O Som e a Fúria presents
in co-production with Komplizen Film, Gullane, Shellac Sud and ZDF/ARTE

a film by MIGUEL GOMES

TABU

Berlinale
62 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Competition

TABU

A FILM BY MIGUEL GOMES

PILAR spends her first years of retirement trying to straighten the world and dealing with other people's guilt, an increasingly frustrating task these days. She takes part in Peace vigils, collaborates with catholic social intervention groups, she wants to lodge young Polish girls coming to Lisbon on a Taizè ecumenical meeting, she constantly hangs up and takes down an ugly painting made by a friend so as not to offend his feelings should it not be in view when he comes to visit...

She is mostly troubled by her neighbour AURORA's loneliness, a temperamental and eccentric octogenarian who escapes to the casino whenever she has any money on her, constantly talks about her daughter who seems to not want to see her, she has hangovers from anti-depressants and suspects her Cape-Verdian maid SANTA is evilly practising voodoo against her. We know little of Santa, who is sparse with her words, follows orders and thinks that everyone should mind their own business. She goes to adult literacy classes and practices at night by reading a young reader's edition of Robinson Crusoe stretched out on her boss's couch while smoking cigarettes.
Aurora will make a mysterious request and the other two join efforts to accomplish it. She wants to meet a man, GIAN LUCA VENTURA, someone nobody knew existed until then.

Pilar and Santa will find that he does exist but are informed he is no longer sane. Ventura has a secret pact with Aurora and a story to tell; a story that occurred fifty years ago, shortly before the beginning of the Portuguese colonial war. It starts like this: "Aurora had a farm in Africa at the foothill of Mount Tabu..."

TABU

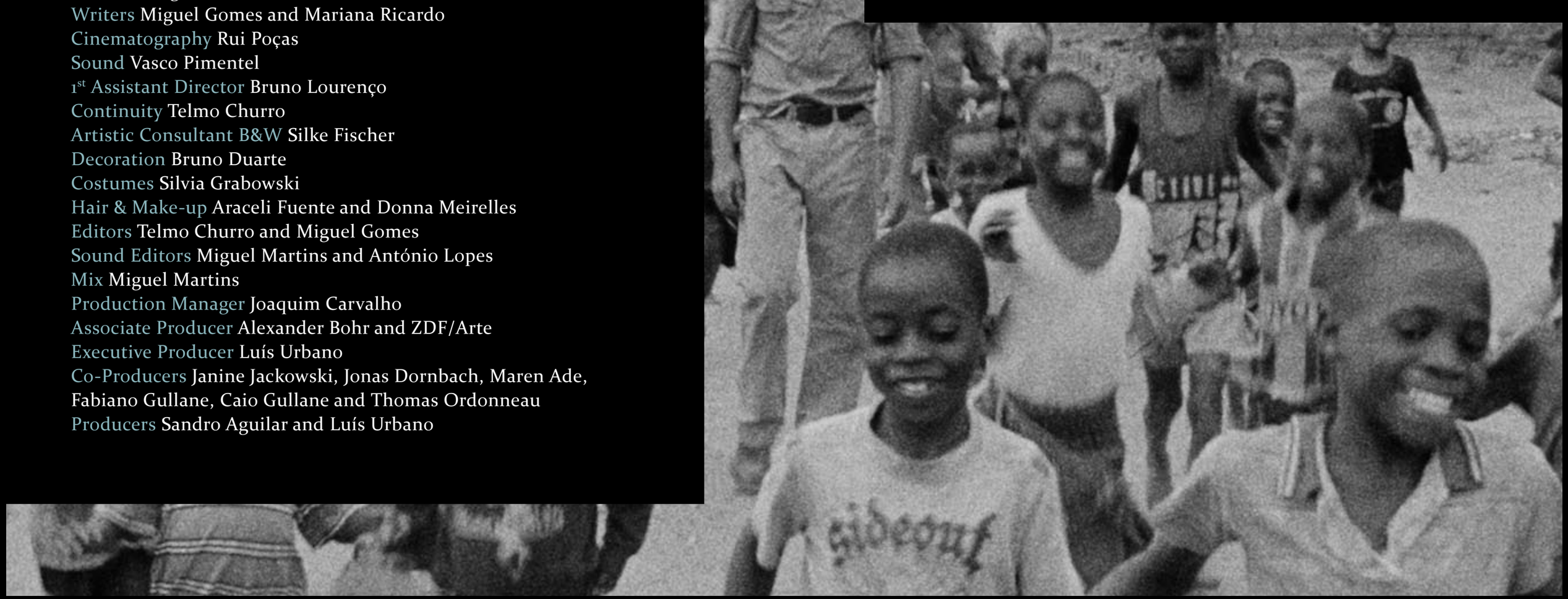
35mm | B&W | 1:1.37 | Dolby SRD | 110’

