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Marginality, Resilience and Escape: Home in Ana Rocha de Sousa's *Listen*

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Abstract: *Representations of the home are a central point for discussion in contemporary Portuguese cinema. From being a prime site for the understanding of gender inequality, to allowing for examinations of untamed urban expansion, the home has also featured in Portuguese films of the past decades as a proxy for social identity. The significance of the home for marginalised communities is the focus of this article, which examines Ana Rocha de Sousa's* Listen *(2020). A Portuguese and British coproduction,* Listen *tells the story of a Portuguese immigrant family to the UK and their battle against social services, who take their children into custody. By presenting it as their last resource, as the space in which they are attacked but also reorganise for retaliation,* Listen *values the home not only as built infrastructure, but also as a signifier for unity, family and cultural and linguistic identity. Structured around three key plot points of the film that coincide with keywords featuring in recent feminist scholarship (marginality, resistance and escape), this article argues a discussion about global Portuguese cinema, and this film in particular, illuminates ongoing debates about the significance of the home and its relationship to class and gender in contemporary European film.*

In the study of twenty-first-century Portuguese cinema and society, representations of the home have become a central point for discussion. Domestic space works as a prime site for the understanding of gender inequality and the overburdening of women, as in *Colo* (Teresa Villaverde, 2017), as well as expressing the contradictions in the untamed urban expansion of cities such as Lisbon, as in *Ordinary Time* (*Tempo Comum*, Susana Nobre, 2018) (Liz). More broadly, in several Portuguese films of the past decades, such as *Arena* (João Salaviza, 2009), *Rafa* (João Salaviza, 2012) or *Dogs Barking at Birds* (*Cães que ladram aos pássaros*, Leonor Teles, 2019), the home has served as a proxy for social identity. This article focuses on the significance of the home for marginalised communities by examining Ana Rocha de Sousa's first feature film *Listen* (2020), a Portuguese and British co-production. The surprise winner of several awards at the Venice Film Festival, including a Jury Prize in the Horizons section, *Listen* tells the story of a Portuguese immigrant family in the UK and their battle with social services, who take their three children into custody after suspecting their middle child has been abused by her parents.

Listen presents the home as a last resort for individuals to defend themselves and reorganise for retaliation, making it a site of resistance. This allows for an examination of contemporary European film representations and conceptualisations of class and gender, and the current meanings associated with the home in this context. *Listen*'s classical narrative structure makes it closer to the middlebrow aesthetics of a certain strand of contemporary European cinema than to the art-house language that has defined the Portuguese cinema showcased in international festivals in recent years. The film values the home not only as a building, but also as a signifier for unity, family and cultural and linguistic identity. Stefano Baschiera and Miriam De Rosa have highlighted three possible meanings of home: first, the architectural meaning, which sees the home as house, construction and frames its understanding in relation to urban space; second, as a place for the creation and definition of

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ideas of family, identity and, particularly, gender; and third, as the embodiment of a psychological profile, which brings it closer to notions of intimacy and cosiness (1–15). This article confirms the extent to which these three elements are intertwined, while stressing the relevance of the second meaning in analysing *Listen*. The article is structured around three key plot points of the film that coincide with keywords guiding recent work on class and gender. Hence, it looks at marginality, resilience and escape, and asks in what ways a discussion about this film in particular, as a Portuguese film, illuminates ongoing debates about the significance of the home in contemporary European film.

Marginality

The first few shots in *Listen* are not devoted to the concrete walls that will later occupy most of the film, or the red brick structure that will contain the characters for most of the narrative. Rather, the first shot in the film is a shot of trees, and of their leaves gently moving in the wind. Two subsequent but brief fixed low-angle shots of green leaves against the grey sky quickly make space for another shot of hanging laundry, the wind as the linking element between them, together with the sound of a dog barking in the distance. As the film's title appears on the screen, in a large bright pink font, a letter is posted through a door mail slot. It is through (and with) the letter that we first enter the home of the family at the centre of the story. Nature, with its gentle, flowing air, is clearly left outside, and it is the apparent rigidity of society, institutions and their rules that seems to dictate what happens inside.

