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NATIONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN EUROPEAN CINEMA

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After the Crisis: Europe and Nationhood in Twenty-First-Century Portuguese Cinema

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Ten years after the start of the financial crisis that has shaped much of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a general narrative on crisis and austerity, bailouts and recoveries, even if told from different perspectives and by a number of different actors, has started to be consolidated. According to this general narrative, a property-led financial crisis hits the USA in 2007 and is followed by a euro-zone debt crisis in 2008; austerity is imposed in a series of European countries from 2010; a 'rescue package' is 'offered' to Greece in 2010, followed by a 'bailout' to Portugal in 2011 and the 'rescue' of Spanish banks in 2012; and by 2014, there are some signs of improvement. In Portugal, such signs include the end of the three-year agreement between the Portuguese government and the *troika* (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) in 2014; the unexpected results of the 2015 general election and the innovative government solution found since 2016¹; the reversal of a series of austerity measures, and, by 2017, the first

¹The most voted for party in the Portuguese national elections in 2015 was the centre-right PSD (Partido Social Democrata), with 36% of the votes. However, PSD did not obtain

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news pieces on the country's successful recovery, even if far from the economic and social health experienced prior to 2007 (OECD 2017).

As a story now apparently close to its end, and as a narrative spanning approximately ten years, 'the crisis' begins to emerge more clearly as an event with a longer history than first assumed. Understandings thereof are increasingly tied to the development of capitalism and neoliberalism (Harvey 2010), of Europeanisation and globalisation (Habermas 2012), and of modernity and postmodernity (Bauman and Bordoní 2014). Arguing for the importance of studying the crisis within specific contexts and adding to the analyses focused on the crisis and austerity in Portugal in this ten-year period as social, political and cultural facts (Santos 2012; Freire et al. 2015; Leone 2016), this chapter uses the contemporary crisis to explore visions of nationhood in twenty-first-century Portuguese cinema. On the one hand, it suggests twenty-first-century Portugal, as well as its national cinema, cannot be dissociated from the idea of, and indeed the reality, of the 2007–2017 crisis. On the other, it argues for the importance of placing the notion of crisis, and this particular decade of crisis, in time and in space, understanding it as a phenomenon with a history and a geography that go further back than 2007 and beyond Portugal's boundaries.

My analysis considers both the changing notions of Portugal, Portuguese culture and Portuguese cinema in the past two decades, and the extent to which, through economic, political and social indicators, the country, its culture and cinema have changed. As such, it discusses the link between visions of Portuguese nationhood in the twenty-first century, particularly since 2007, and conceptions of periphery, smallness and nostalgia developing within cinema. As the examination of an auteur and a popular film will show, a cinematic engagement with political and cultural ideas of Portugal and the crisis suggests new conceptions of Europe and globalisation are emerging. These carry significant implications for the definition of Portuguese nationhood in the twenty-first century.

a majority. As a result, the second most voted for party, PS (Partido Socialista), on the centre-left, with 32% of the votes, signed an agreement with the (other) two left parties with parliamentary representation in Portugal: the Communist Party, PCP (Partido Comunista Português), with 8% of the votes, and a party of Trotskyist affiliation, BE (Bloco de Esquerda), with 10% of the votes. This agreement meant PS was able to form a government, and to present to the Portuguese President a viable political programme. Neither PCP and BE are in government, but both parties have signed deals agreeing to vote in favour of some of the most important reforms proposed by PS, namely on social and fiscal policies aiming to reverse austerity. For more on this, see Freire and Santana Pereira (2016) and, in English, Finn (2017).

PORTUGAL AND NATIONHOOD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

For Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'since the fifteenth century, Portugal has existed, as a bundle of social representations, in two zones or time-spaces simultaneously: the European zone and the colonial zone' (2011: 403). These two 'zones' carry significant cultural implications. It is in the face of Europe (more precisely, of the European Union [EU] in this particular historical period) and in the face of Portugal's former colonies, particularly in Africa, that ideas of Portuguese nationhood have been constructed since the last decades of the twentieth century. The relationship between Portugal and Europe, as well as between Portugal and its former colonies, was also transformed by the crisis. This chapter is focused on Portugal's relationship with Europe, not least because the link between Portugal and Europe, and particularly between Portugal and the EU, is the one most obviously challenged during the euro-zone crisis.