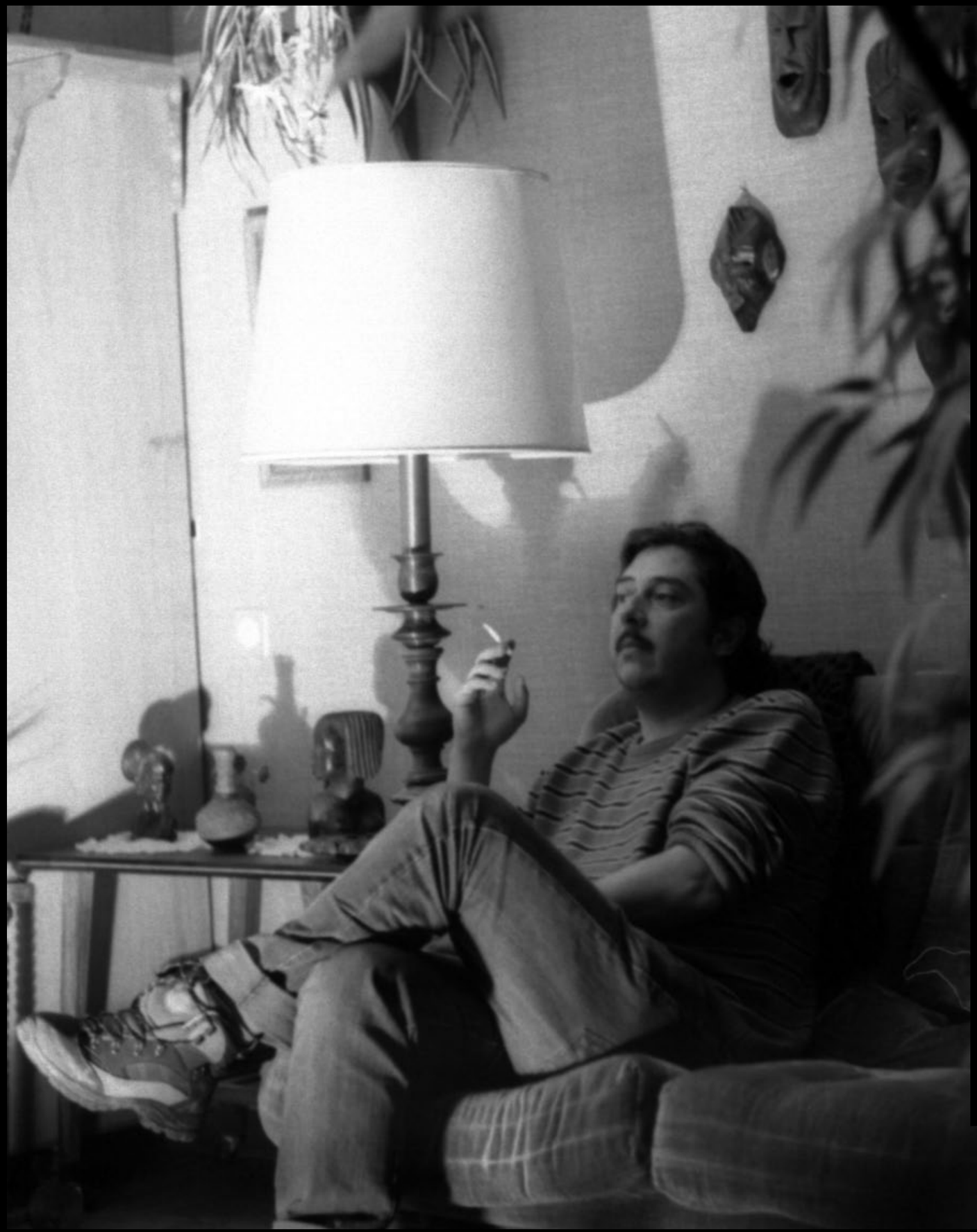
Main Cast
Teresa Madruga
Laura Soveral
Ana Moreira
Henrique Espírito Santo
Carloto Cotta
Isabel Cardoso
Ivo Müller
Manuel Mesquita

