

PORTUGUESE WOMEN FILMMAKERS AND THE *ESTADO NOVO*. FROM INVISIBILITY TO CULTURAL MEMORY

MULHERES CINEASTAS PORTUGUESAS E O ESTADO NOVO. DA INVISIBILIDADE À MEMÓRIA CULTURAL

Margarida Esteves Pereira*
margarida@ilch.uminho.pt

This paper aims to offer a general perspective of the presence (or, rather, absence) of female filmmakers during the *Estado Novo* period. If, on the one hand, the situation of the Portuguese filmmakers must be framed within the context of the regime's ideology with regard to women (Cova & Pinto 2002), on the other hand, we cannot ignore the wider context of the presence/absence of women filmmakers in cinema during the twentieth century. Thus, the issue will be framed within previous work devoted to the question of women and film in a wider context (*cf.* Butler 2002; Lauzen 2019; White 2017); as regards the Portuguese case, the study takes as a starting point work done by Castro (2000) and Pereira (2016). We also claim that this invisibility, as regards the New State regime, has been counterbalanced by the appearance in recent years of a number of documentaries made by women who are recovering the memory of the regime. Finally, the article will focus on a film by Swedish filmmaker Solveig Nordlund, titled *Mitt Andra Land* [My Other Country] (2014), arguing that it establishes a bridge between individual memory and collective memory by invoking the personal experience of the filmmaker, who starts working in Portugal in the 1970s.

Keywords: Women filmmakers. Portugal. *Estado Novo*. Solveig Nordlund. Memory.

Este artigo tem como objetivo oferecer uma perspetiva geral sobre a presença (ou melhor, a ausência) de cineastas mulheres durante o período do Estado Novo. Se, por um lado, a situação das cineastas portuguesas deve ser enquadrada no contexto da ideologia do regime em relação às mulheres (Cova & Pinto 2002), por outro, não podemos ignorar o contexto mais amplo da presença/ausência de mulheres cineastas no cinema durante o século XX. Assim, a questão será enquadrada em trabalhos anteriores dedicados à questão das mulheres e do cinema num contexto mais amplo (*cf.* Butler 2002; Lauzen 2019; White 2017); no caso português, o estudo parte do trabalho de Castro (2000) e Pereira (2016). Afirmamos também que essa invisibilidade, no que diz respeito ao regime do Estado Novo, foi contrabalançada pelo aparecimento nos últimos anos de vários documentários feitos por mulheres que estão a recuperar a memória do regime. Por fim, o artigo focar-se-á no filme da cineasta sueca Solveig Nordlund, intitulado *Mitt Andra Land* [O Meu Outro País] (2014), argumentando que este estabelece uma ponte entre a memória individual e a memória coletiva, invocando a experiência pessoal da realizadora e do seu trabalho em Portugal desde a década de 1970.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres cineastas. Portugal. Estado Novo. Solveig Nordlund. Memória.

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* Department of English and North-American Studies/ Institute of Arts and Humanities, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2189-7457>

1. Introduction

Let me begin with a somewhat dislocated quotation. In *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Ann E. Kaplan justifies the ahistorical perspective in her book by saying that “certain patterns that involve women (...) in relation to marriage, sexuality, and the family (...) transcend traditional historical categories”. This happens, according to the author, because “women have been relegated to the outskirts of historical discourse” (Kaplan 2001, p. 2). She states:

[W]omen, in being relegated to absence, silence, and marginality, have thereby also to a degree been relegated to the outskirts of historical discourse, if not to a position totally outside of history (and of culture), which has been defined as the history of white (usually middle-class) men. (*ibidem*)

Although Kaplan is here referring to questions of female representation in classical Hollywood film, this quotation points to important issues concerning women’s marginality and silence which will be at the centre of this article.

For it seems to me that in order to discuss the subject of women’s invisibility as filmmakers in Portugal in the period of the *Estado Novo* (henceforward referred to as the *New State*) we should take into account the absence of women filmmakers in the wider context of world cinema. Thus, this article proposes to address the question of women and filmmaking in the context of the *New State* by first undertaking a brief survey of the panorama of the absence of women as filmmakers during the twentieth century in the wider world, and of their progressive (though slow) coming to existence. This is intended to help us contextualize the near absence of Portuguese women directors in the period in focus, in the face of the specificities of the Portuguese case, which will also be addressed. The very few studies that have focused on this absence, have shown that it was only after the Carnation Revolution in 1974 (the revolution that would overthrow the dictatorial regime) that women started to appear as directors in Portuguese cinema, but this was (still is) a very timid presence.

Notwithstanding the initial quotation, this article is not intended as an ahistorical view of the matter, much the opposite. We will focus on the relation between women directors and a specific historical period of Portuguese history. Thus, because it is our aim to focus on the Portuguese women directors and their relation with the dictatorial regime of the *New State*, we will then proceed to examine briefly the conditions under which women lived in this period. Given our space limitations in this study, this investigation can only be very sketchy and intended as a required historical background to discuss the presence/ absence of women in the public sphere in a very long period of Portuguese history in the twentieth century.