A high-angle shot then brings us into the home, creating contrast with the low-angle shots previously used for the natural elements in backyards and common green spaces. Hence, we notice that several piled-up letters lay on the flat's beige carpeted floor, together with some brown autumn leaves carried into the house by the wind. As the credits roll, inside the flat we see a baby with her father (Jota, played by Ruben Garcia) and a little girl (Lu, played by Maisie Sly) with her mother (Bela, played by Lúcia Moniz). The mise-en-scène abundantly features pastel and neutral colours; the thick-patterned wallpaper has no bright colours in it, similarly to the rest of the set and the characters' clothing. Feelings are tamed, subdued, but not necessarily or naturally calm, unlike the outside world.

Lu plays with a makeshift camera made of cardboard (probably by herself), capturing stills of family life in her imagination. As she leaves the house with her mother and baby sister Jessy, in a bright pink semi-transparent raincoat that matches the credits' colour and contrasts with the rest of the pastel-coloured environment, the little girl seems to notice a plane flying past and opens her arms as if pretending to have wings. Once again, the camera slowly moves to a low angle, which leads Lu's image to occupy, in a huge pink diagonal, most of the frame. Reviewing the film for *Cineuropa*, Abdal Kaleem argues that *Listen* takes Lu's "viewpoint to mitigate the harsh social realism and show a more poetic vision of the world, with light shimmering through trees and birds tweeting." The space Lu comes to occupy in this shot testifies to her centrality in the film's narrative. However, the overall film cannot mirror the viewpoint of the child exactly as, later in the narrative, Lu is taken away by social services and we barely see her anymore. Still, the poetic vision which is highlighted in this review—and the contrast it establishes with *Listen*'s ostensive social realist aesthetics—is certainly relevant for an analysis of the film.

The poetic vision that characterises *Listen*'s opening sequence is, in fact, at odds with the rest of the film. This vision seems to exist only to strengthen the force, violence and

brutality of what is to come. For instance, in a scene we see Lu and her baby sister hiding behind trash bins outside a grocery shop while Bela buys (but also steals) some food for them to eat. Lu is eventually dropped off at school, where she is reprimanded for being late, while her mother goes to work as a cleaner, taking the baby with her. Tight framing characterises the shots of the children hidden behind the bins, while, through parallel editing, we see the mother inside the shop, with its narrow corridors and high, compact shelves. Later, when they get to school, the claustrophobic feeling attached to these characters is further emphasised by the building's closed gate that does not allow the viewer any insight into that space.

Early on in the narrative, *Listen* very clearly establishes a dichotomy between the outside space—with the green leaves, the wind shifting hanging clothes, planes rushing through the clouds—and the home. Counterintuitively, the film's protagonists are able to find some privacy in outdoor public spaces, at the same time that their home is easily but unnaturally contaminated by external, institutional figures, who impose their authority on the family's privacy. The core focus of the film is not nature's power, ecology, or the importance of the outside world. Rather, this dichotomy strengthens the importance of the family home. Nature in the film works as a point of contrast, but not one with a particular meaning. It works essentially as an entry point (literally, as seen by the moment the viewer is allowed to follow the letters thrown in through the letterbox) to the topic of housing, home and family construction.

As Linda McDowell has argued, in the contemporary neoliberal context class difference is increasingly spatialised (135). The family at the centre of *Listen*'s narrative is clearly working class, and their marginality is also conveyed in spatial terms. First, they live in a non-identified but characteristically working-class part of London. In this sense, *Listen* has similarities to João Canijo's *Ganhar a Vida* (*Get a Life*), a 2001 film about Portuguese immigrant workers in the outskirts of Paris. Unlike Canijo's work, however, *Listen* is heavily influenced, in its specific aesthetics, by British social realism depictions of the working class. After moving to the UK in 2010 to enrol in the London Film School, the film's director Ana Rocha de Sousa studied with British filmmaker Mike Leigh. Leigh's influence is visible in the thematic and formal structure of the director's first feature film but also, more importantly, in the kind of physical, mental and emotional spaces the characters occupy. Connections could be easily drawn between *Listen* and films such as *Secrets and Lies* (Mike Leigh, 1996) or *All or Nothing* (Mike Leigh, 2002). Beyond the specific comparison with Leigh, others can be traced. Ken Loach is certainly a reference for the film too, as confirmed by the film's critical reception. *The Hollywood Reporter*, for instance, described *Listen* as a "Ken Loach-style social-issue drama" (Felperin).

