



Lisbon Close-up, Seen From Afar: The Representation of the City  
in Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas's *Foreign Land* (1996)

Author(s): Paul Melo e Castro

Source: *eSharp*, Special Issue: New Waves and New Cinemas (2009),  
pp. 22-40

URL: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/esharp>

ISSN: 1742-4542

Copyright in this work remains with the author.

---

*eSharp* is an international online journal for postgraduate research in the arts, humanities, social sciences and education. Based at the University of Glasgow and run by graduate students, it aims to provide a critical but supportive entry to academic publishing for emerging academics, including postgraduates and recent postdoctoral students.

[esharp@gla.ac.uk](mailto:esharp@gla.ac.uk)

## Lisbon Close-up, Seen From Afar: The Representation of the City in Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas's *Foreign Land* (1996)

Paul Melo e Castro (University of Edinburgh)

One of the first films of the 1990s *retomada* or renaissance of Brazilian cinema, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas's *Terra Estrangeira* (1996), or *Foreign Land* as it is known in the English-speaking world, has often been discussed in terms of its Brazilian *Cinema Novo* precursors, both by film critics and by co-director Salles himself. In this article, *Foreign Land* will be discussed initially in terms of its aims and techniques, which can indeed be seen to reprise, or at least to reference, those of the Brazilian cinema of the 1960s. Upon this basis, Salles and Thomas's film will then be analysed in terms of its representation of Lisbon, which can be understood as building on and extending the image of the city generated by the *Novo Cinema Português*, the new wave of Portuguese cinema that was contemporary with its counterpart in Brazil and shared the critical impulse central to the New Waves of the time.

For José Carlos Avellar, *Foreign Land*'s visual quality of image somehow comes from the particular way of shooting of Brazilian cinema of the 1960s, the *Cinema Novo*:

hand-held camera, natural light, shooting on location, setting the operator in the middle of the scene as any other character in the film, action that seems to be improvised or created in that moment – without previous preparation or rehearsal – as if the camera

would have recorded it by chance (cited in Elena 2003, p.216).

Avellar's appraisal is typical of the way that *Foreign Land* has been seen to owe a debt to its Brazilian New Wave predecessors of the 1960s in terms of its approach, in some ways perhaps more so than Salles's later, glossier works.

Moreover both the film's critics and Salles himself have claimed that in making *Foreign Land*, the directors were reprising 'the idea already put forward by the *Cinema Novo* [...] to put Brazil in front of the camera, to show us who we are and where we come from' (Salles cited in Elena 2003, p.213). The film's aims clearly dovetail with those guiding the original *Cinema Novo*, whose cultural importance and political relevance to the nation Salles has often spoken of emulating. However, whilst *Foreign Land* does share many of the aims and impulses of the original *Cinema Novo*, the film contains no direct imitation of these earlier works. The connection is more a bond of moral kinship than aesthetic resemblance.

Notwithstanding this kinship in terms of ambition, it is in its subject matter that *Foreign Land* really differs from the trends of its predecessors. In lieu of the travails of life in the *favelas* or the *Nordeste*, the tensions inherent in urban existence in Lisbon and São Paulo set the frame of the film, and in place of the hardships of internal migration it is the trials of emigration that serve to propel the narrative. Rather than a thematic departure, however, this change should be seen rather as an updating of subject matter. The 1990s saw Brazil become an even more city-centred country than it had been in the heyday of the *Cinema Novo*, with urbanisation having increased by more than 20 per cent (Schneider 1996 p.2). This decade also saw the first major waves of emigration to Europe and the United States from what had traditionally been a receiver

country (Elena 2003 p.213). In focusing on social and economic precariousness within an urban setting and on the migration of outsiders to Lisbon, *Foreign Land*, it can be argued, reworks some of the key themes of Portuguese cinema, but with a Brazilian twist.