After these necessary considerations, the article will present an overview of the contemporary women filmmakers who are at the moment making films, many of which in the documentary genre, focusing on the period of the dictatorial regime. These films, which can be assessed as forms of cultural memory (and this is certainly the case in many

of them), are very often also intertwined with personal memories of the past (mostly in the case of the documentaries). By presenting themselves within an autobiographical frame, some of these documentaries seem to move further away from whatever social motives and intentions we ascribe to the documentary form (*cf.* Nichols 1991, p. 4). That is, they further confound the already difficult distinction between fictional and documentary films.

This is also the case of the documentary which will be briefly analysed here, the film *Mitt Andra Land* [My Other Country], by Swedish-Portuguese director Solveig Nordlund. As we intend to argue, Solveig Nordlund is a very fruitful case analysis, because she is part of the first generation of women filmmakers who started working in Portuguese cinema before the revolution of 25 April 1974, having become a director in the 1980s. As we intend to argue, the film by Solveig Nordlund presents an interesting instance of cultural memory, in the sense that it is presented as a personal memory of a historical moment and it does so by using films that may be seen as part of a cultural history of the Portuguese cinema of those years.¹

2. The invisibility question: women's films and women filmmakers of the *New State*

We cannot perhaps talk about the visibility or invisibility of Portuguese women filmmakers in the context of the *New State* regime (1933–74) without mentioning the very telling fact that during this period there was only one feature film directed by a woman.² This was *Três Dias sem Deus* [Three Days without God] (1946), by the now virtually unknown filmmaker Bárbara Virgínia, who would never again make another feature film, and who would emigrate to Brazil in 1951, where she lived until her death in 2015.³ The next feature film to be directed by a woman in Portugal would be *Trás-os-Montes* (1976), co-directed by António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro (*cf.* Pereira 2016, p. 180).

¹ 'Cultural memory' has become in the past thirty years an ample area of studies, and it is not our intention to go over discussions regarding its meaning. It is nonetheless useful to state that the term is here used in the sense that is given to it by Astrid Erll in her Introduction to *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (2010), as an "umbrella term" to refer to "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Erll 2010, p. 2). She further defines the term taking into account the three important dimensions of our understanding of culture as comprising social, material, and mental aspects, thus highlighting the interdisciplinary foundation of this area of studies. She states: "Understood in this way, 'cultural memory' can serve as an umbrella term which comprises 'social memory' (the starting point for memory research in the social sciences), 'material or medial memory' (the focus of interest in literary and media studies), and 'mental or cognitive memory' (the field of expertise in psychology and the neurosciences)" (*idem*, p. 4). Thus, 'cultural memory' is here preferred to the term 'collective memory', although it entails an understanding of memory which also "emphasizes its social or collective nature", as say Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (2011, p. 4) in the introduction to *The Collective Memory Reader*.

² In an article titled "Para uma história das histórias do cinema português", Paulo Cunha disputes this assertion, claiming that the recent announcement of Bárbara Virgínia as the first woman director of Portuguese cinema is another of the myths of the history of Portuguese cinema. He states that the claim is inaccurate because, although Bárbara Virgínia is the first woman to direct a feature in Portuguese cinema, there were other women before her that had already made short films, namely, the Azorean Amélia Borges Rodrigues, who had apparently made up to 35 documentary films between the years 1934 and 1937 (Cunha 2016, p. 42).

³ For more about Bárbara Virgínia *cf.* Castro (2000, p. 23), Pereira (2016, pp. 175–178), Sequeiros and Sequeira (2017, pp. 331–352), Ribeiro (1983, pp. 542–548), and Lisboa (2018).

In the book organized by Ilda de Castro with the title *Mulheres Cineastas, 1874–1956* [Women Filmmakers, 1874–1956] (2000), there are references to a few other women who worked in film before the 1974 revolution that would overturn the *New State* regime, and these are: Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, a children’s writer and pedagogue, who apparently also founded in 1922 a production company, *Fortuna Filmes*; Maria Emília Castelo Branco, a Portuguese actress of the silent period, who directed two documentary films in 1957 and 1958; Alice Noronha Gamito, who participated in the production of a few documentary films on the theme of agriculture; and Maria Luísa de Bivar, who made many documentary films for the *Junta de Acção Social* and worked, also as a documentary director for the Portuguese broadcasting company (RTP) between 1962 and 1964.

Both the book organized by Ilda de Castro (2000) about Portuguese women filmmakers and the research conducted by Ana Catarina Pereira (2016) show that it was only after the Carnation Revolution, and particularly in the 1980s, that women started to direct and author films in Portugal. These studies make apparent that to talk about women filmmakers in Portugal in this period entails discussing a recognisable invisibility.