Second, *Listen* showcases a particular vision of urban space, which could be described as a homage to Leigh's London and also recalls Loach's representation of the city. According to Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, this is London as "a city of grey, depressing suburbs and depopulated, alienating working-class housing estates" (169). *Listen*'s London is not a bustling, menacing city, as hinted by the scene shot behind the bins. In another instance, mother and daughter are alone, waiting at a bus stop, in a quiet environment. London's seeming lack of inhabitants is visually and aurally reinforced as the film edits together images of a series of empty spaces and silent images. More than being significant for the construction of a cinematographic feel of this city—which is not the narrative focus of *Listen*—this is especially important to stress the marginality of the film's protagonists.

The spatialisation of class difference has also to do with the characterisation of the spaces these minoritised characters occupy. Another key difference established in the film's first few minutes is between the family home and the house where the mother works as a cleaner. Unlike the family home, this space is first featured from the outside, as if emphasising the fact that this is not where the film's protagonist belongs. A distorted Bela is thus seen in a close-up shot spraying a cleaning product on a window, while humming an unrecognisable tune. We hear the baby playing in the background, and when the film cuts to inside the house, in a wide shot of the living room in which they are, the contrast between the wealth of this space and the sparsity of their own home is made very clear.

Two large plants decorate the edges of a Victorian three-panelled window, with a large television set on the left of the frame marking the distance to the sofa on the right, and therefore stressing the large size of this room. A beautiful Persian carpet partially covers a well-preserved wooden floor. Through a wide shot that is a long shot too, the viewer is given the space and the time to contemplate the several rich materials featured across the room in this house, rather than the make-do accessories that exist in the family home. Thus, once again, parallel editing shows that, while the mother is cleaning this wealthy house, back in their small flat, the father, Jota, is tidying up with some help from their oldest son Diego (James Felner). Rather than using cleaning products, what we see here is Jota and Diego hastily hiding clothes or toys that look too messy inside cupboards, wardrobes and drawers. In the wealthy, contrasting world of other houses that are not this family's home, time is also an asset, and it runs luxuriously slow. By contrast, when at home with her family, Bela is often seen rushing, urgently dealing with an emergency. When Bela picks up her daughter from school in the afternoon, Lu's teacher voices her concern about the child potentially suffering physical abuse and neglect by her parents. Hence, Bela runs home. The next sequence shows her coming in the flat, hastening, saying they must leave. A high angle frames her at the bottom of the stairs, appearing panicked and in a rush. Whereas the nature shots are lingering, slow, and take their time to build an image of calm, a sense of urgency surrounds the film's characters, especially when inside their home. High-angle shots seem to glue them to this space, pinning them to the floors on which they walk. Home should be a space of peace and calm. Rather, our protagonists always hurry to leave, to get ready, or to prepare their home for a given deadline, such as, in the specific case of this scene, a social services visit, and then hurry to escape.

The main conflict of the film is established precisely after this scene: should they stay or leave before social services accuses them of neglect and abuse, as Bela repeatedly suggests, and face the very damaging consequences this will most likely have? Jota is against leaving, as the social services visit had been planned for that afternoon for a long time, and for this reason they had been cleaning the flat, as we saw in previous scenes. But Bela frantically begins to pack, shouting at her partner and at the kids. For some time, the camera paces back and forth, with the number of shots per minute increasing, until, eventually, that plan is abandoned. The film's editing pace settles down. The characters do too, as they decide to finish tidying up the flat and wait for the arrival of social services instead.

The family's marginality has been clearly established by now, but in this scene *Listen* hints at the possibility that people might be understanding towards the film's protagonists, that the characters might get a second chance, having gotten together to present as a normal family, inasmuch as they can, at this point, be. The scenes shot at home depict what appears to be a normal family, but outside in the real world, and in their own home, they are marginal compared to the rest of society: unemployed, sick, disabled, foreign and poor, having to deal with broken hearing aid devices and sitting next to trash bins, forced to steal food. What

McDowell, writing about the spaces of the home and drawing on Bourdieu, describes as "class racism" gains a new meaning in a film about foreigners (135). Not only do they lack money and jobs but they also speak a different language. Many forms of marginality are imposed on them.