The period in which this analysis is centred tells a circular story about the country's support for European integration, from suspicion towards the EU to wide support for this political project, and once again back to mistrust. Portugal's accession to the EU (EC [European Communities] at the time) in 1986 was met with cautious enthusiasm by some, and even direct opposition by many, including the then prime minister Aníbal Cavaco Silva. Yet soon, and particularly once major structural funds were transferred from Brussels to Lisbon and the results of their impact were visible to the public eye (the most emblematic of these probably being the conclusion of the motorway linking the country's two main cities, Lisbon and Porto, in 1991), popular support for European integration grew considerably. Portugal's interest in Europe was essentially founded on the availability (and indeed the amount) of EU funds, which sustained a huge transformation of the country, in terms of infrastructures, political importance and culture. By 1991, according to Eurobarometer data, and only five years after Portugal's accession to the EU, over 80% of the Portuguese population thought Portugal had benefitted from joining the EC.²

The transition to the twenty-first century can be seen as the honeymoon phase in the relationship between Portugal and the EU. The 1990s

² All Eurobarometer survey reports are available online. The 1991 Spring wave (Standard Eurobarometer 35) can be accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/cb/cb35/cb35_en.pdf (21 June 2017).

were Portugal's most European years. By that time, national authorities were involved in a huge public relations campaign that aimed to show a new image of a modern and successful country that could overcome the perception of a retrograde Portugal. The hosting of high-profile international events such as the world exhibition Expo'98 and the football competition Euro 2004 are key examples of this turn of the century and turn of the millennium effort. This is despite the fact that, according to Soares, these events actually,

fostered the idea of a country concerned mostly with its foreign image, which was able to spend millions on superfluous buildings, such as football stadiums or useless railway stations, instead of investing in crucial areas for economic growth, like education, research and development. (2007: 466)

Soares echoes here the voices of a number of critics opposing the realisation of these events in Portugal. While Portugal's membership of the EU was seen as undoubtedly positive not just by the politicians in charge, but also, as testified by the Eurobarometer survey cited above, by the majority of the Portuguese population, as the European integration process moved forward, criticism emerged from different corners of Portuguese society. Europe and the EU were seen as either promoters of a necessary and beneficial modernisation, or as imposers of an unstructured opening to capitalism and globalisation. Such visions have implications for the notion of nationhood in Portugal too: the country has either been perceived to be a new, developed nation, or one losing its sovereignty and unique character, as its economic development is undermined and its culture becomes diluted into the engulfing wave of globalisation.

Portugal enters the twenty-first century as one of the most pro-European nations within the EU: approval for EU membership stays very strong until 2001, never falling below 67% (Lobo 2003: 102). Yet, as perhaps predicted, and in a reversal of the shift to strong approval for the Portuguese membership of the EU in the mid-1980s, there is, since 2010, a sharp decline: from this year onwards, and at least until 2013, just over 40% of Portuguese people say being part of the EU is a good thing (Magalhães 2013: 50). The austerity measures imposed on the nation no doubt have an impact on perceptions of Europe and of European institutions. But the direction the European integration process was taking had already started to be questioned by a growing number of people.

Two key films challenged the European modernisation of the country even before 'crisis' was a buzzword. *Slightly Smaller Than Indiana* (Daniel Blaufuks, 2006), for instance, is a personal documentary structured as a road movie, in which the director travels through Portugal to show what he identifies as several instances of abuse suffered by the landscape, which had been torn apart by construction projects, many of them unfinished. Shot just after the end of Euro 2004, the film depicts a country on the brink of collapse, as a place where speed and progress appear as illusions waiting to be shattered. In a similar vein, *Ruínas/Ruins* (Manuel Mozos, 2009) is a non-narrative essay-film that features a series of empty spaces, editing together shots of abandoned settings of domestic and industrial character, privately and publicly owned, in rural and urban areas across the country. These are brought together by fragments of direct but non-diegetic sound (because it is edited off-sync with the images), as well as dissonant electronic music. These add to the eerie depiction of contemporary Portugal as a timeworn and disconnected country embarking on a process of precarious development. As these two film examples show, the crisis should not be taken as a moment of exception, but rather be understood as the almost obvious consequence of a particular economic and financial history—and one which draws on and simultaneously helps to shape the cultural history of the nation.

The vision of Europe as the geopolitical entity guaranteeing the future and modernity of the nation—as well as the acceptance that this is necessarily positive—might be justified by what Sousa Santos (2012) identifies as a teleological narrative of progress that is dominant in Western nations, and that Portugal's elites hoped to replicate. According to this narrative, nations can only get better in time, which means the past is constantly retro-shaped as being 'backwards'—the exception being the re-telling and re-appropriation of history in a logic of consumption, as in the expansion of the so-called heritage industry (Samuel 1994). This (positive) association between European Portugal and an idea of future might also explain why, since the turn to Europe, Portuguese culture can be seen to operate an almost complete cut with the past. This meant, for instance, that the colonial issue was only seldom addressed since EU membership was attained (Sabine 2009), to the point that, at the time of writing in 2017, there are still calls for the country to be 'decolonised' (Câncio 2017).