## **Synopsis**

*Foreign Land* revolves around two plot strands that meet halfway through the film. The first concerns Paco, a young man from São Paulo. His elderly mother is a Basque immigrant who dreams of returning home to San Sebastián. When the *Plano Collor* is implemented by the newly-elected President, which at the time froze all private bank accounts, the shock of seeing her life savings seemingly stolen is too much for her and she dies of a heart attack. Paco is left distraught and penniless. He meets a Luso-Brazilian antiques dealer named Igor, who offers him a job as a courier transporting merchandise to Europe. Paco accepts and leaves for Lisbon.

The second strand involves Alex, a young Brazilian immigrant to Portugal. Stuck in a dead-end job as a waitress, she is involved with Miguel, a Brazilian musician and heroin addict. To make ends meet, Miguel fences smuggled goods sent to him from Brazil by Igor. We realise that Paco has unwittingly become entangled in an international smuggling ring dealing in diamonds. Frustrated by his continued drug abuse, Alex leaves Miguel and goes to stay with Pedro, a friend who is secretly in love with her. Miguel decides to double-cross Igor, sell the diamonds directly and use the proceeds to flee Lisbon with Alex. He manages to offload the diamonds, but receives only a tiny fraction of their true value. Igor's boss then has Miguel murdered.

Paco arrives in Lisbon at the Hotel dos Viajantes, the normal stay-over destination for Igor's couriers. He discovers a violin in his luggage, but does not suspect that it contains diamonds. Paco's contact – the deceased Miguel – does not show up and the young Brazilian feels lost. He meets Loli, an Angolan immigrant living in a different *pensão*, or boarding house, on the floor above Paco who shows him the way to Miguel's house. Paco discovers Miguel has been murdered and finds a piece of paper with Alex's address. After he tracks her down, Alex mistakes Paco for an accomplice of the smugglers and hatches a plan to seek revenge on Igor. Alex distracts Paco for a night, while Pedro steals the case containing the violin. Paco returns to the hotel to find that the case is gone and that he has received instructions to meet a man named Krafft.

The encounter between the young Brazilian and the kingpin of the smuggling ring takes place at a night club that plays traditional Portuguese music. Igor appears and Paco realises that the smugglers do not have the case. Paco flees the nightclub and finds Alex, who then admits to having given the case away. Without the merchandise their situation is desperate, and made even worse by the fact that Alex had previously sold her passport to traffickers. Pedro gives the couple his car and they try to escape to Spain. Igor and one of Krafft's henchmen catch up with them at the border. Paco kills the henchman, but is mortally wounded in the process. Alex bundles Paco into the car and they escape over the frontier. Their situation seems hopeless: the film ends in a long shot of their car as it speeds away along an empty highway.

### **Foreign Land at Home and Abroad in the Collor Years**

The Collor incumbency was a difficult period for Brazilian filmmaking. The *Plano Collor*, which triggers *Foreign Land's* narrative,

had been paralleled by the dismantling of the main mechanism of film funding in Brazil. Just as the freezing of her savings account shatters the dreams of Paco's mother, the economic policies that Collor imposed upon taking office destroyed the plans of Brazil's filmmakers. After *A Grande Arte (Exposure)*, a film with international financing and English dialogue released in 1991, *Foreign Land* marks Salles's return to filmmaking in his native tongue. This return to the Portuguese language is accompanied by a turn to Portugal. In order to re-discover Brazil cinematically and to renew the project of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo*, Salles and Thomas invert the route of discovery and travel to Lisbon so as to consider the country from the outside, to look at Brazil from its point of origin in order to gauge its position in the world system today. This inversion reflects a shift in the real world. Portugal, which for hundreds of years had sent its excess population to Brazil, became one of the principal destinations for the young emigrants fleeing the Collor years.