And yet, they resist.

Resilience

Listen is not only a film about a family who resists. It is also a film made by a filmmaker particularly concerned with the importance of resistance, as she has repeatedly stressed in interviews. The star of a teenage popular show on Portuguese television in the 1990s—*Riscos* (Manuel Amaro da Costa) which aired between 1997 and 1998 on Portugal's public broadcaster RTP—Ana Rocha de Sousa went on to study painting at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon. In 2014, a huge public contestation arose following her nomination as a jury member for a regular funding strand by ICA – Instituto do Cinema e Audiovisual, the Portuguese film institute and national film funding body. The very white, male and conservative Portuguese film sector (Liz and Owen) dismissed Rocha de Sousa's CV as that of "a mere TV actress", even though, by then, she had already directed several short films. Eventually, she dropped out and did not accept the task she had been invited to perform. She also moved to another country, feeling her work as a filmmaker, at the time, was not valued, and would not be financially supported, in Portugal. Rocha de Sousa has been said to have never given up on anything else again (Tavares-Teles). The emergence of *Listen*, a majority Portuguese coproduction, only six years later, seems to testify to her resilience.

The controversy around the nomination of Ana Rocha de Sousa for the ICA jury led to the resignation of the President of Associação Portuguesa de Realizadores (APR), the Portuguese Association of Filmmakers, which also shows the limitations and the closure of the Portuguese cinema milieu. Issues of dimension and scope have equally been fundamental to the critical and scholarly conceptualisation of Portuguese cinema. For instance, the notion of the "cinema of small nations", coined by Mette Hjort in her analysis of Danish cinema, is particularly useful to theorise the status of contemporary Portuguese film. With a limited geographical area (92,212 km^2), population (c. 10 million inhabitants) and internal market, a low GDP and limited influence in the world, Portugal can certainly be characterised as a small nation. Although Portuguese cinema often circulates in the wider context of art house cinema, European cinema, or even world cinema—in this case acquiring a more positive and meaningful connotation—it can easily be considered to be marginal and anti-mainstream.

The cinemas of small nations tend to be political too. At the same time, features such as marginality, an anti-mainstream nature and a political character have also been used to define women's cinema (Butler), a non-coincidental overlap that cannot be ignored in an analysis of *Listen*. As a Portuguese film shot by a woman filmmaker, Rocha de Sousa's first feature could be seen as "doubly minor". This is, however, a matter-of-fact and limiting statement, and it is much more productive to consider *Listen* as a "doubly engaged" film. Indeed, beyond their apparent uber-marginality, films directed by women arising from the small nation that is Portugal have, in recent years, challenged some of the most important categories in the study of contemporary film and allowed for a different understanding of Portuguese and European cinema (Liz and Owen). Seen in this light, *Listen* can be taken as another example of a wider corpus rethinking the traditional oppositions between nation and Europe, the national and the

transnational, and the apparently stagnant conceptualisations that oppose art-house and commercial cinema.

One way to escape the constricting vision of Portuguese women's cinema as doubly minor is to follow Patricia White's concept of reterritorialisation. *Listen* is particularly relevant for a discussion about European cinema and contemporary representations of the home if it, too, is examined as a reterritorialised film, that is, if we focus on the new territories it comes to occupy and eventually create beyond traditional and constricting categories related to the nation and aesthetic models in national cinema. For instance, having made it to a major international film festival (Venice), *Listen* appears to be rooted in the art-house scene. However, the film was presented as the Portuguese nomination for Best Foreign Film award at the Academy Awards, and even though it ended up being rejected because it was mostly spoken in English, that positions the film instead as a commercial venture. It is a film that, through the casting of Lúcia Moniz as Bela, nods to popular cinema, as the Portuguese actress is better known for her role as Aurélia in the Christmas classic *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, 2008). The film also has a much more commercial aesthetics than other Portuguese titles gaining international recognition in recent years, which can be seen by its focus on plot, character development and casting, and becomes particularly prominent if a direct comparison to the above mentioned *Get a Life* (a "traditional" art-house, small Portuguese film) were to be developed. *Listen* is a Portuguese film spoken in English and set abroad, which is rare in Portuguese cinema, despite the release in 2023 of Marco Martins's *Great Yarmouth: Provisional Figures*, whose plot is also centred on Portuguese immigrants to the UK. It is a middlebrow family drama, which draws on art-cinema conventions, such as its slow *tempo*, and the homage to British social realist films.

