

PORTUGUESE FILM, 1930–1960

THE STAGING OF THE NEW STATE REGIME

PATRICIA VIEIRA



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Portuguese Film, 1930–1960

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Patricia Vieira

Translated by Ashley Caja

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To Michael, my companion in this and so many other cinematic adventures

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Introduction

Cinema in the New State

In 1937, António Ferro, director of the Portuguese Secretariat of National Propaganda (Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional), organized a semi-private screening of the film *The May Revolution* (*A Revolução da Maio*, António Lopes Ribeiro) for António de Oliveira Salazar, the country's prime minister and *de facto* leader. The movie, which was about to premiere in national theaters, was produced to celebrate the Revolution of 28 May 1926 that put an end to the Portuguese First Republic (1910–26) and paved the way to the institutionalization of the New State's (Estado Novo; 1933–74) authoritarian regime.¹ It remains to this day the only Portuguese fiction film that openly conveys political propaganda. Curious about Salazar's reaction, the next day Ferro enquired about his opinion of the film and Salazar replied: "I liked that film a lot. I liked it too much, perhaps, because I could not sleep afterwards. This morning I could not work like I normally do. [...] I ask you, therefore, not to push me into this type of distractions any more."²

This episode, narrated by Ferro, then in Berne, to the French journalist Christine Garnier, is in itself proto-cinematographic and touches upon key questions for the understanding of the films produced during the first decades of the New State.³ Ferro, stereotyped as the herald of the Portuguese artistic vanguard, displayed before the head of the government the most recent cinematographic production of the regime. Salazar, playing the public persona that he himself created, marked by conservatism and by a withdrawal from mundane pleasures, reacted with a mixture of fascination and sleeplessness to the modernity represented by the film and decided to abstain from future screenings. But is the film an *avant-garde* work worthy of Ferro's innovative plans? Or, despite certain Eisensteinian overtones in the montage, is it merely a movie shored up by conventional technique and narrative? Moreover, was it really cinema, as a relatively new medium of expression, that troubled Salazar, or rather the plot of the movie, which chronicles the preparation of a communist

coup d'état in Portugal? Isn't Salazar's comment, rather than being a provincial reaction to cinema, evidence of a clear vision of the threats to the security of the New State, a vision that led him to fund other works of propaganda? Finally, by admitting to being impressed by what he saw, was Salazar not recognizing, albeit in a negative way, the power of film and the need to put it at the service of the regime?

The production of a film like *The May Revolution* became possible with the creation of the Secretariat of National Propaganda (SPN) in 1933, which in 1944 would turn into the National Secretariat of Information, Popular Culture, and Tourism (Secretariado Nacional da Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo; SNI).⁴ The objective of the SPN/SNI, led by António Ferro from its inception until 1949,⁵ was to foster Portuguese and international support for the political project of the New State. Salazar recognized that, in politics, "[...] the only thing that exists is what the public knows exists,"⁶ and he saw the Secretariat as an instrument for the political education of citizens, so that they learned the foundational tenets of his government—distilled in the trilogy "God, Nation, Family"—and then regulated their concrete existence in accordance with this dogma.⁷

As in Fascist Italy or in Nazi Germany, cinema was a fundamental part of Salazar's propagandistic efforts.⁸ In 1935, António Ferro inaugurated the Traveling Cinema (Cinema Ambulante), which showed propaganda films all over the country. With regard to production, the SPN/SNI was responsible above all for documentaries that addressed topics as varied as the completion of public works, political events, military parades, sporting events, and festivals.⁹ Some documentaries were medium- or feature-length, such as *The Exhibition of the Portuguese World (A Exposição do Mundo Português, 1941)* and *The Inauguration of the National Stadium (Inauguração do Estádio Nacional, 1944)*, both directed by António Lopes Ribeiro, but the majority were short films. Many of these were part of the newsreel *Portuguese Journal (Jornal Português)*, with 95 editions produced between 1938 and 1951 and substituted in 1953 by *Images of Portugal (Imagens de Portugal)*.¹⁰ The regime's propaganda services were also responsible for a few feature-length fiction films, including *The May Revolution*, and funded countless other cinematic works produced by private companies.

