

Piçarra, Maria do Carmo. *Projectar a Ordem: Cinema do Povo e Propaganda Salazarista 1935-1954*. Os Pássaros, 2020. 420 pp. ISBN: 9789893307441

With the suggestive title of ‘Projecting the Order’, this book is yet one more contribution to our knowledge of Portuguese cinema in its beginning phase, as well as to our understanding of how the Estado Novo appropriated culture and technology to present its skewered view of the country and of itself. Maria do Carmo Piçarra is one of the most prolific writers working on the History of Portuguese Cinema and this is a welcome addition to other important studies by her that include *Azuis Ultramarinos: Propaganda e Censura do Estado Novo* (Edições 70, 2015) and, as editor, *(Re)Imagining African Independence: Film, Visual Arts and the Fall of the Portuguese Empire* (Peter Lang, 2017). A sustained inquiry into the earlier attempts to use film for propaganda purposes in Portugal focused on the ‘Cinema do Povo / Cinema Móvel do Secretariado Nacional de Propaganda (SPN)’. Although the designation of ‘mobile cinema’ strictly refers to the fact that this was a means of bringing cinema to remote areas of Portugal and to segments of the population that, in many cases, had not yet seen a film before, its title as ‘people’s cinema’ is of course, purposely misleading. As could not be clearer, it was anything but a cinema *of* the people.

This extensive study is divided in four main parts, besides the introductory remarks and a conclusion. Part 1, ‘Cinema do Povo: A Projecção da Política do Espírito’ appropriately introduces the focus of the present study while taking care to explain certain key contextual elements. The ‘política do espírito’, or politics of the spirit, was a central tenet of the Estado Novo, its propaganda assuming essential characteristics that would serve to justify and reinforce the new state institutions, the exercise of a dictatorial power couched in messianic terms, and thus provide a sort of evidence for the regime’s glory, which in great part, was actually being simultaneously fabricated by the propaganda. Part 2, ‘O País-Ecrã do Salazarismo’ continues and expands on the material presented in the first chapter, covering what it designates as a first programming period, from 1935 to 1954. The attention given here to the correlation with, and use of, Nazi propaganda is very much of interest and, if anything, one could wish for more space to have been given to this aspect. At the same time, the efforts of several of the protagonists to develop not just a ‘Portuguese’ cinema but also an ‘Iberian’ one is also important, despite its ultimate failure. Part 3 can be said to focus more precisely on the years of World War II, introduce one significant film directed by António Lopes Ribeiro, *O Feitiço do Império* (1940). Among his many contributions to cinema and the propaganda machine, he also had directed *A Revolução de Maio* (1937), the one feature film focusing on the notion of political ‘redemption’ and the conversion of even ardent revolutionaries to the glories of the regime, that was heavily used: it would be presented alongside various lectures and explanations given by all kinds of entities and ideologues, aligned with the Church or the Army, as well as from the ranks of local politicians in a concerted effort to indoctrinate the rural populations. Part IV focuses on the years between 1947 and 1955 and contemplates both the end of the ambulatory cinema as well as the beginning of the end of the colonial empire. Given the importance to the regime of creating not just nationalistic fervor but also a myth of grandeur based on an idea of Empire, if anything, one wishes more attention could have been given to the way cinema was used in order to present a distorted view of the African colonies and of their people.

There are many strong points to this book, starting with the profusion of images taken from the archive and from the films under consideration. Another strong point is the inclusion of extensive passages from the various documents consulted by the author, which, to a great extent,

would otherwise remain not easily accessible unless one were to visit the archives where they are kept. Overall, it also should be remarked that the book is a handsome volume with a very legible type, good quality paper, and a careful attention to the overall graphic layout. Nonetheless, there are repetitions throughout the volume that might have been easily avoided. Perhaps the author felt a need to go over some of the same issues in order to allow for readers who might decide to only take up one or the other chapter based on the chronology. Perhaps some of the effect stems from the inclusion of the long citations, which are invariably accompanied by explanatory comments that necessarily must repeat some of the same information. A minor point, to be sure, that does not detract from the general interest of this historical study.

Even though the book avoids any unnecessary dramatization of the issues, there are points at which the narrative succeeds all too well in portraying the grimness of an epoch marked by ideological violence, manipulation, and the repression of most of the people of Portugal, be they the urban masses or the rural workers, especially the latter so perniciously idealized by the propaganda as holders of national values. There are the basic poor conditions of the mobile cinema workers who were not paid enough even to always stay in a rented room overnight at the places they travelled to. Or the scarcity even of technical means, with the specialized trucks breaking down often, even catching fire on one occasion. The disaster at Freamunde in 1938 when an estimated audience of eight hundred was allowed to congregate in a room with capacity for three hundred at most, causing the entire floor to collapse and chaos to ensue as well as leading to the death of some, while scores of others, including children, were gravely injured can stand as a horrific emblem for the cavalier attitude of the state. And overall, the insidious, pervasive, menacing atmosphere of the times that comes through, including in the view of some of the photographs reproduced, despite all the notices of jubilant audiences. Any successful book calls out for more and this is no exception. Given that the fight against communism was a key goal of the 'Cinema do Povo', one is left hoping for further work either on a real people's cinema, or, failing that, a study of the forms of resistance that surely surfaced with the deployment of cinema as a tool for fascist control.

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