Despite being a film by a Portuguese woman director made in a language different to that of most Portuguese films circulating internationally, *Listen* upholds many of Portugal's cultural features, for instance in relation to its conservative gender politics. In this sense, the story of director Rocha de Sousa and the way in which her success has been highlighted after the film's international recognition is easily connected to resilience, which has appeared as the most cited morale buzzword in heroic tales of women "making it to the top", and, as we will see, also characterises the film's representation of the home. Many have suggested resilience should not be examined as a meaningful term, as it is merely another word for neoliberalism. For Angela McRobbie, resilience has become

> a catch-all term, multi-functional and predicated on a logic of substitution, and thereby standing in for some things that have been lost to women as a result of welfare dismantling, while also nudging up against and displacing currently existing phenomena such as the new feminism, […] and, if pushed, endorsing a variation of liberal feminism as a force for manageable changes to the gender regime. (62).

In order to escape the lack of specificity of what McRobbie identifies as "liberal feminism", resilience as an analytical term needs to be used with caution. However, it is not meaningless for an analysis of *Listen*.

As they wait at home for what they think will be the arrival of social services, the family members are accompanied by a melancholic score. The lament of the strings complements the gloomy images "shot" through Lu's cardboard camera. These are blurry, out of focus images, mostly of her siblings, particularly of the baby playing on the floor. The colour palette features mainly grey and blue hues, and it is a home with no joy that the makeshift camera captures.

Eventually, Lu sits on the sofa next to her brother, Diego, while their father paces the living room, walking back and forth, in a tense moment that is built on the coincidence of the pre-scheduled visit by the social services and the new threat that emerged from Lu's teacher at school. Checking the clock on the wall once again, Jota finally sits next to the children, stating that "it's time". At this point, the music ends and is replaced by the faint noise of the TV, which they turned on to look "normal". "Any channel will do", said Jota, passing the remote to Diego.

At the same time, the mother picks up the baby and sits next to the rest of the family on the sofa, as the film—a real camera now—captures their distant looks. This is the first time in the film the family of five is seen complete and together, in the same space and in the same shot, as they sit on the sofa waiting for the doorbell to ring (Fig. 1). A home with small rooms has contributed to the apparent fragmentation of the family members, who, as such, have been further weakened in their marginality. But the home's living room becomes a site of resistance for the whole family. As the doorbell rings, and all of them get up to greet the people at the door, the camera lingers on a shot of the empty sofa, with only voices emerging from the TV. This visual reminder of the empty sofa is a preannouncement of what is to come. The home will be radically transformed after this scene. Home can only be conceived of as a "place" when its inhabitants bring it to life—and when they come together (Massey). As with the shots of nature at the start of the film, which contrasted strongly with the pace and energy of the shots inside the house, the composition presenting the family together for the first time only announces the dissolution of this unity. In *Listen*, an apparently simple and almost binaristic narrative uses negation to build and emphasise the film's themes, through a dialectical editing of scenes that are matched through their disparity.



Figure 1: The family of five seen complete for the last time: an announcement of what's to come. *Listen*, directed by Ana Rocha de Sousa. 2020 © Bando à Parte. Screenshot.