The attention that the SPN/SNI paid to cinema is usually attributed to the work of António Ferro, an intellectual and former member of the modernist literary group *Orpheu*. Ferro was a film enthusiast and wrote several essays on cinema.¹¹ Inspired by French writer Paul Valéry, he designed the so-called

“politics of the spirit” that placed art at the service of New State propaganda in order to generate enthusiasm for the regime among the Portuguese. Cinema, “which exerts such a considerable influence in the renewal of the soul of a nation and in the projection of its character,”¹² was one of the areas covered under his politics of the spirit.¹³ In a 1947 speech, Ferro described the important mandate attributed to cinema in the context of national propaganda:

In fact, Portuguese cinema has, among others, two great and noble missions: a significant educational mission within the Country (both in the aesthetic and the moral sense) and a difficult foreign mission of bringing to other nations the knowledge of our life, our character and the heights of our civilization.¹⁴

Unlike Ferro, Salazar was not a cinephile, and he considered cinema to be terribly expensive, as he confessed to Lopes Ribeiro. However, he acknowledged the potential of film as a means to disseminate the ideology of the New State and to bring the regime’s values closer to the largely illiterate Portuguese population. Lopes Ribeiro himself testified to Salazar’s interest in cinema. He reported that the statesman watched every Portuguese movie and visited several studios, in addition to adopting measures to promote the creation of a domestic film industry such as tax exemptions for cinema professionals.¹⁵ Be it out of aesthetic inclination, as in the case of Ferro, or out of pragmatic considerations, as with Salazar, the New State regarded cinema as a priority, and its leaders undertook multiple efforts to stimulate, direct, and control movie production in Portugal.

In terms of legislation, the military dictatorship that followed the 1926 coup and, later, the New State took several measures both to protect and to stimulate the domestic film industry. In 1927, shortly after the end of the First Republic, Decree No. 13 564, better known as the “Law of the 100 Meters,” was issued. This piece of legislation made it mandatory to show a Portuguese film of at least 100 meters, which had to change every week, during all cinematographic events, and additionally exempted from taxes all new films printed in Portugal. The immediate consequence of this law was a substantial increase in the production of short films that were shown before feature-length movies. However, given that these works were solely designed to meet the 100 meters requirement stipulated by the law, the films were acquired at an extremely low price and, therefore, quality suffered considerably.¹⁶ In 1933, Ordinance No. 22 966 made it mandatory for Portuguese distributors to acquire sound films produced in domestic studios. The government established annually the amount of footage to be purchased. The same Ordinance also exempted from taxes the recently

created Tobis Portuguesa, a company funded by the state with the aim of developing sound cinema in Portugal.¹⁷ Though the latter measure contributed to the establishment of Tobis as the main film company in the country, the former was never implemented.

The New State's legislation on cinema culminated in Law 2 027 of 18 February 1948—otherwise known as the Protection of National Cinema Law—that, along with other provisions, created a SNI-administered Cinema Fund. The goal of the Fund according to its Article 1 was to “[...] protect, coordinate and stimulate the production of domestic cinema [...] keeping in mind its social and educational function, as well as its artistic and cultural aspects.”¹⁸ It is significant that the social and educational function of film or, in other words, its instrumentalization as a vehicle for propaganda, is mentioned before its artistic aspects.¹⁹ In his presentation of the Law, António Ferro did not hide the SNI's bias when it came to distributing the Fund's future subsidies, emphasizing that the works funded would be those that followed the parameters established by the institution: “Naturally, this criterion will lead us to protect in principle and as a matter of principle, certain producers and filmmakers who adapt better to our own criterion.”²⁰ The decisive criterion to which Ferro alludes here is the subject-matter of each production. He established a categorization of the various films produced in the country and defined from the outset which works were more likely to be subsidized, namely, historical films, documentaries, and, to a lesser degree, films of a poetic nature and films about daily life.²¹ Commercial films, especially the comedies that explore “the *backwardness*, the crassness that remains in the life of our streets,” would not be funded.²² Aesthetic and ideological concerns intertwine in the criteria mentioned by Ferro. While the SNI sought to fight “bad taste,” artificiality, vulgarity, and “easy answers,” it was also concerned with creating a “healthy” cinema,²³ in other words, a cinema that was both artistically accomplished and politically aligned with the worldview of the New State. Thus, it is not surprising that preference was given to historical films permeated by nationalism that praised famous figures from the past, and to documentaries frequently made with clear propagandistic intentions.