Thomas and Salles' focus on the struggling immigrants of the Portuguese capital in *Foreign Land* is far removed from the short-haul exoticism that characterised other contemporary non-Portuguese representations of the city, such as Wim Wenders's *Lisbon Story* (1994) or *Until the End of the World* (1991). The discrepancy between Salles and Wenders's take on Lisbon is ironic, as Wenders is one of the most discernible non-Brazilian influences on Salles. Instead of resonating with *fado*, the emblematic folk music of Lisbon, and embodying the possibility of community (perhaps due to a perceived lack of modernity), as the city does in Wender's films, in *Foreign Land* Lisbon is enmeshed in the contemporary world and is once again the 'dark city' described by Portuguese film historian Bénard da Costa. Costa sees the representation of Lisbon in the Portuguese cinema as being characterised by

the closed horizons of a dead-end city, a slave of its own tricks and traps, that would forever insinuate themselves, in filigree or as a predominant note, in almost all the films that had Lisbon as the main setting' (1991, p.40; translation mine).

This vision of Lisbon reaches its zenith with the *Novo Cinema Português*, and can be seen to carry on into *Foreign Land*'s noir-tinged depiction of the city. Urban space is never celebrated in Salles's oeuvre: both Rio and São Paulo are shown as de-humanised megalopolises in works such as *Foreign Land*, *O Primeiro Dia* (1998) and *Central do Brasil* (1998). In *Foreign Land*, for the most part, it is Lisbon that is under scrutiny, and though lacking the monstrous proportions of these Brazilian cities, Portugal's capital fares little better.

### **Lisbon: the Real and the Reel City**

In this article, it is *Foreign Land*'s portrait of Lisbon that I shall analyse in detail. According to Avellar (2002), Salles carries aspects of documentary research over into his fictional filmmaking, specifically in the way in which he permits his experiences during filming to influence the narrative. It has been suggested that *Foreign Land* evolved through the contact its directors had with the actual conditions of the city, as well as the input of the Portuguese and African actors involved in the project, such as the Zaire-born Angolan director José Laplaine, who plays the Angolan, Loli. Here it must be remembered that in filming Lisbon, even with a documentary bent, Salles and Thomas were not just tackling a historical, social and economic reality, but also a cinematographic one. In capturing the spaces and situations of Lisbon, *Foreign Land* necessarily engages with the city's film history. Thus, as well as

building on the Brazilian *Cinema Novo*, *Foreign Land* also relates to previous representations of Portugal's capital.

Rather than looking at *Foreign Land* in relation to preceding representations of Brazil then, I shall look at the film in relation to the *Novo Cinema Português* and the current situation of Lisbon. To do so necessitates some consideration of the *Comédia à Portuguesa* from the 1930s, the Portuguese tradition that the *Novo Cinema Português* sought to overhaul, in order to pinpoint the depiction of the city that is built up in Salles and Thomas's film. Both the *Novo Cinema Português* and the *Comédia à Portuguesa* were film movements that avowedly represented Lisbon, although the latter showed the city as a negative space in reaction to the way the former projected it as a utopian city. The *Comédia a Portuguesa* began in 1933 with Cottinelli Telmo's *A Canção de Lisboa* (1933), its most representative exemplar, and remained the paradigm for Portuguese film until the 1960s. The *Comédia à Portuguesa* was then replaced by the *Cinema Novo*, which began with Paulo Rocha's *Os Verdes Anos* (1963) and Fernando Lopes' *Belarmino* (1964). This new wave arose in response to the perceived aesthetic bankruptcy of the *Comédia à Portuguesa* and the inadequacy of its cheery vision of a village-like Lisbon, portraying the city as an urban space racked by civil repression, beleaguered by the effects of the wars in the African colonies and depleted by mass emigration in response both to these strictures and also the country's ongoing economic underdevelopment.

The differences between the contrasting representations of Lisbon in the *Comédia à Portuguesa* and the *Novo Cinema Português* can be summed up by reference to German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (see Tönnies, 2001). The *Gemeinschaft* refers to a rooted, solidaristic, human-centred community (which corresponds to the vision of the first

movement) and the *Gesellschaft* signifies a mercantile, atomised, money-driven society (which corresponds to the critique of the second). *Foreign Land*, in turn, can be seen to update the representation of Lisbon made by the *Novo Cinema Português* to reflect the pressures of post-coloniality and postmodernity, whilst displaying the humanism that characterises Salles's *oeuvre* by keeping some of the utopian elements of the *Comédia à Portuguesa*'s representation of the city alive, albeit in similarly updated forms.