Whereas the dictatorial New State regime had built its core ideology around the idea of a glorious past (this vision is for instance depicted in the documentary *Fantasia Lusitana/Lusitania Illusion* [João Canijo, 2010]),

democratic European Portugal was almost entirely constructed as a nation with a promising present and an improving future. This political and cultural narrative repressed, as much as possible, historical facts and the association with any sense of (past) backwardness, and therefore left unattended pressing issues in contemporary Portuguese society, including immigration, racism and social inequality (Medeiros 2015; Vale de Almeida 2016). If Europe represented modernity and the future, the break with Europe, once the crisis hit, led to a renewed interest in the past. Problematically, though, as this history and past had been left untouched, the history-based conception of twenty-first-century Portugal has easily turned into an utterly faint, when not distorted, vision of what the nation had been. The politics of *Tabu* (Miguel Gomes, 2012), for instance—probably the most international of recent Portuguese films—were extensively debated, as the film has been received as a parody of colonial times, and one that, because it has been seen as humorous, fails to make a clear political point, being seen as indifferent at best, and uncritical at worst (Faulkner 2015; Medeiros 2016; Owen 2016; Nagib 2017).

The different stages and modes of the relationship Portugal establishes with Europe hint at two possible definitions of nationhood in this country—or, as argued below, at two seemingly contrasting but deeply interconnected visions of nationhood. One, related to modernity and progress, is particularly embraced at the start of the 1990s, but denied after 2008, and especially since austerity hits the country, meaning conceptions of the nation might no longer be safely based on positive, transnational visions of a European future. The other, structured on a discourse promoting the vision of a confident past, and emerging particularly after 2014, offers a distorted and problematically nostalgic vision of history. These two aspects of Portuguese nationhood in the twenty-first century have also been explored by contemporary Portuguese cinema. On the one hand, recent Portuguese films gaining recognition abroad focus on the present, explicitly alluding to Portugal's financial crisis, and re-thinking the nation's connection to the European space. These include Miguel Gomes's *As Mil e Uma Noites/Arabian Nights* (2015) trilogy, Marco Martins's *São Jorge/Saint George* (2017), Teresa Villaverde's *Colo* (2017) and Pedro Pinho's *A Fábrica de Nada/The Nothing Factory* (2017). On the other, a significant number of Portuguese films released since the *troika* years, and particularly successful with national audiences, show an emotional attachment to the past. This is for instance the case of *Os Maias: Cenas da Vida Romântica/The Maias: Scenes from Romantic Life* (João Botelho 2014), *O Pátio das*

Cantigas (Leonel Vieira 2015), *Cartas da Guerra/Letters from War* (Ivo Ferreira 2016) and *Jacinta* (Jorge Paixão da Costa 2017).

The extent to which visions of nationhood are articulated in twenty-first-century Portuguese cinema is not just a matter of representation and political engagement, but also of aesthetics. While Portugal might not be depicted in film as a European nation, what is problematised in cinematic terms is the expression of the distance and/or proximity to Europe, which stands for ideas of modernity, progress and potential standardisation. Similarly, the films examined here are not about the Portuguese colonies or the nation's (post)colonial status—even if studies on the empire, memory and post-colonialism are a rich field of enquiry in contemporary Portuguese cinema (see for instance Owen and Klobucka 2014; Vieira 2015; Faulkner and Liz 2016). Rather, they express a sense of longing for and an emotional attachment to the past that at the same time denounces a worrying ignorance about that same past. *Saint George* and *O Pátio das Cantigas* are examined in greater detail below as vivid illustrations of the complex relationship between Portugal and Europe in the transition to the twenty-first century: as utopian promise and present disappointment in the first case, and as growing nostalgia for a specific vision of the past of country and its cinema, as well as, potentially, a coherent national identity, in the second.

PORTUGUESE CINEMA, CRISIS AND AUSTERITY: THE CASE OF *SAINT GEORGE*³

Despite a lack of data and the limited number of systematic studies on these issues, an article mapping cultural policy in Portugal suggests the impact of austerity has been particularly felt in the cultural sector (Garcia et al. 2016). As part of the measures imposed by the *troika*, the Portuguese government suspended all funds to the audiovisual sector in 2012. This was an acutely hard blow to a sector historically perceived to be in a permanent state of crisis. Labelled the 'year zero' of Portuguese cinema, 2012 was a year of protests by all those involved in the film business in Portugal (Kourelou et al. 2014). It was also the year that saw the creation of a new Cinema Law, which aimed to boost film production in Portugal, bringing

³I am thankful to the film's production company, Filmes do Tejo II, for giving me access to *Saint George*; the film was no longer in theatres and not yet commercially available at the time of writing.

together funds from the public and private sectors (Pinazza 2017). However, the law was never fully implemented, which has led producers, filmmakers and others, to argue 'Portuguese cinema is in danger' (Gomes and Urbano 2013). The tension between professional associations and the government has been growing since 2012. More recently, in February 2017, Portuguese filmmakers staged another protest at the Berlin Film Festival against this Cinema Law.

