in this case between France and Portugal.<sup>3</sup> The seventh chapter—'Cinema and the City in European Portugal', written by the editor Mariana Liz—studies the way Lisbon is represented in Wim Wenders's *Lisbon Story* (1994), as well as Porto in Manoel de Oliveira's *Porto of my Childhood* (2001), taking into account the country and its European integration.

The eighth and ninth chapters—'Contextualizing Pedro Costa's Digital Filmmaking' (Nuno Barradas Jorge), and 'Broken Links: The Cinema of Teresa Villaverde' (Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin)—both contextualise the directors and their cinematic visions.<sup>4</sup> Barradas Jorge analyzes the filming strategies used by Pedro Costa through assessing how these reflect both contemporary global filmmaking as well as national issues. The author does this by first looking at how the Portuguese director uses digital filmmaking and the advances in technology in favour of a particular aesthetic characterised by 'a frugal filmmaking style'.<sup>5</sup> The use of digital technology, responsible for greater artistic freedom at both global and national levels, became extremely important in the case of Pedro Costa. Not only did it offer autonomy and opportunity for filming without constraints (economic, but also in terms of production), but it was also the path chosen by the director to affirm his authorship in films

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<sup>3</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, 'La Cage Dorée/The Gilded Cage: A Franco-Portuguese Comedy of Integration', in *Portugal's Global Cinema*, pp. 99-115, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, López and Martin's chapter is the only one that deals with a female director.

<sup>5</sup> Nuno Barradas Jorge, 'Contextualizing Pedro Costa's Digital Filmmaking', in *Portugal's Global Cinema*, pp. 135-151, p. 135.

that deal mainly with depicting marginal characters in Portuguese society, ‘reflecting the social reality of a country in constant structural development’.<sup>6</sup>

López and Martin, on the other hand, focus their attention on Teresa Villaverde’s films through a specific lens, identifying the director’s main themes and aesthetics. At a symbolic level, Villaverde’s work manifests an obsession with ‘social issues’ where themes such as “family” as well as (personal) dramas—emotional and social—predominate. At a formal level, the director explores these issues by using a ‘predominance of subjectivity; dynarrative and dynarration; and a specific fracturing of mise-en-scène strategies in her staging and editing’.<sup>7</sup>

Michael Goddard’s ‘Mysteries of Raúl Ruiz’s Portugal: Territory, Littoral, City and Memory Bridge’, the tenth chapter, delves into the longstanding relationship between the Chilean director and Portugal, observing the way the country, in several of his films but in particular *Mysteries of Lisbon* (2010), represents not only a bridge between the past and present but also between Europe and Latin America, thus confirming Portugal’s transnational role as it leads us ‘into an inescapable sense of transitoriness and passage in which neither personal nor cultural identities are stable’.<sup>8</sup>

The eleventh chapter—‘White Faces/Black Mask: The White Woman’s Burden’ (Hillary Owen)—could likewise be included in this second section because it explores not only Pedro Costa’s representation of Cape Verde but also inquires into issues of gender and race; however, it does establish a bridge (and in a sense belongs) to the third and last part of the volume. This last section is composed by chapters dedicated to the study of the (filmic) relationship between Portugal and its former colonies. Thus, this part can also be said to include the twelfth through to the fourteenth chapters.

Both the twelfth and thirteenth chapters—‘*Light Drops: Portugal Critically Reviewing the Colonial Past?*’ (Paul Melo e Castro), and ‘Colonialism as Fantastic Realism in *Tabu*’ (Lúcia Nagib)—explore Portuguese post-colonial cinematic production. The first one accomplishes this through an analysis of Vendrell’s film via the trope of memory, and the latter by looking at how Gomes uses certain conventions only to undermine them by means of the cinematic apparatus. As Nagib explains, ‘[t]urning [his] back on Hollywood’s artificial colouring [...] Gomes at once reveres and subverts the tricks and conventions of commercial cinema, eliciting awareness both of the location and the medium that captures it’.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the fourteenth chapter—Natália Pinnaza’s ‘Luso-Brazilian Co-Productions: Rescue and Expansion’—concludes both this section as well as the volume. Pinnaza writes about the significance (and rules) of international co-productions in a globalised context, namely between Portugal and Brazil. This chapter aptly closes the book as it returns, in a sense, to its

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<sup>6</sup> Barradas Jorge, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin, ‘Broken Links: The Cinema of Teresa Villaverde’, in *Portugal’s Global Cinema*, pp. 151-167, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Goddard, ‘Mysteries of Raúl Ruiz’s Portugal: Territory, Littoral, City and Memory Bridge’, in *Portugal’s Global Cinema*, pp. 167-185, p. 181.

<sup>9</sup> Lúcia Nagib, ‘Colonialism as Fantastic Realism in *Tabu*’, in *Portugal’s Global Cinema*, pp. 223-239, p. 225.

very beginning, pointing towards issues that are central to understand Portugal's global cinema: its industry, its history, and its culture. These aspects are of great significance because they allow the reader to better understand what defines Portuguese Cinema, what the strategies developed by those involved in the film world were in order to promote it and make it visible, and, finally, what comprise the ongoing discussions around its role in an increasingly transnational and globalised landscape.

Taking this into account, let us not forget the title of the volume, as it points towards a cinema 'beyond national borders', not only problematising the notion of borders but also highlighting cinema's importance to the world by making it more understandable.<sup>10</sup> Addressing the complexity of any (national) cinema is not an easy task, and Liz's edited collection manages to do so by providing the readers with an insightful study that approaches Portuguese film by means of new developments in modes of production and 'authorship, alternative cinematic formats [...], distribution and exhibition' in both European and global contexts.<sup>11</sup> Here, the idea of border is of significance, since it is not limited to a geographical, cultural, linguistic, or geopolitical boundary. Liz emphasizes this by stating in the title that Portugal has a "Global" cinema, one that, by means of the achievements of its directors and its films, 'testifies [...] the international success of contemporary Portuguese film[s], which have been screened and recognized abroad more often and in larger numbers than in previous decades'.<sup>12</sup> Examples include names like João Pedro Rodrigues, Miguel Gomes, and Leonor Teles, all directors who have been praised and celebrated by the critics and the public either in film festivals, theatres, galleries, museums, and even universities.

Lastly, one must note one of the main features of *Portugal's Global Cinema: Industry, History and Culture*, which is the way it is written. The edition's collective expertise does not undermine its reading accessibility; with more and more students, schools, and universities (national and international) interested in studying Portuguese cinema, Liz's edited collection paves the way for other readings to come forward—ones possibly focusing on more contemporary directors who are also changing the landscape of Portuguese cinema—reaching far and wide and making visible its rich diversity that both represents and exceeds what lies within its walls.

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<sup>10</sup> Liz, 'Introduction', p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.