The difference between Tönnies's two concepts neatly encapsulates the shift between these two movements in Portuguese cinema, one that finds a parallel in the narrative strategy used to depict urban space. Gelfant (cited in Caws 1991) draws an important distinction between ecological city novels and portrait city novels, a distinction that can be applied usefully here to film narratives of the city. The ecological novel focuses on a community and its relation to its immediate surroundings, whilst the portrait novel depicts a single character alone in the metropolis and often on his or her uppers. Extending this taxonomy to the city films under analysis here, the *Comédia à Portuguesa* works are ecological city films that posit an idealised *Gemeinschaft* within the city. The example I will use here is Cottinelli Telmo's *A Canção de Lisboa*. In this film, the protagonist Vasco, with the help of his friends and fellow residents of his *bairro*, wins the girl, passes his medical exams and lives happily ever after. It is an idealised version of neighbourhood life in Lisbon, where everyone knows one another and everyone looks out for each other's interests. The *Novo Cinema Português* works are portrait city films that revolve around a single protagonist at odds with the city and struggling to survive in the *Gesellschaft*. In Paulo Rocha's *Os Verdes Anos*, Júlio is a young man, as inexperienced as the title suggests, who in-migrates from the countryside to work in the city as a low-

paid cobbler. He meets a woman and falls in love, but is sent crazy by the anomie of urban life; eventually he murders his fiancée and the film ends in tragedy. Fernando Lopes's *Belarmino*, on the other hand, is the story of an ageing boxer who has a mental image of himself as a great champion but whose life in the city reveals him to be almost down and out. Like Júlio in *Os Verdes Anos*, in *Foreign Land* Paco is young, inexperienced and alone in the city, and he pays for his naivety. Echoing the fate of *Belarmino*'s boxing protagonist, Paco ultimately loses his bout with the city.

### **Lisbon as Semi-Peripheral *Gesellschaft***

*Foreign Land* synthesises these two views, sharing the pessimistic bent of the *Cinema Novo*, but at the same time keeping open some possibility that humanity can survive in the modern city. In doing so Thomas and Salles's film takes key spaces represented in both the *Comédia à Portuguesa* and the *Cinema Novo* and updates them for the 1990s. Lisbon becomes represented as a *Gesellschaft* where the Third World encounters The First World, an idea that can be explained in reference to the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos's concept of the semi-peripheral as expounded in his work *Pela Mão de Alice* (2002).

The general idea behind Sousa Santos's notion is that Portugal belongs neither to the First World nor to the Third. Instead it acts as a link between the two. Historically, Portugal was the mediator between the resources of its colonies and the economic interests of First World countries such as Britain, to which Portugal had a semi-peripheral relationship. Today, Sousa Santos argues, this role has been actualised to fit a post-colonial world. At a micro-level, Lisbon becomes a foreign land where immigrants from the Third World and the economic interests of the first collide. However,

Sousa Santos's focus is on the main ways in which Portugal's semi-peripherality can be recuperated as a competitive advantage. Salles and Thomas's film, on the other hand, focuses on the ongoing depredation to which Lisbon is home as a consequence of this situation.

For Tönnies, 'we go out into the *Gesellschaft* as into a foreign land' (2001, p.18). This encapsulates exactly Paco's experience in Salles and Thomas's film, both on what is supposed to be home soil and when he leaves for Europe. Thanks to the *Plano Collor* a lifetime's savings and hopes are seemingly obliterated, provoking a situation in which the value of money, the search for liquid currency and the risk of inflation dominate society. It is within this situation that Paco is employed by Igor. Igor initially seems friendly, but is in fact only interested in Paco insofar as he can make use of him. What seems like a meeting based on sympathy reveals itself to be solely profit-driven; *Gesellschaft*, not *Gemeinschaft*.