Director Miguel Gomes
Writers Miguel Gomes and Mariana Ricardo
Cinematography Rui Poças
Sound Vasco Pimentel
1st Assistant Director Bruno Lourenço
Continuity Telmo Churro
Artistic Consultant B&W Silke Fischer
Decoration Bruno Duarte
Costumes Silvia Grabowski
Hair & Make-up Araceli Fuente and Donna Meirelles
Editors Telmo Churro and Miguel Gomes
Sound Editors Miguel Martins and António Lopes
Mix Miguel Martins
Production Manager Joaquim Carvalho
Associate Producer Alexander Bohr and ZDF/Arte
Executive Producer Luís Urbano
Co-Producers Janine Jackowski, Jonas Dornbach, Maren Ade, Fabiano Gullane, Caio Gullane and Thomas Ordonneau
Producers Sandro Aguilar and Luís Urbano

MIGUEL GOMES

Born in Lisbon in 1972. He studied at the Lisbon Film and Theatre School and worked as film critic for the Portuguese press between 1996 and 2000.
He directed several short films awarded in festivals such as Oberhausen, Belfort and Vila do Conde, and screened at Locarno, Rotterdam, Buenos Aires and Vienna. THE FACE YOU DESERVE (2004) was his first feature film. In 2008, he presented his film, OUR BELOVED MONTH OF AUGUST in the Directors’ Fortnight at the Cannes Festival, which was subsequently selected in more than forty international festivals where he won over a dozen prizes.The Viennale (Austria, 2008), Bafici (Argentina, 2009) and the Centro de Artes e Imaxes da Corunha (Spain, 2009) included retrospectives of his films. TABU is his third feature film.





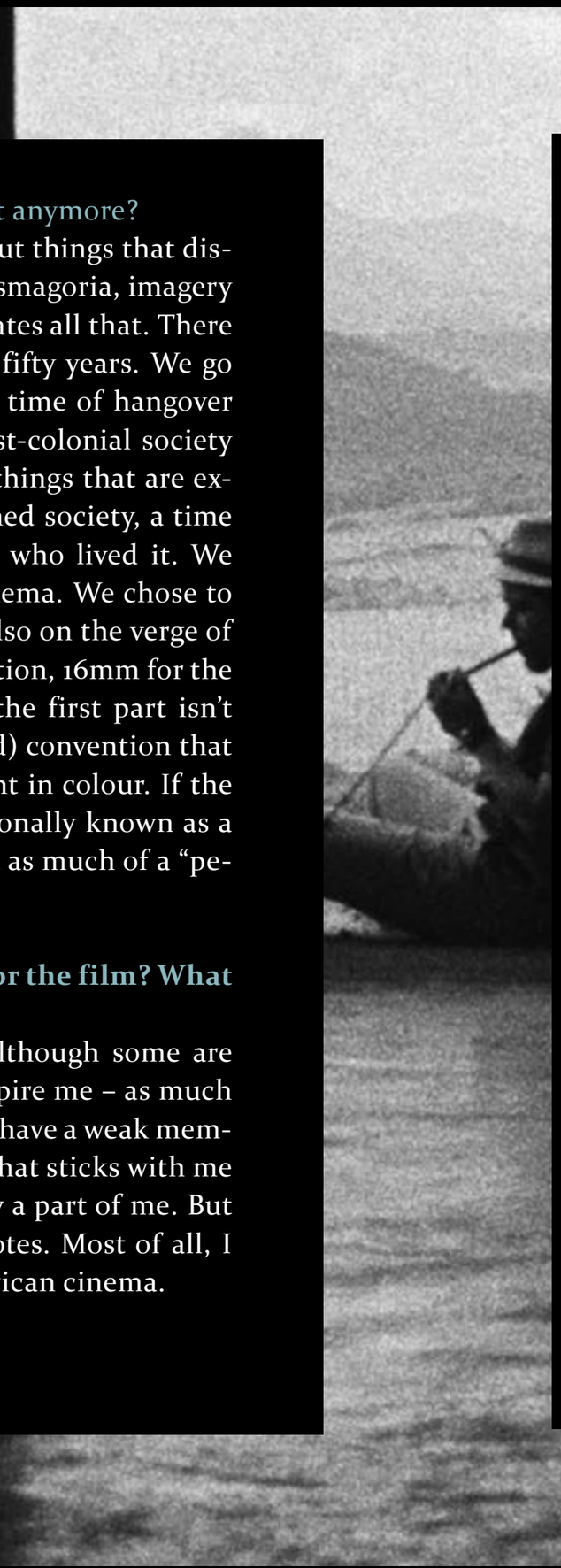
FAST QUESTIONS BY MAREN ADE AND ULRICH KÖHLER, SEMI-QUICK ANSWERS BY MIGUEL GOMES