Looking at the example of Bárbara Virgínia, as Luísa Sequeira has done in her documentary film *Who Is Bárbara Virgínia?* (2017), takes this invisibility a step further, if we consider that the film *Três Dias sem Deus*, which was screened at the first edition of the Cannes Film Festival in 1946, has almost disappeared. Today, of the original 102-minute film, there remains a total of 26 minutes of film footage – the soundtrack was lost as well –, which is archived at the ANIM (centre for film conservation of the Portuguese Film Institute⁴) (cf. Lisboa 2018).⁵

To say that this invisibility is simply a direct consequence of the situation of women in Portugal under the dictatorship, however, would be to ignore not only the context of film history and filmmaking in Portugal as elsewhere, but also to ignore the history of women’s social roles throughout the twentieth century; to ignore, that is, that even today women have not achieved a position of equity in so many areas, artistic and other. It is important to take into account the continuing exclusion of women from the means of production and expression, as the case of Bárbara Virgínia so aptly illustrates. As far as the Hollywood industry is concerned, for example, and as is noted by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin: “As a capitalist industry working within hegemonic patriarchy, it should not be surprising that the classical Hollywood studio system afforded special privileges to men, both in front of the camera as actors, and behind it as production personnel” (Benshoff & Griffin 2004, p. 207). These authors rightly remind us that the film industry was only replicating the division of labour between the sexes, which means that “women who wanted to work in film production were often relegated to ‘feminine’ jobs as secretaries, minor assistants, and ‘script girls’” (*ibidem*). This is to say that “[m]en were in control of the American film industry practically from its outset, as Thomas Edison

⁴ Cinemateca Portuguesa – Museu do Cinema.

⁵ According to Ricardo Vieira Lisboa, there remains a total of 868 metres of film stock, which corresponds to less than a quarter of the initial 102 minutes of film (Lisboa 2018). The translation of all quotations taken from books and articles in Portuguese were made by the author of this article.

and his cohorts worked to monopolize the new technology” (*idem*, p. 213). Although there were women filmmakers in Hollywood – and feminist film historians have drawn attention to a number of women that were producing films in the silent era⁶ –, these cases look like the exception that proves the rule.

This much is symptomatically mentioned in Manuel Félix Ribeiro’s history of Portuguese cinema (1983)⁷, where, in the brief pages dedicated to the film *Three Days without God*, the author states that “the feminine tendency for film directing has always been very scarce. And until the 1940s you can almost count on the fingers of one hand the total of women directors in existence.” (Ribeiro 1983, p. 542) He goes on to refer to the French directors Alice Guy and Germaine Albert Dulac, the Americans Lois Weber and Dorothy Arzner, the Russian Olga Preobrajenskaya, and the German Leni Riefenstahl, to which he adds the Portuguese Bárbara Virgínia.

The still slow increase of women working in film after the 1970s is, as Alison Butler mentions, related to “the broader impact of feminist politics and other social changes” (Butler 2002, p. 3). Even today we are well aware of the fact that women are still underrepresented as directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, sound editors, among other behind-the-scenes professions linked to cinema and the film industry. Continued research conducted by Martha M. Lauzen at the Centre for the Study of Film and Television (at San Diego State University) indicates that in Hollywood today, for example, not much has changed as regards the numbers of women working in key creative behind-the-scenes professions in top grossing films since the 1990s (Lauzen 2019, p. 1).

And I will not even address the question of female authorship and subjectivity in this article, plagued as it is by a theoretical framework that views female authorship as an impossibility, as is well described by Annette Smelik in *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory* (1998), where she states that:

[an] emphasis on Hollywood cinema brought feminist film theorists to conceive of female subjectivity within cinematic discourse and representation in predominantly negative terms or even as an impossibility; the female subject is postulated as masculine (Mulvey), marginal (Kaplan), masochistic (Doane) or as a non-subject (de Lauretis). (Smelik 1998, pp. 28–29)

As Smelik argues, the question of female authorship is further complicated by the *auteur* school, with its insistence in attributing authorship solely to the person of the director. Grounded as this idea is on the Romantic conception of the author as a man of

⁶ Benschhoff and Griffin (2004) mention that “(...) as early as 1912, at least 20 independent film companies were being run by women” (p. 214). They say that “(...) although it was still plainly a male-dominated environment, the slapdash organization of early filmmaking did afford some opportunities for some women to become filmmakers. (...) Historical evidence indicates that during these years it was much easier for a white woman to move into and excel within institutionalized filmmaking than it was for a man of color” (*idem*, pp. 213–214). Alison Butler also states that “the difference in the status and numbers of women in mainstream film production before and after the coming of sound is intriguing as well as depressing” (Butler 2002, p. 26).