The episodes described here highlight the extent to which cinema has become an important field to challenge notions of crisis and practices of austerity. Like the national cinemas of other European countries affected by austerity, Portuguese cinema has also been producing films *about* the crisis, and directly depicting its effects. Iván Villarrea Álvarez, for instance, has been mapping what he calls the 'cinema of austerity' in Portugal and Spain. He divides this cinema into two main phases: the first, between 2007 and 2010, is composed of a number of films that seem to preclude the crisis, and are almost premonitions of events to come (*Slightly Smaller than Indiana* and *Ruins* would be included in this category); the second, between 2011 and 2017, comprises films that instead address head-on the consequences of austerity. The films that are part of this second phase tell the stories of people who lost their jobs, their houses and/or their families, and often turn to violence as a result. Frequently allegorical, these films 'show an atomised mosaic of society, waiting for the wind to change' (Villarrea Álvarez 2017; my translation).

Marco Martins's *Saint George*, released in 2016, is one of the films listed by Villarrea Álvarez as an example of this second phase of the cinema of austerity. Seen by over 40,000 viewers, *Saint George* was one of the most watched national films in Portugal in 2017.⁴ Undoubtedly the film's topic and extensive promotion campaign, which stressed its realistic depiction of Portugal in 2011, contributed to this success. Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, for instance, alluding to the aim of his government to reverse austerity, tweeted his support for the film, describing it as 'a hard punch of reality that inspires us to continue with change'. Following art cinema conventions, the film constructs a realistic portrait of the nation. But *Saint George* also comes to occupy the terrain of what could be defined as a 'middlebrow cinema' (Faulkner 2016)—it is a quality film,

with high production values, and it is appealing to audiences. It not only adopts a plot-based narrative, telling an essentially straightforward story, it also casts a popular Portuguese star, Nuno Lopes, who has worked in numerous film, TV and theatre productions at national and international level. Nuno Lopes also significantly won a Best Actor award at the Venice Film Festival for his performance in *Saint George*—a prize he dedicated to the 'heroes' who had been fighting the 'dragon of austerity'.⁵

In *Saint George*, Jorge (played by Nuno Lopes) is an unemployed factory worker and an amateur boxer. The link between boxing and life under austerity is drawn clearly from the start: *Saint George* is a film about someone forced against the ropes. Similar to films such as Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), *Saint George* is a vivid account of austerity, which leaves viewers with a feeling of impotence and anger. As the narrative progresses, it might look like there is a way out (of claustrophobic housing, isolated neighbourhoods, and a life of poverty)—but despite Jorge's endeavours, there never really is a solution to his problems. In an attempt to stop his wife Susana (Mariana Nunes), from whom he is separated, leaving for Brazil with their son Nelson (David Semedo), Jorge finds a job as a debt collector. He hopes to save some money and to be able to rent a flat for his family, away from his abusive father, with whom he currently lives. His experience in the boxing world and his athletic physique frame him as the perfect candidate for a job that essentially requires the ability to physically intimidate those owing money to his employers. However, Jorge is neither comfortable in his role nor able to actually turn to violence. His characterisation as a boxer who is unable to be violent is one of the many contradictions that the film explores, anchored in a story of richness and poverty, coldness and sensitivity, modernity and backwardness.

The film's beginning is very similar to the scenes in *Ruins*. *Saint George*'s very first sequence edits together a series of empty, abandoned or destroyed locations, including office buildings, advertising boards and restaurants (Fig. 12.1). Unlike *Ruins*, however, *Saint George* then goes on to explore not so much these spaces and the meaning they convey, but rather the lives that are caught in between such emptiness. The neighbourhoods where Jorge and Susana live, for instance, could also be first recognised as abandoned spaces or locations under construction. By placing the narrative in such spaces, the film highlights smallness, periphery and confinement, as

⁴Statistics as of July 2017, the time of writing. Box office numbers are made available by ICA—the Portuguese Institute of Cinema—on their webpage: <http://www.ica-ip.pt/en/downloads/box-office/> (accessed 3 July 2017).

⁵Lopes's acceptance speech can be watched in full at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9aZ7m7-UNo> (accessed 2 August 2017).

Fig. 12.1 Empty, abandoned and destroyed locations mark the initial sequence of *Saint George*

well as a tension between a sense of belonging and exclusion, as its key themes—themes that effectively mirror Portugal’s historical relationship to Europe.

Two main stylistic devices support the film’s themes. Firstly, camera-work privileges close ups. Framing is often tight and claustrophobic, focusing on details and inserts. When shots are wider, people and objects block what viewers should actually be looking at. This sort of strategy, that at the same time highlights and delimits the different layers of each image, contributes to the notion that obstacles are omnipresent: in the shot, in the narrative and in Jorge’s life. The constant tight framing highlights the sense of entrapment that defines Jorge’s character—in the boxing ring, in his professional life and in his personal life. From the start, Jorge is reduced to insignificance by framing choices that see people and buildings constrain him. He sleeps in a small room with his son Nelson, in a two-bedroom flat that seems to house at least six people; he prepares for a fight in a packed dressing room, and is then cornered in a limited boxing ring; he talks to Susana between parked buses, his body and face out of focus, oppressed between the urgency of what he has to say and the weakness of the promises he can make (Fig. 12.2).