What was the starting point for the film?
The fact that there is someone in my family who has several points in common with Pilar's character. She has always lived on her own, she is a practicing Catholic, loves to go to the movies (she's the one who got me into watching films when I was a kid) and keeps jumping from one humanitarian activity to the next. She told me the story of her relationship with a senile and somewhat paranoid neighbour who would often take refuge at her place and accuse the African maid of locking her up in her room at night, and of further ill-treatment which was never proven. I was interested in these three lonely sixty or eighty-year-old female characters with distinguishing temperaments and peculiarities but who deep down are fairly ordinary characters we might run into in everyday life. Characters we don't usually meet in films.

How did the idea for the silent second part come up?
I'm not even sure the second part of the film is technically a silent film. Dialogue is suppressed, but there is a narrative voice-over that recounts the sequence of events taking place in this segment of the film. And there are the letters Ventura and Aurora exchange. Someone is telling a story for somebody else who is listening to it. Between Ventura's memory and Pilar's and Santa's visualization of his narrative there is no place for dialogue. As if the concrete words exchanged between characters got lost in time. It was also from this perspective that I wanted to address the aesthetics of silent film (or even of Super 8, a domestic and more recent variety of primitive and silent film). I didn't want to make a modern pastiche of silent film, but rather find another way of getting through to some of its essence and beauty. Well, at least try to...

Was it a search for a cinema that doesn't exist anymore?
Tabu is a film about the passage of time, about things that disappear and can only exist as memory, phantasmagoria, imagery – or as cinema, which summons and congregates all that. There is a massive ellipsis in the film, we go back fifty years. We go from the time of old age to youth, from the time of hangover and guilt to the time of excesses, from a post-colonial society to the time of colonialism. It's a film about things that are extinguished: a person who dies, an extinguished society, a time that can only exist in the memory of those who lived it. We also wanted to connect this to an extinct cinema. We chose to shoot the film in black and white, which is also on the verge of extinction – 35mm for the contemporary section, 16mm for the African section. I'm sometimes asked why the first part isn't in colour, according to the (somewhat absurd) convention that the past is in black and white and the present in colour. If the second part of the film fits what is conventionally known as a "period piece", I'm not sure the first part isn't as much of a "period piece"...

How important was the work of Murnau for the film? What other films inspired you?
Murnau's work is important to everyone, although some are more aware of it than others. Many films inspire me – as much as stories told by relatives, in this case – but I have a weak memory and films get all mixed up in my head. What sticks with me is the sensation of films, which is completely a part of me. But the cinema I make is not one of explicit quotes. Most of all, I have a strong connection with classical American cinema.