⁷ This is the book *Filmes, Figuras e Factos da História do Cinema Português 1896-1949* (Ribeiro 1983). The subsequent quotations from this book were translated by the author of the article.

genius, this school has helped perpetuate the exclusion of women from the position of *auteur* (cf. Smelik 1998, pp. 29–30).

It is indeed open to debate whether the female subject as creator/ author will make a difference in the films that are produced. Even if this debate falls outside the scope of this article, it is important to bear in mind that, as Patricia White reminds us:

Authorship has been of critical importance to feminist film studies, in large part because women’s access to the means of production has been historically restricted. The exclusion of women’s perspectives has made its imprint on films, audiences, and the cultural imaginary. (White 2015, p. 2)

But as White further states, “feminists have explored the work that has been made by women as an act of historical retrieval, a theoretical project of decoding biography and experience within film form and address (...)” (*idem*, pp. 2–3).

Although “women’s access to the means of production has been historically restricted” in a pervasive way, as I have argued above, this does not prevent us from taking into account the specific conditions under which women lived during the long Portuguese dictatorship.

3. Historical conditions of womanhood in the *Estado Novo*

The “act of historical retrieval” (as Patricia White states) is essential, also for what it shows of women’s historical conditions as creative subjects, and the limitations under which they worked. In the case of the Portuguese women living in the particular period of the dictatorship, it is important to recall that the *New State*’s frame of mind induced them primarily toward a domestic condition. In this, it must be stated, the regime does not completely depart from other democratic regimes of the time, as is recognized by Irene Pimentel in her study *História das Organizações Femininas do Estado Novo* [History of the Female Organizations of the New State], where she states that “the Salazarist regime shared the same reasoning that, at the time, largely marked the situation of women in Europe – although with differences depending on whether the regimes were democratic or dictatorial” (Pimentel 2001, p. 400).⁸

As has been described in some of the studies concerned with the situation of women in the *New State*, Salazar had a clear concern with the promotion of an ideal of womanhood that framed women in the domestic space of the home, as mothers and housewives.⁹ Irene Pimentel quotes from the interview given to António Ferro by Salazar, where he states that “woman must be cherished, loved and respected, because her role as mother, as the educator of her children, is not inferior to that of man.” (*idem*, p. 27). The separation of roles assigned to men and women reproduced the belief in the culture of separate spheres (public/private), and was institutionalized in the laws that were created by the new regime, beginning in the Constitution of 1933. Anne Cova and António Costa Pinto (2002) point out that the discourse of Salazarism “was deeply rooted in the

⁸ Translated by the author of the article.

⁹ In relation to the ideology of domesticity of the regime, cf. Pimentel (2001), Cova and Pinto (2002).

traditional idea that women were situated on the side of ‘nature’ while men were on the side of culture” (Cova & Pinto 2002, p. 129). In this, they further argue, the regime closely followed “the messages repeated by the Catholic Church in the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), which claimed that ‘nature’ intended that women were destined to stay at home, to bear children and to devote themselves to housework” (*ibidem*).

Much has been said about how the ‘regenerative’ drive of the *New State* regime rested on a moralistic and paternalistic project that was directly controlled by the dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar.¹⁰ This project rested on the stability of the traditional, patriarchal family unit, where the woman played the expected role of providential spouse, housewife, and mother, the familiar role of the “angel in the house”. Irene Pimentel gives a good account of how the discourse of the regime, and of the dictator, promoted a moral and political ideology that rested on the very centrality of the family. The feminine associations that were created within the *New State*, namely, the *Mothers’ Work for National Education* (Obra das Mães para a Educação Nacional, OMEN), which was created within the Ministry of Education in 1936, and the *Portuguese Female Youth* (Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina, MPF), created in 1937, served the purposes of the regime in perpetuating the values of God, Fatherland and Family (*Deus, Pátria e Família*), the well-known motto of Salazarism.¹¹ According to Irene Pimentel, the ideology of domesticity served well “the purpose of eliminating female competition from a labour market where there was unemployment” (Pimentel 2011, p. 29), and simultaneously an attempt to abolish unfair competition between companies which prospered on account of systematically using women and children as cheap labour.

Throughout the 48 years that the regime, on the whole, lasted – from the beginning of the first Military Dictatorship in 1926, leading to the creation of the *New State* in 1933, which would be overturned by the military coup on 25 April 1974 – there were nonetheless alterations in the society and the social roles women held. Anne Cova and António Costa Pinto tell us that, in spite of the ideology of female domesticity and family life that characterized the discourse of the *New State* on women, their entrance in the job market continued unabated throughout the regime. And, albeit the differences in payment, with women’s salaries being much inferior to those of the men, female entry in the job market was reinforced in the 1960s due, mainly, to the high male emigration rates and the Colonial wars (*cf.* Cova & Pinto 2002, pp. 132–133). Pimentel also stresses that what happened in relation to the sexual and gender politics of the *New State* towards women was different from what was envisaged, with women entering the job market and attaining higher levels of education in ever increasing numbers as the regime was coming to its end (*cf.* Pimentel 2001, p. 404).