Fig. 12.2 Jorge being physically and visually oppressed in *Saint George*

Secondly, sound tends to hide what characters say—either by capturing and making particularly prominent background noises, which obscure dialogue, or by voicing things viewers do not actually see, as in the case of the scene where a group of men discuss unemployment benefits at Jorge’s father’s flat. Sound is crucial for the feelings of simultaneous entrapment and intimacy developed in *Saint George*. The film begins with a sigh by the main character. He is then heard praying to Saint George, while training. Whispered prayers to Saint George and repeated mantras can be heard throughout: for instance, Jorge’s coach keeps telling him, ‘You are great’ [*Tu és grande*], in a bid to offer encouragement just before the start of another fight. Dialogue is constant, but not consequential. Questions are repeated but no answers are presented. Speaking to Susana, Jorge insists: ‘Why don’t you come back home?’, but she shrugs and moves away rather than explaining her reasons. The closeness and disconnectedness of the sound matches the tightness of the image, in a claustrophobic narrative that moves slowly, but not far.

Portuguese critic Vasco Câmara (2017) argues the film draws from different cinematic genres, namely melodrama and film noir. The film’s emotional density seems to derive from a melodramatic streak already present in Martins’s previous work (see for instance his film *Alice* [2005], also

starring Lopes as its protagonist), whereas from film noir, *Saint George* inherits a characteristic anxiety about identity and disorientation. Fragmentation emerges not just as a main topic of the film, but also as a key feature of contemporary society. This is an issue that is made worse by austerity policies and that is well expressed in the construction of Jorge as a character. He is a father, but cannot perform that role fully because he needs money. He is strong but sensitive, unable to hit people when working for the debt-collecting agency, and unable to win fights, supposedly for being too soft. A sense of disorientation is vividly mirrored in the expression of the film's protagonist. Despite being at the centre of the narrative, and having an overwhelming percentage of screen time in relation to other characters, Jorge spends most of the film on the side-lines, watching events as they unfold, learning and copying behaviours and attitudes, trying to understand what is happening and what his role might be. For instance, when he starts working for the debt collectors, he travels in the back seat of the car, and his facial expression seems to indicate his puzzlement and a sense of being lost, as if he is wondering why he is there and what he is meant to be doing. In fact, it is when he travels alone for the first time (now in the driver's seat), that the narrative takes a turn for the worst: Jorge is not in control of his life, and when he tries to take the initiative, he is seemingly punished by structural hierarchies.

This is a realist, almost documentary film. Yet, *Saint George* appears as a realist film about illusion. Boxing is framed as an illusion (for instance, when, clearly bruised after losing another fight, Jorge tells his son he is not hurt), and wealth is framed as an illusion (as represented by the character of the chef at a Michelin-starred, modern and bright-lit restaurant who cannot pay his debts), in the same way that the work of the debt collectors is fictitious (they don't actually help anyone, and the actions they carry out are illegal). While *Saint George* is absolutely centred on the present, the film suggests there has been a better past. It hints at the glorious old times of boxing, for instance, by referencing Fernando Lopes's *Belarmino* (1964), a classic of Portuguese cinema on a similar topic. The very recent past is also framed as more positive than the present: the scenes at the restaurant and in the city centre hint at periods of development, even if these are only in the film to show the viewer what no longer exists. The sense of illusion is heightened by the fact that this is Martins's first digitally shot feature film. But mostly, this is the story of the illusion that were the *troika* years in Portugal (a topic also explored in Miguel Gomes's *Arabian Nights*)—the illusion of being helped while in reality people's lives were made worse,

which mirrors the illusion of progress European integration projected into peripheral nations like Portugal from the mid-1980s onwards.

Despite the clear denouncing of such issues, the film is not entirely political. Race and gender, embodied by Nelson and Susana, for instance, are ignored. *Saint George* is centred on yet another white male protagonist, who is seen dealing with his frustration and impotence. The film can be read as a problem of postmodern complexity, as it pinpoints fragmentation and acceleration as crucial setbacks for a potentially European Portugal. Europe appears in *Saint George* as an imposer of inequality. In turn, Portugal is here seen at its least European, as it is no longer a nation characterised by progress and development. *Saint George* is a film about the illusion that is/was European Portugal—a nation for which unsustainable development meant significant gaps in progress and high levels of inequality became very quickly evident across its disintegrating society.