How did you work with the actors?
For the first section, we rehearsed the scenes written on the script quite a bit. For the second part we didn't rehearse anything and threw away the script (although following the guiding lines of what we had written). I asked Ana Moreira to learn how to use a rifle and Carloto Cotta to practice playing the drums. In Africa, we formed a four-element group within the crew, named the Central Committee (me, the scriptwriter, the script supervisor/ editor and the assistant direct). The Central Committee's job was to invent, rewrite and eliminate scenes or ideas of scenes we were to shoot the following days. During the shooting we would improvise with the actors, who knew little of what would go on in the scenes, although they had a general picture of the whole story. In some scenes we recorded synchronous sound and the actors would pretend to be speaking, while saying whatever they pleased (Tabu will be a very interesting film for the Portuguese deaf-mute audience who can read lips...). In other scenes the actors were actually speaking and later we eliminated and replaced the synchronous sound.

How did you work with the black and white?
We did some preparatory work, trying to understand the shades of grey each colour and gradation of colour would give. Nothing very scientific, but we would photograph sets, wardrobe, make-up tests, props etc. in black and white. I used a 7D digital camera in black and white mode to decide where to place the movie camera. When there is no colour, both composition and the way light enters and is diffused in the frame become more relevant. But at some point we all have eyes to see, so we put science aside.

What role do the colonial times in present-day Lisbon play?

My dear friends, that is question of sociological nature that would demand a long answer I don't feel apt to give. War between Portugal and the former colonies (Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde) began in the first half of the sixties and ended only in 1974, with those countries' proclamation of independence and the fall of the fascist regime in "The Carnation Revolution" of the 25th of April. That is to say it's still very close in the history of the country. Thousands of returnees came back to Portugal at that time. My mother, for example, was born in Angola and came to Lisbon in the sixties to study. As I've said, more than articulating the colonial issue between the two sections of the film, I wanted to have a more abstract component, going from a vague sense of loss and guilt to a time of excesses, brutality and folly (sentimental, social and political folly). But I wanted the melancholy of the first part to contaminate the euphoria of the second. The images and characters' actions in "paradise" (something it never was, for those who missed the irony) already come from a "paradise lost".

Where exactly in Mozambique is Mount Tabu?

There is no Mount Tabu in Mozambique, don't believe everything you see in the movies. The film was shot in the north of the Zambezia province, near the border with Malawi. It is a mountain region dominated by the cultivation of tea. In the film, it's not even supposed to be Mozambique, it's an unnamed former Portuguese colony, an indeterminate historical territory reinvented for a film called Tabu.

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TERESA MADRUGA

Teresa Madruga was born in the Portuguese archipelago of Azores in 1953.
She begins her acting career in theatre in 1976.
Her work for directors such as Manoel de Oliveira, João César Monteiro, João Canijo, João Pedro Rodrigues, João Botelho or Fernando Lopes stands out among a filmography of more than 30 titles.
Her main part in Swiss director Alain Tanner's "La Ville Blanche" (1983) brought her international recognition and further work in Spanish, Italian and French productions. In 1995 she acted alongside Marcello Mastroianni in Roberto Faenza's "Afirma Pereira".
She has been recurrently awarded for her roles in film and stages (Best Actress at the Festival du Court Metrage de Clermont–Ferrand for "D'Aprés Maria", from director Jean Claude Robert; Best Female Act at Sete de Cinema for "Dans La Ville Blanche").
She worked in the Portuguese National Broadcast Radio Station, and lent her voice to more than eighty cartoons.

LAURA SOVERAL

Laura Soveral was born in Angola in 1933.
She was a kindergarten teacher in the Portuguese former colony but starts acting when she settles in Lisbon. While studying German Philology at the Lisbon University she becomes interested in theatre. She debuts in the play "Deseja-se Mulher" by Almada Negreiros in 1963 and enrols in the National Theatre Conservatory.
After several television roles, she wines Best Cinema Actress award by the SNI (National Office of Culture) in 1968.
While her career in cinema prospers, she continues acting for theatre, performing on the main Portuguese stages. She plays in films by Manoel de Oliveira, João Botelho, Fernando Lopes, among many others.
She still acts for television, regularly taking part in soap operas.