In retrospect, it becomes clear that the Protection of National Cinema Law did not produce the expected results. Ferro himself predicted this situation in a 1949 speech in which he announced that he was resigning from his position at the SNI and referred to the bureaucratic delays in the implementation of the Law.²⁴ In fact, the number of Portuguese films that premiered annually decreased during the second half of the 1940s, prolonging the death throes of

domestic production until 1955—Portuguese cinema’s *annus horribilis*, when not a single feature-length film was released.²⁵

In a text published shortly after the implementation of the Law in 1951, Manuel de Azevedo presciently described the reasons that would lead to the failure of the Fund. He criticized corruption in the allocation of film subsidies, which were often awarded to directors who had given little proof of their talent, and pointed out that independent producers were unable to afford the high production costs prevalent in the country (access to studios, laboratories, etc.) when they lacked government financing.²⁶ Citing from an article he published in *Mundo Literário*, Azevedo concluded that “cinematographic production was split in two; a part will resort to the fund and will be guided and supervised by the SNI; and another part [will remain] defenseless and without opportunities, independent but condemned.”²⁷ While independent cinema was gradually asphyxiated due to exorbitant production costs, the SNI-financed films became more and more formulaic, repeating clichés and following conventions so as to receive state support.

Beyond the legal provisions for cinema that, despite their scarce practical results, stood as evidence of the government’s efforts to promote the film industry, the New State also created film awards. These were similar to the literary prizes awarded by the SPN after 1934 and rewarded the most distinguished works, actors, and technicians in any given year. Distributed by the SNI from 1944 onwards and continued by the SEIT until the early 1970s, the film awards—divided into the categories of best picture, best actor, best actress, best photography, best adaptation, the Paz dos Reis prize for best documentary, and honorable mentions in each category—were a way simultaneously to stimulate film production and to steer Portuguese cinema to topics consistent with the regime’s values.²⁸ Ferro’s statement from 1935 about literary prizes would later also apply to the cinema awards:

The *broadly constructive* intentions of our awards are, then, easily understandable. To avoid having them be classified as a puzzling matter, the competitors should just remember that the S.P.N. is an agency of the Council Presidency and that the Council President is Salazar. Whoever does not agree with these principles—and with any action that derives from them—only has one path to follow: not compete for our awards.²⁹

The literary prizes, like the film awards later on, promoted the political, social, and even moral order established by Salazar, meaning that works that went

against the principles of the New State were automatically rejected. This is why, until the 1950s, awards were predominantly given to historical films such as *Camões* (Leitão de Barros, 1946), *Friar Luís de Sousa* (*Frei Luís de Sousa*, António Lopes Ribeiro, 1950), and *Chaimite* (Jorge Brum do Canto, 1953) that were directed by the three filmmakers who worked most closely with the regime and that followed Ferro's plan to promote this film genre.³⁰ It is also the reason why Jorge Brum do Canto, whose work promoted the values of the regime, was the filmmaker who received the most awards, and fado singer Amália Rodrigues was the only person to receive three best actress awards—a response to the national and international popularity of fado, which the propaganda machine exploited to support Salazarism.

We have established the New State's undeniable interest in developing Portuguese cinema. This intent was translated into the direct production of films, particularly documentaries, by the propaganda services of the regime; into financial incentives, subsidies and prizes; and into attempts to make the distribution and exhibition of domestic productions mandatory by defining quotas. It behooves us now to consider the status of the films produced during the New State. If *The May Revolution* and the SPN/SNI documentaries were clearly propaganda works, what was the relationship between the state and the other fictional films released during the first decades of Salazarism? Given the government's intervention in the film industry, would not all cinema from this period be, in one form or another, a means to disseminate propaganda?

To answer these questions, we will have to formulate, albeit briefly, our understanding of the term propaganda. Without entering into a detailed discussion of the vast research on the subject,³¹ for the purposes of this study we subscribe to the definition proposed by Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell and grounded in a communicative model: "Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."³² Here, propaganda is understood as a specific form of persuasion that may include elements as innocuous as some of the rules of classical rhetoric, but also the appeal to emotion and the subconscious, as well as the use of information—be it truthful, misleading or even false—in an attempt to influence the opinions and actions of certain individuals or groups. This definition derives from the first use of the word in the sense that we attribute to it today. The precursor of the modern meaning of propaganda emerged in 1622, in a Papal Bull by Pope Gregory XV, wherein he created the *Sacra Congregatio de*

Propaganda Fide (The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith). Charged with the Church's missionary activities, the *Congregatio* was conceived as an instrument to combat the spread of Protestantism both in Europe and in the colonies.³³ Although Jowett and O'Donnell's definition of propaganda encompasses activities such as advertisement or public relations, in our analysis of cinema during the New State we will focus on political propaganda conveyed by the state or by governmental organizations. In the case of Salazarism, these include, first and foremost, the SPN/SNI, but also the military, the various state ministries, the General Agency of the Colonies (Agência Geral das Colónias), and youth associations such as the Portuguese Youth (Mocidade Portuguesa).

We now find ourselves in a position to revisit the aforementioned questions and reformulate them in a more precise manner. Was cinematic production from the 1930s to the 1950s, as a whole, used as a means of persuading the public to adhere to the principles of Salazarism, to recognize the advantages of the regime, and to mold behavior in accordance with the values of the New State?