During the scene in the storeroom where Igor first suggests to Paco that he accept a job as a courier to Europe, the antique dealer denounces what he sees as the 'ignorant yuppies' responsible for Brazil's 'false modernity', the 'empire of mediocrity'. Yet the Luso-Brazilian Igor can in fact be seen as a very small cog in the machine producing the situation he so vehemently seems to deride, a semi-peripheral status that is confirmed in Igor's later interactions with Krafft, the Frenchman who appears to be his immediate superior in the smuggling ring. Igor mentions that all he has are 'little souvenirs,' that the gold of Brazil is gone, and that few diamonds remain. We later learn that these few diamonds are being trafficked out of the country under Igor's orders. Igor has thus criticised a wider process, the exploitative basis of which in fact mirrors his own activities. However, this display of hypocrisy on Igor's part pales in

comparison to the dissimulation on the part of the President of Brazil who instigates the *Plano Collor* and is later impeached for gross corruption.

Later in the film we discover that beyond Brazil's borders it is no different: the *Gesellschaft* is a global situation. Once Paco arrives in Europe he is ignored while the smugglers go after Miguel, and then, once their attention returns to the diamonds in his possession, the young Brazilian becomes someone to deal with or to eliminate purely in the interests of getting hold of the merchandise. All relations between the First World and the Third have a hierarchical mercantile basis in *Foreign Land*.

### **At Home and Abroad: Spaces of Accommodation and Entertainment in *Foreign Land***

I shall now turn to two particular aspects of Salles and Thomas's film, with reference to the two paradigms in Portuguese cinema outlined above, in order to explore how the two directors continue and update common spaces traditionally used in the representation of Lisbon. The first aspect is the representation of habitation and the relationships between the characters and the wider society that these imply. When Paco reaches Lisbon he rooms in the Hotel dos Viajantes. Upon arrival, as he climbs the stairs alongside the proprietor, Paco sees Loli, the Angolan. The hotel owner comments 'on the third floor is a black establishment. It has nothing to do with us'. The Third World lives in and works for the city, but is excluded from belonging to it. Later, when Paco tries to make friends with the personable Loli, one of the other Angolans in the *pensão* upstairs tells him that whites are trouble, that the blacks should stick with blacks and whites with whites. Rejection of the mainstream is shown to be

the reaction to rejection by the mainstream, as the cause of a dangerous circularity within the social and physical fabric of the city.

Ironically, Paco himself finds that despite his white skin he is regarded with mistrust and a certain amount of contempt as a Third-World Brazilian. This experience is Alex's daily reality: the young waitress is shown suffering abuse and anti-Brazilian jibes from her boss in the restaurant in which she works. She is shown reaching the end of her tether with what is presumably a constant experience, and then quitting her job in exasperation at her treatment. Rather than the racial and class homogeneity of the *Comédia à Portuguesa* where, even if a richer or poorer or even a 'coloured' person appears, the essential harmony of the community is undisturbed, *Foreign Land* develops the stance of the *Novo Cinema Português* to show Lisbon as a city criss-crossed with unbridgeable racial and class divisions. Despite being innocent of any wrongdoing, when Loli sees the police outside of Miguel's house, the Angolan voices his distrust of the *chotas*, or police, and retires from the scene. In today's Lisbon, it would seem to the viewer, one can not be too careful.