The doorbell rings once more, but as Jota approaches the door, it is not calmly opened. Rather, it is pushed against him. He screams, looking up to the top of the stairs: "Bela!" The force used to open the door ajar gives way to a policewoman entering their flat, together with a social services officer. The camera then cuts to the mother ordering the children to run to

their rooms and hide. At the top of the stairs the mother has time to see the police officers take Jessy, who had been playing on the floor by the door, downstairs. Bela then runs after her older children, hiding in a bedroom with them. Parallel editing stresses the opposition between a mostly masculine scene of force downstairs, with the social services informing the father his children are considered to be at a risk of imminent harm, and the quiet (but not calm) expectation of the mother, protecting her children behind a wardrobe behind a locked door, upstairs—a gendered division the film goes on to explore. In due time, a law enforcement officer forcefully opens the door and enters the room. They remain there, mute, while Bela still has the opportunity to jot down her phone number on a sheet of paper and hand it over to Diego. He is instructed to commit it to memory and dispose of the paper. The handheld camera, and the mother's screaming, heighten the dramatic atmosphere of the scene. Lu first, and then Diego, are indeed taken, as Bela screams "You cannot do this!" and is held down on the bed by a police officer.

The scene's intense dramatic character is almost denied by the following shot, which, after a simple cut, shows Jota (rather than a police officer) holding Bela, not forcefully, but in a hug, in front of a letter they were mandated to sign. They both cry and try to process what just happened. In *Listen*'s very first shots the home seems to emerge as a haven, close to what bell hooks describes as "'homeplace,' where we can recover ourselves" (43). However, what follows, and particularly the scene in which the children are taken, stresses just how fragile this concept is. The most dramatic and narrative-defining sequence of the film amounts to only three minutes, with a similar amount of time devoted to the grieving mother. After the children are taken, what the viewer sees are scenes from an empty nest, as the film replicates the idea that homes primarily belong to women (hooks). Bela lies at home, on the sofa or on the bed, her breasts leaking milk (Fig. 2). The image of a despondent individual (in the case of *Listen*, the mother), is common to many other films about what Iván Villarmea Álvarez describes as the now "perennial and systematic crisis" that has, at least since 2008, affected Portugal and Spain (15). In *Listen*, however, such scenes are not about a frail financial future, but about the compromised prospect of a family.



Figure 2: The despondent mother in *Listen*. 2020 © Bando à Parte. Screenshot.

As is the case in other British social realist films (Forrest), the narratives of films such as *I, Daniel Blake* (Ken Loach, 2016) and *Sorry We Missed You* (Ken Loach, 2019) focus on the emergence of a working-class hero who takes matters into his own hands after being confronted with a huge injustice. After the conflict of the film has been clearly established, the same happens in *Listen*. In this case, it is not single men, but the couple, as resilient agents, that become heroes, even if their individual paths to heroism are presented in radically different ways. For instance, after their first visit to the centre where the children are being held, and realising the final outcome might be permanent, Jota decides to do something. We see him going to an auto repair shop, in a derelict area of the city. Here, he confronts who we come to understand is his employer about the salary he is owed for work he had completed, and steals a laptop in exchange for the missing pay. As McDowell has put it, "women, it is commonly argued, are at the mercy of their bodies and their emotions, whereas men represent the transcendence of these baser features, mind to women's body" (11). Apparently aligning with a traditional understanding of gender, the editing in *Listen* links Jota's brave, defiant actions with images of a depressed Bela at home, as if in mourning, in a lethargic state.

Back home, browsing on this laptop, Jota finds out about a lawyer who can help him and Bela recover the children. The meeting with the lawyer, a woman, is all but emotional. With a calm, neutral, unemotive voice, she tells them they will need to be psychologically prepared for what is to come. "The fight ahead of us is going to be tough", she informs them. "You've got to keep your anger and anxiety inside you", she argues, once again stressing the opposition between the private and public spheres. This is a society made for resilient individuals, who need to find a personal solution to their (systemic) problems, even when this involves fighting the State as the source of their difficulties. As McRobbie suggests, in the current unequal society,

> the most vulnerable sectors of the population are not just made to suffer, but are increasingly and incrementally deprived of resources which would permit any improvement to their dire circumstances, thus making a mockery of the discourse of self-responsibility and showing the illusory nature of the so-called meritocracy. (121)

As there is no conventional path to follow, it is up to marginal characters in extreme situations such as these to discover the best solution by themselves. In *Listen,* the lawyer, and the fortuitous plan she will outline for this family, sets up Jota, first, and then, eventually, Bela, as resilient heroes. While they try to recover their children, Jota and Bela's home seems to be the only thing that keeps them going. It is also the only thing they have left. As bell hooks has suggested, "when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance" (46). At this point in *Listen,* the home has lost its meaning as the place the family inhabits. It does not, however, to use Doreen Massey's terminology, become just a *space*, as it is now a *place* for resilience.