That said, we cannot underestimate the pressures felt by a young woman to fulfil the social and familiar expectations that weighed on her, and the difficulties she would

¹⁰ In relation to this Ana Paula Ferreira states: “Many studies reveal the system of representations that coalesced into the construct of the Estado Novo as a ‘unitary’, ‘cohesive’ and ‘homogeneous’ national community, purportedly commanded by the moral, rather than political or legal, imperative of ‘regeneration’” (Ferreira 1996, p. 133).

¹¹ In relation to this *cf.* Cova and Pinto (2002, pp. 135–138).

have to transcend if she decided that she wanted to be a filmmaker. A part of this struggle is subtly presented in the documentary film that Luísa Sequeira made about Bárbara Virgínia (already referred to here). The question in the film title “Who Is Bárbara Virgínia?” indicates a possibility of knowledge that is never fully answered. The film is built around the enigma of Bárbara Virgínia’s erasure and the near-impossibility of assigning her the place that should be hers as the only woman director in the history of Portuguese cinema of those years. This leaves the viewer with the responsibility of thinking about the various impossibilities that prompted the erasure of this woman from the history of Portuguese cinema, which go from family expectations to social exigencies, from censorship to the difficulties of working in a man’s world, as is mentioned by Sequeiros and Sequeira (2017, p. 348):

Bárbara Virgínia was educated as a middle class woman and as a cultured artist, confronted with the exclusion by conservative family members, the self-perceived professional gender segregation in her activity, and the conservatism and narrowness of the cultural life of a society under a fascist regime.

4. Contemporary women filmmakers and the *New State*: recovering memory

The end of the dictatorial regime in 1974 marks a profound break in Portuguese history of the twentieth century, also because this was followed by the immediate suspension of the colonial wars (whose beginning dates back to 1961), the independence of the African countries which had been colonized, and the establishment of a democratic regime in Portugal. In terms of its cinema, the transition to democracy is marked by the abolishing of censorship, which means that filmmakers could now film the new moment and start addressing the historical questions related to the dictatorship. This did not take long to happen, with several films that had been produced still before the revolution coming out in the years that followed.¹² Curiously, in the *História do Cinema Português* [History of Portuguese Cinema] by Luís de Pina we are told that the political disruptive moment that is marked by the Carnation Revolution is not extensive to the cinema, which, according to Pina, had already performed its own revolution in the years that precede 25 April 1974. He states: “In the dawn of 25 April of 1974 the political power fell, but the power of cinema was already in the hands of the 1960s generation, and it will go on being locked up there” (Pina 1986, p. 181).

By pointing out that the filmmakers of the *Cinema Novo* – author-directors like Paulo Rocha, Fernando Lopes, Cunha Telles, Fonseca e Costa, António-Pedro Vasconcelos, or João César Monteiro – had already performed the necessary turning point in Portuguese cinema, Luís de Pina disregards the obvious relation between film production and its social circumstances, as if film could exist in a capsule of its own. It is true that the movement created by the new filmmakers of *Cinema Novo* had initiated a profound renewal of filmmaking in Portugal, reinforcing, as Tiago Baptista states, “a conception of cinema as art (and not as industry or spectacle), of the directors as authors (and not as technicians), and of the films as works of culture (and not as entertainment

¹² In relation to this cf. Pina (1986, pp. 181–187) and Baptista (2008, pp. 86–88).

products)” (Baptista 2008, p. 85). However, the Revolution marked a profound disruption in all areas of society, and filmmaking was not an exception. After the revolution, some of the directors of the ‘New Cinema’, and a few others (notably, a long list of directors coming from abroad) did not miss the moment of recording the revolutionary process that was under way. In the first moment, there was an explosion of documentary films that were particularly important as recorders of this process, and were ideologically engaged in it. As Tiago Baptista notes in his assessment of the period, the “cinema of April” quickly put itself at the service of the revolution (Baptista 2008, pp. 86–87).

Still, in the panorama of Portuguese cinema, the appearance of women as directors was only timidly achieved after the Revolution in 1974. This is perhaps the reason why, when debating issues of women and dictatorship in the Portuguese context, we are mostly reminded of a younger generation of women filmmakers who have started working after the 1990s. Some of these women have been creating a distinct body of work engaged in the process of retrieving both the individual and collective memories of opposition to the *New State* – and of the discourses of the *New State*. In their films, mostly documentary, these individual memories are intertwined with the collective memory of the dictatorship, through the use of archival images of those years. As Aleida Assmann (2010) explains in her dual take on cultural memory, as “cultural working memory” and as “cultural reference memory”, that is, as canon and as archive (*cf.* Assmann 2010, pp. 97–107), the archive “creates a meta-memory, a second-order memory that preserves what has been forgotten” (*idem*, p. 106). By making use of these meta-memories, most of these films retrieve the cultural memory of that period, often rescuing it from amnesia, but also from new idealised versions of the *New State* that recurrently try to posit it as a lost paradise.