Temporary accommodation, such as the Hotel dos Viajantes, is redolent of the dislocations of the big city as shown in Portuguese cinema. In the *Comédia à Portuguesa* it performs a mustering role for the unlikely assembly of an improvised family. In *A Canção de Lisboa*, Vasco's landlord in the end lends him a paternal hand despite the fact that Vasco owes rent in arrears. In *Foreign Land* the manager of the Hotel dos Viajantes compromises Paco's position by handing over his suitcase (and thus the merchandise) to an unknown person who pays his bill. This is a fatal turning point for Paco. Once the diamonds are lost, so is he. In the *Cinema Novo*, in films such as *Os Verdes Anos*, itself a tale of impoverished migration, temporary accommodation is a space of frustration and disconnection. This quality comes through

in *Foreign Land* when Paco is lying in bed in the Hotel dos Viajantes waiting for the contact that never comes. He hears the sounds of the city existing around him: the hum of trams, the rattle of buses and, at night, the horn of the *cacilheiros*, or river ferries, as they ply their way between Lisbon and the south bank of the Tagus. These noises are what theorist of film sound Michel Chion calls *anempathetic* sounds (1994), that is sounds lacking in sympathy, sounds that go on in the background at moments of heartbreak or crisis as if nothing were amiss. It is in these ways that the city is shown as an intrinsically unsympathetic place.

In the Hotel dos Viajantes, Paco feels his lack of connection to anything or anybody, yet something occurs that relieves his sense of isolation and exclusion. It is here that he meets Loli, the affable Angolan who breaks through Paco's fear and reserve to create the start of a budding friendship, though later events in the film mean that this relationship will ultimately go unfulfilled. Despite the evident racism and antagonism of the city, Loli and the other African emigrants are able to carve out a space of community. Paco, alone and lost in his rented room, steps out onto his balcony to while away another few minutes looking out over the river. Above him he hears the joyous strains of African music. He looks up and sees the Angolans hanging out their washing. They are evidently not a traditional family unit, rather people thrown together by the chance combinations of city life. Nonetheless, as in the vision of the city propounded by the *Comédia à Portuguesa*, their residence forms a space of *Gemeinschaft*, where each looks out for the other and has the community's best interests at heart.

The second strand of Lisbon life that is represented in both the *Comédia à Portuguesa* and the *Novo Cinema Português*, and which is then picked up by *Foreign Land* are the spaces where music is

performed, important sites in the modern city for the encounter and coexistence of friends, of foes perhaps, and of those simply unknown to one another. In the *Comédia à Portuguesa*, the key space is of course the *fado* club, as well as traditional neighbourhood festivities. The playing of traditional music is an opportunity for the *Gemeinschaft* to convene and confirm its identity, a phenomenon that recurs repeatedly throughout the films comprising this genre. In *A Canção de Lisboa*, everyone gathers at the *fado* club to hear Vasco sing and thus redeem himself from his earlier misdemeanours and rejoin the ranks of his community. At the neighbourhood festivities, despite some rivalry and conflict at the beginning, the whole *bairro*, or neighbourhood, draws together as one to dance and enjoy the fireworks. The nature of these gatherings shifts in the *Novo Cinema Português*, possibly due to the decreased relevance of *fado* for the city at a time when its place in society had been enshrined by the Salazar regime and its popularity was beginning to be undermined by postwar developments in popular music. In *Belarmino*, the *fado* club gives way symbolically to a jazz club, depicted in a way redolent of the British Free Cinema, and a nondescript cabaret club called The Ritz. In Fernando Lopes's film, the jazz club and the cabaret club become spaces of freedom, places of dark, smoky escape from the strictures of the *Gesellschaft* outside its doors.

In *Foreign Land*, we see two spaces of entertainment and, again, find a mix of the qualities of the *Comédia à Portuguesa* and the *Novo Cinema Português*. The first club is called the Ritz Clube, just like that in *Belarmino*. Perhaps it is the same club, separated by 22 years. The Ritz Clube is where we see Miguel, Pedro and Alex together for the first time. Miguel has just played a long, abstract trumpet solo, which receives little acclaim from the audience. No sooner has Miguel finished, than a dance number starts up and the

hitherto subdued crowd takes to the floor. Pedro praises Miguel's musicianship, but Miguel is bitter and not in a mood to receive praise, making the quip that 'next time I'll mix rap with Bossa Nova and my samba will turn out just like this' as he gestures to the quick African dance music swirling around the club. Pedro, who is shown to be an empathetic if unfortunate character in the course of *Foreign Land*, suggests he should try doing just that and observes that the spirit of the Ritz lies in the sort of syncretism suggested by Miguel's joke, not in the esoteric purity of his jazz compositions. Pedro surveys the room, commenting that 'there are people here from Brazil, from Angola, from Guinea, what do you expect?' to which Miguel retorts that it is nothing but 'a colonial cabaret'. The Ritz is an example of a *Gemeinschaft* coming together tentatively in an otherwise hostile city and affirming its identity, an identity created by the collision of people from diverse Third-World origins mustered cheek by jowl on the margins of Lisbon's *Gesellschaft*.