Historians and film critics unanimously agree that the ideological manipulation of film in Portugal was not comparable to the instrumentalization of cinema that took place under the yoke of the powerful propaganda machines of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. For Jorge Leitão Ramos, even Spanish cinema under Franco had a more obvious propagandistic slant than Portuguese productions.³⁴ João Bénard da Costa goes even further, declaring that one cannot interpret the most remarkable films of the New State as mere vehicles for the official ideology: "We don't find in Salazar's regime [...] a monolithic cultural policy that would allow us to see the art from this era as the reflection of a propaganda apparatus. [...]"³⁵ Indeed, the production of feature-length, fictional propaganda films during the New State resulted in only two works: *The May Revolution* and *Spell of the Empire* (*Feitiço do Império*, 1940), a film also directed by Lopes Ribeiro and produced by the General Agency of the Colonies that praised the Portuguese colonization of Africa. Despite promotional efforts, the presence of renowned politicians at the premieres, and positive reviews by the majority of critics, both films had little success at the box office, an outcome which probably discouraged the regime from investing in this type of cinema. The remaining fictional, feature films from this period were produced by private companies without direct interference from the state and therefore were not, strictly speaking, works of propaganda.

Nevertheless, the fact that propaganda was limited to only a few fictional feature-length films does not mean that New State filmography was completely independent from political power. On the one hand, the specificity of cinematic production, which requires a large investment of capital, meant that private filmmakers and producers were often forced to resort to state subsidies. They depended on grants such as those offered by the National Cinema Fund and therefore had to follow the directives announced by the authorities. On the other hand, the easy access of a large segment of the public, including those who were illiterate, to Portuguese cinema meant that the films produced and screened in the country were subject to strong censorship.

The definition of the criteria for film exhibition preceded the military coup of 1926 and, even after that date, the first legislation to this effect was predominantly concerned with moral issues. Yet, Decree No. 13 564 of 1927, which established the General Inspection of Entertainment (Inspecção-Geral dos Espectáculos), banned not only films that went against the moral order, but also those that put into question the “political and social regime.”³⁶ The exercise of censorship was carried out after the premieres, subjecting theaters to hefty fines when they screened films that violated the norms defined in the Decree.³⁷ The political implications of censorship became clearer in 1929, when the General Inspection of Entertainment, until then under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Education, moved to the Department of the Interior as a consequence of the recognition of the “social and political importance” of its activities.³⁸ In 1944 the services of the General Inspection of Entertainment were integrated with the recently created SNI, and in 1945, during the regime’s post-war consolidation, a Censorship Committee was created, upon which the permission to screen any film on Portuguese territory depended.³⁹

The state did not establish objective criteria for censorship, but criticism of public figures, government policies, or the Portuguese Empire, as well as allusions to poverty or leftist ideology were certainly grounds for cutting scenes from a film or for banning it altogether. Works that challenged the parochial Salazarist morality and films that explicitly showed sexuality were also often targeted by censorship. Beyond the countless foreign films that were prohibited or mutilated,⁴⁰ many domestic productions were censored. One of the most notorious examples is Manuel de Guimarães’s *Lives Adrift* (*Vidas sem Rumor*, 1956), a film that was so disfigured by censorship that it could not be screened.⁴¹

Constrained by censorship’s omnipresent gaze and by financial contingencies that led to the self-censorship of producers and filmmakers, whose work

often depended on subsidies granted by governmental institutions, New State filmography ended up conforming to the regime's values, or, at the very least, not disputing Salazarism's foundational principles. Historian Luís Reis Torgal describes this situation in terms of the film industry's adoption of an "indirect or contextual ideology—in regards to subject-matter [...], atmosphere [...], social morality [...]."42 Jorge Leitão Ramos advocates an even more radical position when he describes the mark that Salazar left on all domestic sound films: "Because of what he did, because of what he ordered to be done, and because of what he did not allow to be done, all sound cinema in Portugal *until long after 1974* was influenced by Salazarism."⁴³ However, Ramos is careful to point out that "even films that best convey the ideals of the regime (given that those seeking to combat it are almost non-existent) do not do so [...] in an inflammatory and direct way [...]"⁴⁴ In other words, returning to the question raised above, we do not have, with regard to feature-length fiction films, an industry with a blatantly propagandistic slant, but rather films that fit into the worldview of the New State and that reproduce Salazarist principles through their settings, choice of characters, and even the narrative plot.