NOSTALGIA FOR NATION AND FILM IN *O PÁTIO DAS CANTIGAS*

Whereas *Saint George* denounces the unequal, uneven and inconstant relationship between Portugal and Europe, focusing its narrative and form on ideas of fragmentation, decadence and entrapment, *O Pátio das Cantigas* is constructed on a sense of nostalgia. *O Pátio das Cantigas* is also set in the present, but its production and promotion history, as well as its narrative, stress the vision of a Lisbon and a country that is continuously compared to those of a supposed 'golden age'. The present, officially emerging as post-austerity, is not entirely bleak. However, promises of a better future are constructed on very thin foundations. As such, *O Pátio das Cantigas* offers important insight into how Portugal's relationship to Europe shifted during and immediately after the *troika* years, as well as into Portugal's supposed new positioning in a globalised world.

O Pátio das Cantigas is a remake of the homonymous film directed by Francisco Ribeiro in 1942. The 1942 version of *O Pátio das Cantigas* is regarded as the quintessential example of the *comédia à portuguesa*, a popular genre in the 1940s (Shaw 2003). These comedies were known for drawing a simile between neighbourhood life and family life. Accordingly, *O Pátio das Cantigas* tells the story of a group of people living in a small area of Lisbon's historical centre. Focused particularly on the love triangle formed by Rosa (Dânia Neto), a modest, hard-working, and very attractive young woman; Evaristo (Miguel Guilherme), a widower in his fifties,

owner of a gourmet grocer's; and Narciso (César Mourão), a bon vivant in his thirties working as a tourist guide and *tuk tuk* driver, the film tells the story of this particular community through episodes relating to these and other characters—their partners, children and other relatives, all somehow attached to this area of the city.

This remake of *O Pátio das Cantigas* was part of an initiative supported by public television channel RTP. In addition to this version of *O Pátio das Cantigas*, remakes were also made of *A Canção de Lisboa* (Pedro Varela, 2016) and *O Leão da Estrela* (Leonel Vieira, 2015), originally shot in 1933 and 1947, respectively, and considered some of the finest examples of the *comédia à portuguesa*. The films were also screened as a mini-series on RTP after their commercial premiere on the big screen. The fact that these remakes were produced and then watched by so many people in the years after austerity was implemented in Portugal shows an apparent shift in society to a desire to look back not with negativism (to a recent past) but with nostalgia (to a more ancient history), as well as a willingness to engage in escapism through entertainment.

O Pátio das Cantigas is particularly relevant for the discussion about cinema and nationhood in contemporary Portugal as it was an incomparable hit with national audiences. This is the most watched Portuguese film ever, with 607,976 viewers, also according to data published by ICA. In the same way that *Saint George* is a film about austerity and can simultaneously be seen as a product of the austerity imposed in the film industry, *O Pátio das Cantigas* aimed to launch a debate not just about Portugal's supposed greatness, but also about the vitality of Portuguese cinema. However, unlike the international success many art films, including, to an extent, *Saint George*, were achieving in film festivals around the globe, Portuguese popular films, often derided by critics, might achieve impressive box office figures, but they almost always fail to recover their production costs, as the Portuguese internal market is too small and there are limited opportunities for export.

The debate about the possibility of existence and development of a popular Portuguese cinema, which would be different from the 'international' Portuguese cinema praised abroad, but is rarely seen by national audiences (Liz 2017), has a long history. The 1940s films have been particularly important for those defending the existence of a commercial cinema in Portugal, as they are perceived to be role models for audience interest. By contrast, many filmmakers and critics have repeatedly dismissed not just the endeavour to produce 'films that please audiences', but

also the notion that the films of the 1940s would be the appropriate standard to build on. João Mário Grilo, for instance, argues these films 'contribute, in a relevant way, to the resurrection of a nightmare of the ill-famed "national cinema", which defined the isolation of the Portuguese cinematic production in the 1930s and 1940s' (2006: 31; my translation). The national specificity of Portuguese popular cinema is one of the most contentious issues being raised, particularly in the era of transnational, global and world cinema(s), as well as increasing globalisation.

As Lisa Shaw (2003) notes, the *comédia à portuguesa* films of the 1930s and 1940s were cheap to produce. By contrast, the new version of *O Pátio das Cantigas* had a budget of €1million, a spectacular figure for a film 'industry' (if the term can even be applied) the size of the Portuguese film sector. With high production values, the film's ensemble cast included a long-list of mostly TV stars, in addition to a series of cameos by media and entertainment personalities. With the aim to modernise not just the plot (see below) but also the looks of the film, the remake was characterised by a series of over-lit images and fast-paced sequences, often accompanied by popular songs. With plenty of colour, light and catchy music, the film has a shiny and glossy look, not too dissimilar from the one adopted by the French directors of the *cinéma du look*. However, unlike the films of Luc Besson and others in the 1980s, *O Pátio das Cantigas* seems to lack the supposed postmodern irony generally attributed to their French counterparts (see for instance Vincendeau 1995). The lack of distancing (Oliveira 2015), as the feature that would allow *O Pátio das Cantigas* to think the present in relation to the past, is precisely what compromises the film's vision of nationhood imposed on the viewer.

