

**Mariana Liz and Hilary Owen, eds.**  
*Women's Cinema in Contemporary Portugal.*  
 New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Adapting Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of "minor cinemas" for the case at hand, it could be said that female-authored Portuguese cinema suffers a double invisibility on the basis of nationality and gender. In this landmark collection addressing fourteen women filmmakers active since 1974, the year in which the Salazar regime was overthrown by the peaceful Carnation Revolution, the editors and contributors are committed both to acknowledging and transcending the aforementioned invisibility, which clearly applies to many but not all of the directors under consideration—Susana de Sousa Dias has, for example, become a major point of reference in art-house world cinema. Since many studies of Hispanic as well as global cinema(s) make only cursory reference to Portuguese films or Portuguese women directors, the original contribution of this volume (alongside Elena Cordero-Hoyo and Begoña Soto Vázquez's upcoming edited collection *Women in Iberian Filmic Culture: A Feminist Approach to the Cinemas of Portugal and Spain*) is indisputable. Even more commendable, however, is the manner in which the ten chapters of Liz and Owen's book, both individually and collectively, engage readers who (at least in my case) will likely only have seen a fraction of the films under consideration, and aim to convince them that it is worth investing their time in learning more about and watching them.

The impetus for the book came from conferences in 2017 and 2018. Varied female voices working in Portuguese, UK, and U.S. institutions subsequently penned contributions divided into the following sections: "Histories;" "Feminisms;" "Archives;" and "Transnationalism." As Liz and Owen note in their co-authored introduction, the project "involves both examining the conditions of film production, exhibition and criticism, that frame and condition the making and reception of films in terms of gender, and, simultaneously, analysing the narrative, style and aesthetics of these films" (6). A normative as well as descriptive approach is made explicit in Liz's chapter where she comments of two post-financial-crash films with female protagonists how "it is very disappointing

that Portuguese women directors reject their role as conscious political agents” (p. 103). Although, as other case-studies make clear, this is not always the case in female-directed films, cinema is hardly exempt from the general tendency by which the Transition from dictatorship to democracy was accompanied by a leap from pre- to post-feminism. The number of women working in the national cinema under Salazar was even less than under Franco in neighbouring Spain, and the history of female cinema in Portugal effectively begins with the return of democratic rule. That does not, of course, imply that the dictatorship has been absent from the corpus of films under consideration or that the relegation of women to the category of second-class citizens was miraculously resolved.

Ana Isabel Soares speaks of the difficulty in accessing the works of Margarida Gil, a documentary filmmaker who seeks to suggest the continuity of gender discrimination and violence from the early modern to dictatorship periods. Patrícia Vieira examines and problematizes the representation of women in relation to their traditional linkage with the natural world with specific reference to *Máscaras* (Noémia Delgado, 1976). A focus on festive rituals involving bulls, alongside the ritualistic slaughter of animals, is shown to document how the coming of age for men is intimately connected with mastery over nature and the female population of a village. The liminal film, Vieira convincingly suggests, “is both a nostalgic homage to a worldview about to disappear with the profound social changes underway at the time and an indictment of that mindset” (p. 116). As Hilary Owen notes in her own chapter, evocatively titled “Monsters, mutants and maternity”: “If any single issue united, shaped and defined Portuguese political feminism over the last half-century, it was the decriminalization of abortion” (65). Hence, for example, Paula Rego—arguably the most prominent cultural ambassador for Portugal irrespective of gender—has done paintings on the subject. The atmosphere evocatively conjured by Owen’s filmic analysis reveals creative variations on the not-always feminist-friendly slasher and horror genres, with one film pointedly re-appropriating foetal images aggressively deployed in pro-life campaigns.

The complex and frequently contradictory demands placed on female conduct is discussed in Alison Ribeiro de Menezes’s eloquent dissection of *Cartas a Uma Ditadura* (Inês de Medeiros, 2006), a documentary about women’s letters to Salazar. Charity and homework were venerated, but the fragile state of the domestic and national economy required that working-class women seek paid employment outside of the home. The prime distinction between the section on “histories” and that on “archives” is the tendency for contributions to the latter

to be more self-reflective, recognizing the productive ability of film to create and not just reflect on the past, alongside a negation of unmediated access to history. Hence, for example, Estela Vieira's discusses in her study of Margarita Cardoso's *Kuxa Kanema* (2003) and Susana de Sousa Dias's *48* (2010) how both films "critique the positivist conception of the archival image as the source of a complete or absolute historical knowledge" (p. 148).

Such questions are hardly unique to Portugal, and the authors make a spirited case for the national cinema having the potential to contribute to broader debates in and around world cinema(s). Sally Faulkner meaningfully compares and contrasts the careers of Margarita Cardoso and Argentine filmmaker Lucrecia Martel. Although the Portuguese director has cited the more canonical foreigner as an influence, Faulkner contends that her explorations of post-colonialism are not derivative and that the disparity in their respective levels of success is due to material more than aesthetic considerations. Martel is but one source of influence amongst a medley of transnational genealogies from which Cardoso seeks inspiration, including but not limited to literary figures such as Virginia Woolf and Carmen Martín Gaité (the latter a key point of reference, I would add, for some female Spanish film directors such as Paula Ortiz). Liz suggests that the relatively little explored Portuguese capital (Intellect's "World Film Locations" series includes entries on Cleveland, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Prague, but not on Lisbon) could reinvigorate the seemingly exhausted field of studying cinematic cities. Filipa Rosário's analysis of four post "year-zero" films ("year-zero" is taken as 2011 when the post-financial-crisis rescue plan demanded that the state relegate national autonomy to the dictates of international capital) suggests that austerity has been a spur to female creativity, and is symptomatic of an ethos that carries through the volume of simultaneously refusing to embrace victimhood or negate structural inequalities. Intelligent and refreshingly free of typos (a particular achievement given numerous non-native contributors), this book carries out important labour in articulating the aesthetic and ethical advantages of (re-)discovering Portuguese women's cinema at home and abroad for students, scholars, and viewers alike.

DUNCAN WHEELER is Professor and Chair of Spanish Studies at the University of Leeds. His most recent book is *Following Franco: Spanish Culture and Politics in Transition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).