ANA MOREIRA

Ana Moreira was born in Lisbon in 1980.
She's 17 when she debuts as an actress in the short film "Primavera" by João Tuna. One year later she plays the main part in "Os Mutantes", by Teresa Villaverde - a turning point in her career - for which she won Best Actress prizes at Bastia and Taormina film festivals. Teresa Villaverde would direct her again in "Água e Sal" (2001) and "Transe" (2006).
Meanwhile, she drops a Graphic Design course to be a full-time film and theatre actress. She acts in films from Raquel Freire, José Nascimento, José Fonseca e Costa, Margarida Gil, Jorge Cramez and João Botelho, among others.
In 1999 she's nominated as a Shooting Star by the European Film Promotion, and wins, in 2006, Best Cinema Actress Golden Globe (Portuguese award) for her role in "Adriana", by Margarida Gil.

CARLOTO COTTA

Carloto Cotta was born in Portugal in 1984.
He goes to high school at Cascais Theatre School and his final project is Íñigo Ramírez "Me Cago Em Dios", which he translates, directs and performs. It will be his first appearance on stage, in a Lisbon underground association.
After that, he acts in more than 30 shorts, films and soap operas, working, among others, with João Pedro Rodrigues, Manuel Mozos, Jorge Cramez and Miguel Gomes, who directs him in "A Cara Que Mereces" and now in "Tabu".
He's the lead in the Cannes Palme d'Or winner short film "Arena" (2009), by João Salaviza, and plays a part in the awarded "Mistérios de Lisboa", by Raul Ruiz.
He's been a member of the band "Aves Migratórias" for the past 8 years.

HENRIQUE ESPÍRITO SANTO

Henrique Espírito Santo was born in Portugal in 1931.
He works as a film society manager and the author of several cinema related articles in the magazines Visor, Imagem, Actualidades, Seara Nova and a few daily newspapers between 1954 and 1963.
He becomes a film, documentary, publicity and TV producer in 1967 and also plays minor roles from that year on.
He is the production manager for directors as João César Monteiro, José Fonseca e Costa, Alberto Seixas Santos and Manoel de Oliveira. He produces "Cerromaior" by Luís Filipe Rocha (1980), one of the first post-revolution films to explore social issues.
In 1976 he founds the producing company Prole Filme.
He teaches film production in universities, schools and film festivals since 1978 .
He also developed the workshop for children "How To Make A Movie" in 1998, and has been teaching it all over the country ever since.