I am reminded, particularly, of the films by Margarida Cardoso and Susana de Sousa Dias, who have consistently addressed in their films issues that are linked to the memory of the *New State* and of the colonial wars. Margarida Cardoso directed several feature and documentary films that draw on this period of Portuguese history, the most famous of which is perhaps *A Costa dos Murmúrios* [The Murmuring Coast] (2004), an adaptation of a novel by the Portuguese novelist Lídia Jorge, with the same title, set in Mozambique.¹³ Most of her films are connected, in one way or another to Mozambique, where the director has lived at a very tender age, when her father was settled there as an officer during the years of the colonial war. This much we are told at the beginning of the documentary *Natal de 71* [Christmas 71] (1999), a film about the colonial war in Mozambique. In *Yvonne Kane* (2014) [feature], *Kuxa Kanema: o nascimento do cinema* (2003) [documentary] and *Licínio de Azevedo: Crónicas de Moçambique* (2011),

¹³ This film has been the focus of several critical analyses, which have focused specially on the film’s critical perspective of Portuguese colonialism and the colonial war. This is the case of an article by Adriana Martins, which focuses on both Margarida Cardoso’s *The Murmuring Coast* and Manuel de Oliveira’s *Non, ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* [Non, or the Vain Glory of Command] (1990) as examples of films that deal with the colonial war (*cf.* Martins 2012, pp. 271–279). In another article, Rui Gonçalves de Miranda addresses the film by Margarida Cardoso, together with the film *April Captains*, by Maria de Medeiros, as examples of women’s films that deal with Portuguese recent historical past (*cf.* Miranda 2013, pp. 264–276). Other articles that focus on this film and on Margarida Cardoso’s work, include, Vieira (2005) and Sabine (2010).

Margarida Cardoso goes back to an independent Mozambique to focus on the first years after the country's independence.

Susana de Sousa Dias has also consistently addressed the dictatorship in her films, by exploring the archive. This led her to make three important essay films¹⁴ focussing on the darker aspects of the period of the dictatorship in Portugal, and recovering a memory of that period that is now facing erasure and oblivion. In the films *Natureza Morta* [Still Life] (2005), *48* (2009) and *Luz Obscura* [Obscure Light] (2017), Susana de Sousa Dias critically exposes the cruelty of the regime and the insidious mark it left on people's lives, using mostly images that have been captured by PIDE (the state police of the regime). Another director who has been working on the issues concerned with the Portuguese dictatorship and the process of the independence wars in Africa is Diana Andringa.

Apart from these, there are a number of other films by women filmmakers that have addressed issues either dealing with the *New State* and the colonial wars, with the Carnation Revolution or with the process of independence of the colonized African countries. Of these, we can refer to, among others, *Capitães de Abril* [April Captains, feature] (2000), directed by Maria de Medeiros; *Cartas a uma ditadura* [Letters to a Dictator, documentary] (2008), directed by Inês de Medeiros; *Spell Reel* [documentary] (2017), directed by Filipa César; *A Outra Guerra* [The other war, documentary] (2010), directed by Elsa Sertório and Ansgar Schäfer.

5. *My Other Country: the woman filmmaker at the centre?*

Of the more recent films by women, I will now briefly focus on one by the Swedish-Portuguese director Solveig Nordlund with the title *Mitt Andra Land* [My Other Country] (2014). Solveig Nordlund is part of the generation that is linked to the renewal of Portuguese cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, which, simultaneously, is a generation of filmmakers that for the first time includes women, however few. Women like Noémia Delgado, Margarida Cordeiro, Monique Rutler, Teresa Olga or Paola Porru, or Margarida Gil, who had studied cinema, and/or were working as sound directors, editors, assisting directors and, finally, directors.¹⁵

This was the case of Solveig Nordlund, who, having arrived in Portugal at the end of the 1960s, as we are told at the beginning of *My Other Country* (2014), participates in the process of transformation that Portuguese cinema was undergoing in that period. Nordlund, who was born in Sweden, came to Portugal, via Paris, where she had met Alberto Seixas Santos. They were both studying film in Paris, and came to Portugal to make films. Her first feature, *Dina e Django* [Dina and Django] is from 1983, but she had

¹⁴ In an article focussing on *Still Life* (2005) and *48* (2009), Carolin Overhoff Ferreira prefers to call them “indisciplinary films”, a concept which she views as an alternative to that of essay film (cf. Ferreira 2014, p. 267). She states: “Based on archive material or on found footage, the films have been treated as documentaries, but, truly, they are beyond this category (...)” (*ibidem*, my translation).