On the one hand, and siding with those that see resilience as a proxy for the neoliberal system, the film emerges as conservative, including in its gender politics, as it highlights the resilience of the father and the apparent emotional submission of the mother as "normal" reactions to the film's main conflict. The idea that battles can be won if people really fight, which seems to guide the film's narrative, could also be seen as conservative insofar as it ignores forms of exclusion that might leave other individuals out of such processes. On the other hand, the film ends with an escape, and with a not necessarily happy, but certainly tranquil ending, considering the ordeal the characters had to face. *Listen* highlights the multiple inequalities of contemporary society and criticises the social system currently in place. The fact

that the film's protagonists are allowed to have a last word, while perhaps naïve or disingenuous, might also be seen as a more positive and hopeful sign in narrative terms.

Escape

Towards the end of the film, the parents are allowed a court session to discuss the future of their family. At the court, Bela talks vividly, in a confident manner, about recovering their children. She tells the judge she wants the five of them to be together again so they can leave the UK. Bela and Jota sit to one side, the social services officers to the other. The confrontation is almost too obviously highlighted by the sequence's classic mise en scène, as it is captured in a shot/reverse shot pattern, as either Bela or one of the officers interjects, talking about how the children were cared for during this process. The only time in which this geometrical editing structure is broken is when Bela approaches the bench to speak to the judge, thus coming closer to the camera too. This is a more emotional scene than the ones we have watched before in the film, although the colours continue to be generally subdued and there is no added music. The drama arises mostly from the performance, namely Bela's inspired heartfelt speech, which Jota listens to with pride, tears in his eyes as he anticipates the outcome of the hearing. As she concludes her intervention, repeating the sentence "my kids are not for sale", the film's musical theme, which had also framed the composition of the family on the sofa, resumes. The final word belongs to the woman, previously and stereotypically deemed as "too emotional", now in charge of all her faculties (including the ability to create emotive speeches), even if the retaliation process was initiated by the male hero.

The musical theme that accompanies the court scene, and that we had first heard as the family gathered on the sofa, waiting for a dramatic moment they could not expect, is the only nondiegetic music in *Listen*. And it reoccurs at different points of the film's narrative. The strings composition and the sound of the harp confer the scene a melancholic tone: it suggests a longing for the last time the family were together, and perhaps a hope they will reunite again soon. Back home, the music continues, as Bela and Jota sit in the kitchen, drinking tea. He compliments her for her speech, but she is despondent: there is a real chance their efforts have been in vain. There is no urgency at this point in the narrative, but the quietness that feeds the scene is almost eerie, with the home appearing once more as an uneasy space. On the one hand, they have kept their flat throughout the film, and the flat has also kept them going. On the other hand, the flat is permeable to outside tensions and problems, and time, inside this flat, has run with urgency rather than tranquillity, which is why seeing the film's protagonists sitting calmly feels incongruous.

As if confirming the more usual *tempo* of the home, this scene does not allow Jota and Bela to sit for a very long time either. As they eat and drink, a metallic sound interrupts the music that had been accompanying their brief dialogue. Bela gets up from the table, shot in deep focus at the very end of the frame, with the couple outlined by a narrow corridor, as if stressing the restrictions they face and that confine them in their own place. As Bela returns to the kitchen, she hands Jota a letter. A close up of Jota's face discloses some joy at last, as he opens the envelope to learn it is his paycheck. A scene set in the kitchen, and with letters being delivered, had also inaugurated the film and had represented the viewers' introduction to the space of the family home. Another envelope appears in the following scene, emphasising the film's circularity and impending ending. The lawyer who had been helping Jota and Bela instructs Diego that he will now be taken to France. His parents are expected to meet him there

after getting Lu and Jessy back. The film then quickly cuts to the presentation of that possible future.