Spaces where community might possibly emerge in *Foreign Land* are evident when the characters begin to speak each other's languages. This miscegenation occurs musically at the Ritz Clube and also occurs in Paco's exchange with Loli on the hotel balcony. This latter meeting transpires at a point when Paco is confused but not disheartened and, needing someone to talk to, he seeks out Loli in the *pensão* on the floor above. When Paco enters he is the only white person present, and is subjected to comments, jibes and recriminations. The atmosphere in the *pensão* can be seen as an inversion of the climate of racism found outside its walls in the rest of the city. Paco finds Loli and they chat. Paco recounts how he was seduced by Alex and uses the Brazilian idiom 'ela me comeu' or literally 'She ate me'. Loli at first does not understand but then catches on, and starts to joke about it, quipping 'and then it is us [the

blacks] that are called cannibals!’ Paco arranges for them both to meet for a drink, to which Loli replies ‘está fixe’ (a European phrase much used in African Portuguese, meaning something like ‘great’). Paco seems unfamiliar with the phrase but understands the sentiment and repeats the words, the first tentative steps towards the linguistic complicity of friendship. This potential connection is never realised, even though Loli later shows some loyalty towards Paco, despite the Brazilian having accused Loli of stealing his case.

There are further moments of linguistic approximation between other characters too, such as when Miguel bids farewell to his friend Pedro by saying ‘tu és um gajo porreiro’, a very Portuguese phrase meaning ‘you’re a nice bloke.’ The juncture when both musical and personal languages mix is the point at which community can start to be established between different groups in an urban space otherwise crammed with strangers.

These interactions contrast with encounters between Miguel and the taxi driver who helps to fence the stolen diamonds. The taxi driver at first imitates a Brazilian accent to feign friendship with Miguel, but when it comes to talking business he drops the phony Brazilian pronunciation and returns to regular, European Portuguese. Later, when the taxi driver is trying to convince Pedro to accept a price for the diamonds that is much lower than their true value he says ‘after all, what language are we speaking?’ Here the imposition of European Portuguese reflects the desire to cow and control those whose Third-World accents are, in Alex’s words, ‘an offence.’

The second club we see in *Foreign Land* is the Fado venue where Paco meets Krafft, Igor and Krafft’s henchman. Before Paco arrives we see the Frenchman Krafft being regaled with platitudes about *fado*. In the background a singer is pointedly performing a very well-known Amália Rodrigues song entitled ‘Estranha Forma de

Vida' or 'Strange Sort of Life.' This exchange between the two men seems to be just the sort of discussion typical of the 'ignorant yuppies' Igor railed against when he first sounded Paco out. When Igor makes a surprise entrance half-way through the meeting, he comments 'I really needed to revisit home soil and take in some beautiful *fado*', yet of course his real reason is to find Paco and the diamonds, and to secure his investment and position in the smuggling hierarchy, not to refresh his cultural roots.