¹⁵ Cf. Pereira (2016, pp. 180–183). According to Ana Catarina Pereira, for women, “the ‘first strong decade’, in the area of production is the 1980s”. It is in this decade, the author tells us, that begins “the difficult entry of women in an art that had previously been exclusively a man’s art, in a movement that was essentially accomplished by Monique Rutler, Solveig Nordlund and Margarida Gil, corresponding to ‘the first generation of women filmmakers’” (Pereira 2016, p. 182, my translation).

already made some shorts, and had participated in some of the films of the Portuguese *Cinema Novo* (either as assistant director or as editor). Especially important for the sake of this article is her participation in the film collective *Grupo Zero* (Group Zero), with whom she made *A Lei da Terra* [The Law of the Land] (1976), one of the many documentaries made at the time about the agrarian reform in Alentejo. She also participated, as editor, in one of the most remarkable Portuguese films to come out just after the revolution, *Brandos Costumes* [Mild Manners]¹⁶ (1975), directed by Alberto Seixas Santos (who was, at the time, her husband).

The documentary film *My Other Country* (2014) is a short Portuguese-Swedish co-production, made with the financial support of RTP (Portuguese Radio and Television, Portuguese Broadcast Company), the Swedish Film Institute (Cecilia Lidin), and FilmiVästernorrland. It is a curious autobiographical recollection of Solveig Nordlund's early years in Portugal, a recollection of what it was like to live in a country under a dictatorship, as well as a reminiscence of life in Portugal during the years that followed the Carnation Revolution in 1974. But more interestingly, the film recalls all that by revisiting some of the films that were made at that time, in which Solveig Nordlund participated or was linked to in some way. The film is, thus, built as a palimpsest made of fragments of these other films, which are edited together and made to cohere through the voice-over autobiographical narrative. The list of films that are used in the autobiographical recollection that constitutes the narrative backbone of *My Other Country* is extensive, ranging from *Perdido por Cem* [A hundred times lost] (1973), directed by António-Pedro Vasconcelos, and *O Cerco* [The Siege] (1970), directed by António da Cunha Telles, to some of the films directed by Nordlund, namely, *Nem Pássaro, Nem Peixe* [Neither Bird Nor Fish] (a short, from 1978) and *Dina e Django* [*Dina and Django*] (1983), two films by Alberto de Seixas Santos – *Brandos Costumes* (1975) and *Gestos e Fragmentos – Ensaio Sobre os Militares e o Poder* [Gestures and Fragments – Essay about the Military and Power] (1984) –, as well as the collective films that were made both about the Revolution and about the brief period of the Agrarian Reform in Alentejo – these were *As armas e o povo* [The People in Arms] (1975), by the *Colectivo dos Trabalhadores da Actividade Cinematográfica* (Collective of Film Workers), *A lei da terra* [The law of the land] (1976) and *Luta do povo – a alfabetização em Santa Catarina* [The People's Fight – Adult Literacy in Santa Catarina] (1976), by the collective *Grupo Zero*.

The film opens and ends with images of a demonstration in Lisbon in the years of the bailout and the austerity measures imposed by the IMF and the European Union. The contemporary framework signals the link between the director and the country, which she considers her own (her other country), despite the fact that the narrative is told in Swedish, her mother tongue. The initial and ending images of the film provide a contrast between the country the director/ narrator exposes in her memories of Portugal in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and the modern Portugal of the second decade of the twenty-first century. At

¹⁶ I am using here one of the English translations that we can find in the site IMDb (International Movie Database). Also registered in this site are the translations “Gentle Morals” and “Gentle Costume”, both of which are, in my view, inferior to the one I chose here.

the same time, they act as a reminder that the austerity measures that were being enforced on the country could represent a severe setback in the social progress that had been achieved.

Interestingly, this is a film that looks at the country from the perspective of someone who is both an insider and an outsider. In a way, the film makes clear that this is a personal narrative of the country by someone who knows it well, and assumes a long-standing association to it. On the other hand, by choosing to narrate it in Swedish, the narrative creates a necessary distancing in relation to the facts narrated. Additionally, we are informed that this is a person who was taken by surprise at the discovery of a country about which she had barely heard about when she was a girl. The beginning of the film mentions how strange the experience of living under a dictatorship was for a young woman born in a democratic country in Northern Europe. Also, as far as the revolutionary process is concerned, the film exposes the same sense of bewilderment that we find in many of the documentaries of the time, particularly, those that were made by foreign reporters and filmmakers. It reminds us of another film that focuses on the images of the revolution that were captured by some of the leading world photographers and filmmakers of the time, a film by Sérgio Tréfaut with the title *Outro País* [Another Country] (1999).

The title *My Other Country* may well be a nod towards Sérgio Tréfaut's film, a documentary that captures the memory(ies) of the 25 April 1974 through the eyes of the many filmmakers, photographers and reporters who came to Portugal at the time to record the revolution in the making. Both films are framed in the autobiographical mode, and recuperate memories of Portuguese films that have captured the historical moment of the revolution. However, Solveig Nordlund's autobiographical framework lays bare her clear association with the films that are simultaneously inscribed in the cultural and collective national narrative of those years and in her personal life.