This more quick-paced editing intensifies the urgency of the sequence as, in the next scene, Bela and Jota pick Lu up from the centre where social services had been caring for her, and Lu comes rushing in, jumping into her father's arms. Bela signs a release form for her middle child and blames the social worker for being part of a system she knows to be unfair as Jota, appeasing as always, tries to apologise. Eventually they leave: Bela, Jota and Lu towards the left of the frame; the social worker, forms in hand, to the right, in what constitutes another instance of the schematic, parallel framing and decoupage *Listen* adopts in key narrative scenes. The camera lingers on yet another empty space—this time of the visitor's room in the foster centre—and the strings non-diegetic music returns. The final shot of the film shows Bela, Jota and Lu opening the doors of this facility with both hands. This final image expresses confidence in a better future, as they close the doors behind them, as if to make sure they are not drawn back in again. No further information is given about this future, although it is suggested baby Jessy is left behind, after having been placed into adoption. This is a huge blow for the family, that the film's narrative simply bypasses to emphasise, instead, the resilience of these parents, and the celebration of the escape, framed by the solid architecture of the home, which provided shelter and reassurance and gave them strength throughout the family's ordeal.

Even if *Listen*'s narrative resolution is flawed, the film's cultural relevance remains unquestioned. As a perhaps uninventive but very coherent film in which claustrophobic mise en scène is combined with geometrical camerawork and formal musical editing, *Listen* is unlike any other Portuguese film before. It is a Portuguese realist film set in Britain about a young family and working-class resilient heroes that challenges, in terms of idiom and in terms of cinematography, the language Portuguese cinema has been expected to speak in past decades as a supposedly "artisanal", art-house cinema. As an example of a contemporary Portuguese transnational film, *Listen* challenges the understanding of what a Portuguese *auteur* is, as Rocha de Sousa is, in the many ways suggested earlier, an outsider. Having worked first in television, and as a young woman who moved abroad, Rocha de Sousa has a very different training and outlook, on life and on filmmaking, than Portuguese directors working in the same period, including Teresa Villaverde, Susana Nobre, João Salaviza or Leonor Teles, to stay with the examples cited at the start of this article. Ana Rocha de Sousa is not just influenced by Mike Leigh, she emerges as the Portuguese—and female—Ken Loach. As such, the analysis of *Listen* expands the contemporary understanding of small (trans)national cinema in twenty-first-century Europe.

In addition to raising questions about Portuguese film and society, *Listen* belongs to a wider body of work that confirms the significance of the home as a key theme in contemporary European film. It further articulates vital conceptions of the home regarding matters of class and gender. Recent European films that have engaged with the same topics, and can be generally described as films about families and their homes, include *Home* (Fien Troch, 2016), *Rosie* (Paddy Breathnach, 2018), *Moon, 66 Questions* (*Selini, 66 erotiseis*, Jacqueline Lentzou, 2021), *Petite Mamam* (Céline Sciamma, 2021) and *Lullaby* (*Cinco Lobitos*, Alauda Ruiz de Azúa, 2022). In *Listen*, the home is constricting and yet too porous to the threats emerging in the outside world. At the same time, in *Listen*, the home is also a material guarantee and a space that allows characters to thrive, or at least to survive, when nothing else will. It is the place they always return to, and their only site of stability.

Because Portugal is at the same time very conservative and highly permeable to international developments in the field of gender equality, studying a film like this also gives us information about the limits of contemporary European feminism. Confirming the value of reterritorialisation as an analytical tool that eliminates the tempting but restricting conception of double minority as uber-marginality, this article has shown it is vital to expand the European cinema canon to include those cinematographies and film genres most often relegated to its margins in order to account for the diversity, contradictions, and richness that characterise it, and, therefore, allow us to rethink the actual definition of Europe, its culture and film. An examination of *Listen* and of its characters' varied degrees of marginality emotionally and materially embodied in the representation of their home, reinforces the importance of expanding the corpus of national, and even local and regional cinemas, considered as European. This article thus extends the corpus of films available for analysis, while pointing new ways for reflection about home and marginality, practices of resistance and dominant accounts of domesticity in contemporary film.

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