As (folk-)Portuguese as the setting may be, the official language of the meeting is French, and the monolingual Paco is excluded by language from the money-driven negotiations between the First-World Krafft and his semi-peripheral associates. When Paco eventually escapes, Krafft scornfully upbraids his two Portuguese collaborators and it becomes clear that, dangerous as they are to Paco and Alex, in the grand scheme of things these two figures are very much secondary. If the smuggling ring somehow represents an unfair economic order, the degeneration of *fado* - from a form of musical expression that unites a community to a curio which foreigners and faux-nostalgic émigrés consume - shows this musical form's *Gemeinschaft*-related associations to be an easily digestible and shallow image of Lisbon that no longer matches the city's reality. The short haul exoticism that we see in the club is a veneer over the true bottom line. Back in Brazil, Paco had been an aspiring actor and at the beginning of *Foreign Land*, we see Paco practising lines from the play *Faust*. Now, while he sits at the table with the gangsters, with his hopes of becoming an actor long relinquished, the words he had been committing to memory return and he stands up and declaims the lines as a prelude to his escape. For Avellar (2002), this moment of recall is when Paco realises he has sold his soul to the devil. Suddenly Paco realises that in this foreign land his life is worth less

than the merchandise he has mislaid. Rather than a place where community is confirmed, the *fado* club now becomes a space in which the emptiness and exploitative nature of the modern *Gesellschaft* is revealed.

### **Conclusion: Taking that Old Boat**

If the *Comédia à Portuguesa* posits Lisbon as the happy, self-contained centre of the world, the Portuguese *Cinema Novo* refutes this vision. In these films, Lisbon becomes a place of anomie and marginality. For Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, despite the many differences between different national cinemas, the New Waves of the 1960s were characterised by a revolutionary hope for the future (2006). The Portuguese *Cinema Novo* differs, offering little hope for the future, perhaps because of the oppressive weight of almost half a century of dictatorship and the unlikelihood, in the 1960s, of its quick demise. *Belarmino* ends with a shot of the protagonist behind symbolic bars, whilst *Os Verdes Anos* closes with Júlio's arrest. In *Foreign Land*, the Brazilian *Cinema Novo*'s dynamics of social marginality and inclusion are expanded to a world-wide scale, a situation where life is ever more global yet ever more rootless and Lisbon becomes a particular – semi-peripheral – embodiment of this generalised *Gesellschaft*. Yet Salles, ever hopeful for the future despite the iniquity of the present, eschews the overtly revolutionary stance of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* in favour of a cautious humanist hope that a way will be found to allow the sort of potential or temporary meetings witnessed in *Foreign Land*, such as those between Paco and Alex and Paco and Loli, to gain a permanent foothold. Until then, as suggested by the lyrics in the song 'Velho Navio' (or 'Old Boat'), which plays in an extra-diegetic manner at the end whilst Alex whispers its words to the dying Paco, the only thing that can be done is to hold on.

## Bibliography

- Avellar, J. C. 2002. Trois Frères. *Cinémas d'Amérique Latine*, 10. 8-16.
- Avellar, J.C. 2002. Walter Salles: Cinéasta y Productor, *Cinémas d'Amérique Latine*, 10. 33-54.
- Bénard da Costa, J. 1991. *Histórias do Cinema Português*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda.
- Chion, M. 1994. *Audio-Vision*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cottinelli Telmo, J. 1933. *A Canção de Lisboa*. Tóbis Portuguesa. DVD. General Release.
- Elena, A. 2003. Foreign Land. In Alberto Elena and Marina Díaz López (eds.), *The Cinema of Latin America*. London: Wallflower Press. 211-219.
- Lopes, F. 1964. *Belarmino*. Produções Cunha Telles.. DVD. General Release.
- Nowell-Smith, G. 2006. What is a New Wave? *New Waves and New Cinemas Postgraduate Symposium*. Leeds.
- Rocha, P. 1963. *Os Verdes Anos*. Produções Cunha Telles. VHS. Lisbon: Videoteca de Lisboa.
- Salles, W. and Thomas, D. 1996. *Foreign Land*. Videofilmes. DVD. General Release.
- Schneider, R.N. 1996. *Brazil: Culture and Politics in a New Economic Powerhouse*. Boulder, Colo.; Oxford: Westview Press.
- Sousa Santos, B. de. 2002. *Pela Mão de Alice: o Social e o Político na Pós-Modernidade*. Oporto: Edições Afrontamento.