O Pátio das Cantigas both pays homage to 1940s Portuguese cinema and departs from its canon. A number of sequences in the new version are direct retakes from the original film, such as the scene in which Evaristo, having drunk a bit too much, wanders through the neighbourhood, stumbling, and has a lengthy conversation with a street lamp. The opening sequence is also essentially a shot-by-shot retake of the original film, although there are a number of important differences in terms of aesthetics and narrative focus. In the 1942 film, we see the opening credits over images of traditional buildings and small neighbourhoods in the historic centre of Lisbon. The 2015 version of *O Pátio das Cantigas* opens with the film's credits appearing on bunting, hanging from similar houses and blocks of flats. The flags in evidence at the centre of the screen are the colour of the Portuguese flag (green, yellow, red) and the music, first

cheerful, quickly turns melancholic, echoing fado tunes and guitar cords. The sequence immediately marks the ‘Portugueseness’ of the film and its narrative, alluding not just to the flag, but also to fado—the perceived Portuguese ‘national song’ (Holton 2006)—in a nationalist streak that seems inherited from the 1940s dictatorial censorship, but feels out of place (and out of time) well into the twenty-first century.

A key difference between the two films is the age of the protagonists. Almost every character from the original film is here replaced by a much younger avatar. The exception is Evaristo, who stays the same age. Hence, in the 2015 version of *O Pátio das Cantigas* Evaristo is even more clearly marked as different from the rest of the ensemble, in terms of his cultural references and taste. For instance, in a knowing reference to the film’s status as a remake, Rosa tells Evaristo: ‘I love the way you speak; it is as if you are a character in those old movies.’ This is despite the fact that, as discussed in greater detail below, *O Pátio das Cantigas* modernises all characters, even Evaristo, in terms of their jobs and pastimes.

The film is at the same time contemporary and full of anachronisms—particularly with regards to gender representations. *O Pátio das Cantigas* actualises age, but not gender equality. As was the case in the original film, the opening sequence of the 2015 remake presents us with a narrator. Looking down at Rosa as she leaves her flat to go to work in the morning, the narrator presents the protagonists of the film—most of them, the same as in the 1942 version. His POV shot shows Rosa from above, as he claims that she is ‘so hot’ (Fig. 12.3). The camera then moves to street level to show mostly her legs, as she walks past in a tight dress and high heels—a shot that will be replicated when we have the introduction of another young, female character, Amália. It is not just the women that are reduced to being ‘desirable’ or ‘undesirable’ (as in the case of Amália’s sister, Susana, apparently overweight). Men too are presented drinking beer around a table, discussing how hot women are, but not expressing any other interests or concerns.

O Pátio das Cantigas fails to address a series of political and historical issues, such as the link between the nation and the ‘other’, here expressed in terms of the relationships established between Portuguese and foreign characters. The issue of language becomes prominent as, for instance, Rufino speaks ‘*Portuñol*’ (a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish) to Spanish clients in his hostel, and Evaristo tries to teach his employees, João Magrinho and Alfredo, French, so they are able to communicate with tourists entering the shop. At the same time, however, Evaristo keeps

Fig. 12.3 Rosa as seen by the narrator in *O Pátio das Cantigas*

mispronouncing the name of the Indian neighbour in his building (a character the 2015 version adds to the original plot, perhaps in an attempt to show a more cosmopolitan side to contemporary Lisbon). He also complains about the smell of curry (this neighbour runs a family restaurant nearby), and the film is not clear on whether the sought reaction is laughter, and indeed if the viewer is being prompted to laugh with him or laugh at his racism.⁶

O Pátio das Cantigas expresses a tension between an economic openness towards the foreign and a clear stance against the erosion of Portuguese culture. In another scene, characters come together to approve the potential hiring of a foreign DJ for the neighbourhood’s traditional, annual street party. This scene predicts a real-life situation, since, in 2017, the organising commission of *Santos Populares*⁷ in Alfama (one of the most

⁶A vivid debate developed in Portugal in September 2017 as new research presented the nation as one of the most racist countries in Europe. According to data published by the European Social Survey, over 52% of people in Portugal believe people from different ethnic groups are born with less intelligence; 54% see specific ethnic groups and cultures as intrinsically better than others. As argued above, in relation to the need to de-colonize the country (Câncio 2017), this is a pressing issue, which stems in part from the inability of successive Portuguese governments to promote a serious and wide discussion about the nation’s colonial history. For more on this, see for instance Gorjão Henriques 2017.