ISABEL CARDOSO

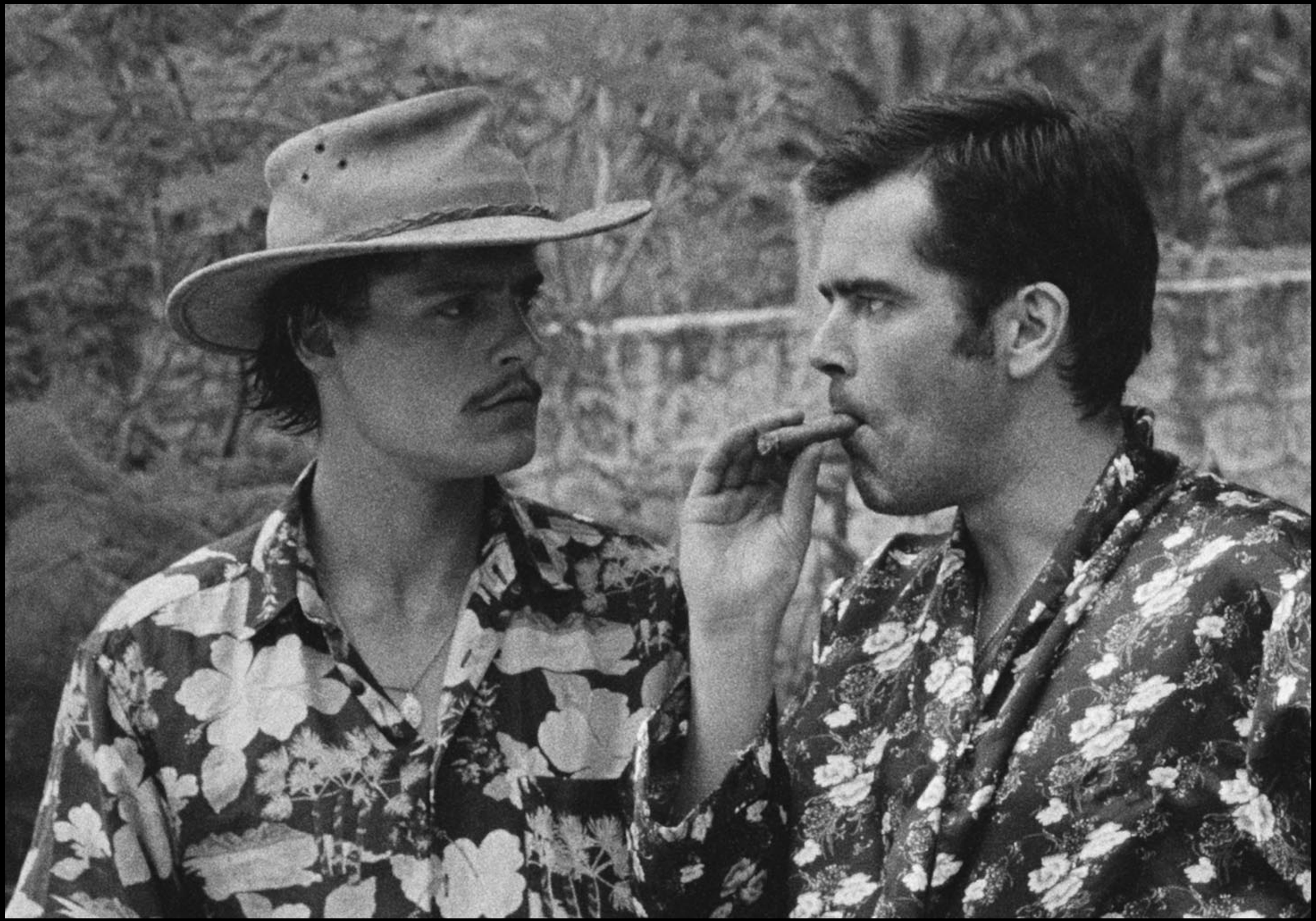
Isabel Cardoso was born in São Tomé in 1949.
She's a cook for the day nursery at Unidos de Cabo Verde Association. Although she's not a professional actress, this is her third role under the direction of acclaimed directors: she appears in two films from Pedro Costa, "Juventude Em Marcha" (2006) and "A Caça Ao Coelho Com Pau/The Rabbit Hunters" (2007, "Memories" project for the Jeonju Festival).

IVO MÜLLER

Ivo Müller was born in Brazil in 1977.
In 1994, thanks to a scholarship from the American Field Service, he goes to study in the United States. During that stay, he dedicates to amateur theatre.
He graduated in Law in 2002, with the essay “Copyright Laws and Cinematographic Work”. During that period he works as an intern in banks and law offices, and writes several articles about cinema for the Guia Floripa website while continuing his theatre work.
He joins the theatre company Grupo Tapa (of which he’s still a member) as an understudy in 2003.
He already won the APCA (São Paulo Association of Art Critics) 2010 Best Play award for “Doze Homens E Uma Sentença” directed by Eduardo Tolentino de Araújo.
He is the author of the theatre monologue “Cartas A Um Jovem Poeta”, based on texts from Rainer Maria Rilke.
He is a member of the CPT (Centre for Theatrical Research) between 2006 and 2008.
“Tabu” is his first feature film.

MANUEL MESQUITA

Manuel Mesquita was born in Lisbon in 1977.
He studied Anthropology, but has been working in several cinema related activities.
He composes music for films and plays minor roles: he is a regular cast member in films by João Nicolau who gave him his first lead role in “A Espada e a Rosa”.
Usual collaborator of the production company O Som e a Fúria, he also appears in Sandro Aguilar’s “A Zona”.
Being a multitasking artist, he also works in production, directing and editing.
He is part of several relevant Portuguese music bands, like München or Norman, with Norberto Lobo and João Lobo.



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