One of the most striking features of this documentary is indeed the way it inscribes these intertextual fragments in the collective memory of the country, putting forward a vision of cinema as an important tool in the construction of a national imaginary. Astrid Erll recognises the power of films and literature “to create images of the past which resonate with cultural memory.” (Erll 2010, p. 389). She states that: “Fictions, both novelistic and filmic, possess the potential to mould images of the past which will be retained by whole generations.” (*ibidem*). By using images of Portuguese films to tell her own story of Portugal in-between the end of the 1960s and today, Solveig Nordlund reminds us that these films “possess the potential to mould images of the past which will be retained by whole generations” (to borrow from Astrid Erll). In other words, underneath (or above) the autobiographical narrative of *My Other Country*, we can find an intimation of the way the Portuguese cinema of those years can work to promote our cultural memory. For example, when talking about the moment when she arrives in Portugal at the end of the 1960s, Nordlund uses images of António-Pedro Vasconcelos and Cunha Telles's films to convey the atmosphere that was lived in Lisbon (and within her circle of friends) at the time. In order to explain the dictatorial regime and the last years of the dictatorship, Nordlund uses the images of *Mild Manners* – a film that is also composed of many films, if we take into account that, apart from the scenes of family life that are at the centre of its narrative, it uses images from archive films of important

moments of the period of the *New State*, as well as other historical Portuguese films, like *Chaimite* (Jorge Brum do Canto, 1952) and *A Revolução de Maio* [The May Revolution] (António Lopes Ribeiro, 1937). In Nordlund's *My Other Country*, the citations from *Mild Manners* convey the sense of oppression that was lived within the patriarchal Portuguese family, and they are enough to make us understand the country which she talks about in the voice-over narrative. The same is true about all the other citations from films used to give us a story, both personal and historical, of the agrarian revolution, or of the 1980s, with the end of the revolution and the entrance in the period of liberal democracy. All this is understood with reference to the film fragments that are cited in the documentary, together with the director's personal narration.

6. Conclusion

By recuperating the memory of these films to tell her personal story the director intertwines it not only with the history of this other country but, most importantly, with a specific period of Portuguese cinema. In other words, by putting herself at the centre of this narrative mediated by a few unquestionably significant images in the history of Portuguese film, the filmmaker also inscribes her name in the history of that cinema – no less because to tell this story she also uses some of her films from the 1980s.

A history that is, as we have seen, heavily marked by the weight of the patriarchal society of the years of the dictatorship and the relegating of women to the domestic sphere. This becomes evident in the fragments of *Mild Manners* that Solveig Nordlund chooses to place in her documentary to characterise the regime she came to inhabit in Portugal at the end of the 1960s; fragments that are themselves permeated by the archive images of the regime, but also of the colonial war.

The fact that the films chosen are somewhat linked to the director's personal history, but only in some is she the director, may be indicative of the marginal position of women in the cinema of that period. This marginality, if not a complete absence or invisibility, is sadly perpetuated in histories of Portuguese cinema (cf. Baptista 2008; Pina 1986), where the few films by women that were made in the 1970s and 1980s are not acknowledged, or only in a very lateral way.

Thus, the absence of female directors is certainly a sign of the inexistence of behind-the-scenes jobs for women in cinema in the twentieth century, which is something that this article intended to address. However, this may also signal the obvious erasure of women from the historical places that are theirs – as the initial quotation by E. Ann Kaplan reminds us –, by making them invisible. This is also indicative of how difficult it was (it is) for women to have access to the means of production – as the few cases that were discussed here intend to demonstrate. This is reinforced in the Nordlund's film that we briefly analysed here, taking into account that, apart from her own films, no other woman-directed films are cited. Precisely, because they did not exist.

Part of this is certainly the result of women's association to the domestic spheres throughout the twentieth century, which, in the Portuguese case, was particularly supported by a regime that sought to assign them an almost exclusive domestic role within the family, something that is so perceptively embedded in Seixas Santos's *Mild Manners*. At the centre of the film's narrative is the patriarchal structure of Portuguese society, as

becomes clear in the introductory monologue where the younger daughter talks about the death of the father. The film begins with the words “Your death. This is about your death.”¹⁷ The father being, simultaneously, the patriarch of the family depicted in the film and the figure of the dictator.

This leads us back to the assertion made by Luís de Pina about the disruptive moment in Portuguese cinema having happened before the Revolution of 1974. This is an assertion that I do not dispute. Yet, it may be viewed as a symptom that however revolutionary and innovative the Portuguese *cinema novo* may have been (and it undoubtedly was), this is a social change that it did not fully perform.

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¹⁷ “Da tua morte, é da tua morte que se trata”, my translation.

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