⁷Santos Populares are annual street parties taking place in several locations across Lisbon in June, in honour of Saint Anthony, the city’s patron.

depicted neighbourhoods in the films of the *comédia à portuguesa*) prohibited foreign music, and only Portuguese songs could be heard. Similarly, in a completely different way from the original film, the 2015 version of *O Pátio das Cantigas* frames its final sequence around a Bollywood dance number performed by the film's protagonists, although this sequence is never justified in terms of plot or narrative. There is a referencing of 'other' cultures in the film, unlike in the *comédia à portuguesa*, but in *O Pátio das Cantigas* this appears as not more than a vague nod to a dense and complex issue.

Shaw (2003) argues the *comédia à portuguesa* films were de-historicised and de-politicised. To an extent, the remake too seems as if it could take place in any time period, ignoring pressing issues in contemporary society. As an exercise in cinematic remaking, *O Pátio das Cantigas* could be seen as a fantasy. If *Saint George* was a reality about (the European) fantasy, *O Pátio das Cantigas* is a fantasy about (Portuguese) reality. The film is grounded in the present, but its narrative relates something that does not exist. As is commonly accepted (Shaw 2003; Baptista 2010), the Lisbon and the nation constructed in the *comédia à portuguesa* was one essentially built for the censored cinema permitted during the dictatorship. As such, this new version of *O Pátio das Cantigas* presents not just an imagined contemporary Portugal, but also significantly, one based on an imagined past nation.

Although perhaps not as explicitly as in *Saint George*, the crisis is also present in *O Pátio das Cantigas*. For instance, Rosa complains about low sales in the shoe shop where she works. However, unlike in *Saint George*, the crisis appears here as a motor for change, rather than immobility: the film presents a number of opportunities arising from variations in the economy, namely in the tourism sector. As mentioned, Narciso is a *tuk tuk* driver; his brother Rufino runs a hostel (where Rosa also works part time); Evaristo's old grocery (in the 1942 film) is transformed, in 2015, into a gourmet grocery, where 'typical' produce is sold to tourists. Tradition is here re-branded as heritage for consumption, as tourism appears as an alternative form of globalisation—one that these characters can control—that projects a positive view of their city and their country on international media.

This issue is all the more pressing as Lisbon is increasingly becoming an international mass tourism destination. Trendy magazine *Monocle* suggested in 2015 that nostalgia saved Lisbon (Tuck 2015). However, the jury is still out on whether nostalgia is in fact saving or destroying the city,

as we witness a simultaneous devaluation of cultural heritage and the growing value of material heritage, with housing prices sky-rocketing in the city's historical centre. The risks associated with gentrification are all the more worrying in the case of Lisbon as, since Sandra Marques Pereira argued at a conference on the future of the city in April 2017, Lisbon is actually unable to compete in the housing and tourism global market due to the structural poverty of country. For instance, in the past few years, even though Lisbon developed steadily, the middle classes never made it to the city centre, which was instead immediately taken over by foreign investors (Marques Pereira 2017).

To an extent, *O Pátio das Cantigas* is part of this gentrification process. It attempts to bank on the commercial value of heritage (namely the memory people had, not of actually watching these films, now too old, but of hearing comments about these films as 'good' examples of Portuguese cinema), while ignoring the symbolic value of the original examples of *comédia à portuguesa*: not only were these films not very good, but they were also complicit with the New State dictatorial regime. The idea of nationhood expressed in *O Pátio das Cantigas* ignores the dictatorial and colonialist past, even if it insists on a global positioning for the nation that draws on a vision of a supposed valuable past. In doing so, the film projects a homogenising notion of nationhood, which problematically ignores difference at many levels.

CONCLUSION

The two films examined here allow us to think about twenty-first century Portugal through the 2007–2017 crisis and its history. They have austerity as a referent, but point to a longer history of Portugal and its cinema, highlighting as key themes associated with visions of Portuguese nationhood exclusion and periphery, tourism and nostalgia. Austerity and gentrification become two sides of the same coin. The first shows just how much the crisis hurt people in Portugal, not so much because it was a moment of exception, but because it highlighted what many had noticed before, particularly in terms of growing inequality. The second seems to suggest a new beginning is possible, but while referencing the past and tradition as positive indicators, also seems to bypass this more recent history, that actually is not as nice as it appears to be. The Europe that emerges in these films is unstable because built on weak bases. It is a Europe of inequality, unjustified and uncontrolled speed, as well as shallow progress. Globalisation too,

often ignoring Portugal's previous role in the world, and the historical responsibility the nation should carry forward because of it, is built on glossy and superficial visions of what an engagement with the other might be. Thinking about Portuguese nationhood in the twenty-first century in relation to the crisis proves particularly fruitful. This crisis, however, has a history, and this history is not yet over. Beyond the weak models these films seem to highlight (a Europe of inequality through speedy development and then austerity, or a Europe of inequality through speedy development based on tourism and nostalgia), alternative visions of nationhood in Portugal will hopefully develop in coming years of the twenty-first century.

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