In this book we discuss a selection of films produced between the 1930s and the 1950s with the aim of examining the reciprocal relationship between cinematographic language and the rhetorical and discursive construction of the ideology of the Portuguese New State. Leaving aside purely documentary production, less complex due to its more obvious instrumentalization for propaganda purposes, we focus on fictional feature-length films. Our study concentrates on the confluence between the image of the country represented in these works and the portrait of Salazar's government elaborated by the ideologues of the regime. In other words, the films are not considered as mere sociological documents that reveal the way of life of this period or as an illustration of specific government policies or practices—although both of these approaches are possible and, in some cases, justified—but instead as representations of a fantasized country. New State cinema offers us not so much an image of what Portugal was but of what it should have been, a paradigm conveyed to the population through artworks, so that the Portuguese progressively sought to conform to this ideal. Accordingly, the purpose of the book is not to undertake a history of cinema and describe the development of film during the first three decades of the New State. Such a project has been, moreover, already carried out by Alves Costa, Luís de Pina, José de Matos-Cruz, and João Bénard da Costa, among others. Rather, we have adopted a thematic approach to the film industry

that allowed us to identify the guidelines of Salazarism as they were portrayed in cinema.

In a study that juxtaposes two distinct types of discourse, namely the political–ideological and the artistic–cinematographic, the question of whether or not the influence of the former on the latter is unilateral necessarily arises. In other words, are we not adopting an excessively mechanistic conception of cinema as a mere reflection of the New State’s worldview? Or, better yet, are we not espousing a modified version of the oft-criticized Marxist model for understanding art, substituting here the economic base with political ideology, which ineluctably determines the superstructure—in this case, cinema?

If the relationship between artworks and the socio-ideological context wherein they originate is, in general, the subject of much controversy, the matter is even more complex in societies where a concerted effort is undertaken to determine the content of art. With regard to film, Siegfried Kracauer is situated at one of the extremes of this debate since he considers that “all Nazi films were more or less propaganda films—even the simple entertainment films which seem to be remote from politics.”⁴⁵ For Kracauer, seemingly apolitical cinema was used as a vehicle to disseminate Nazi propaganda and, for this reason, any film from the period can only be understood when analyzed through the perspective of Hitlerism. Viewed in this light, films become, simultaneously, historical documents and case studies that illustrate the characteristics of German totalitarianism.⁴⁶ On the opposite end of the interpretive spectrum we find an emphasis on the aesthetic value of cinema, an application of the concept of “art for art’s sake” to film analysis. In line with this position, films should be primarily appreciated in and of themselves, with particular attention paid to the language and the style with which the various actors in the process of film creation operate, and not as a reflection of a given social environment or ideological system.

In the chapters that follow, we will consider films from the first decades of the New State from two distinct angles. First, as aesthetic objects that dialogue with the cinematographic trends of their time and express the artistic vision of the actors, filmmakers, and technicians who created them. Second, as the products of an industry subject to the constraints of Salazar’s regime, which saw cinema as a means for disseminating its principles, and thus established a set of mechanisms that aimed to stimulate but also control film production. Cinema from this period could be mapped along a continuum that extends from films that are most openly propagandistic to those that deviate or even seem to

contest—albeit covertly, due to the control of censorship—the hegemony of the New State. This diversity discourages the adoption of a uniform pattern of interpretation, suggesting instead the need for an interdisciplinary approach, as well as a comparative perspective. An analysis of the filmography from this period needs to consider not only the styles and plots of the different films but also the similarities and differences between cinematographic language and the intellectual and socio-political discourses from the time, thus allowing us to highlight one interpretive element or another, depending on the work or the subject under discussion.

As we explore Salazarist film, the key features of the New State, as well as its tensions and contradictions, begin to emerge. Cinema does not simply reproduce a set of values, but also brings to light the paradoxes of a government in which multiple agents—from the Church to the Armed Forces, from old Republicans to Integralists, etc.—are vying for their share of political influence.⁴⁷ The films highlight the absence of a unified, timeless New State ideology and reveal instead a bric-à-brac of doctrines and political practices amalgamated in order to produce a unified whole. Cinema was one of the means used by the regime to create an illusion of coherence and ideological harmony, but at the same time it also exposed, often inadvertently, the inconsistencies inherent in Salazarism.

Our interpretation of cinema during the New State oscillates between an appraisal of these movies as vehicles for the dissemination of an ensemble of ideas that we will call, for the sake of convenience, Salazarist “ideology”, and a resistant reading of the filmography of this period. The latter presupposes that films, beyond being both aesthetic objects and products of an industry—with a commercial component and susceptible to greater or lesser political control—also function as repositories of a society’s fictions, of its desires and expectations, and of its (often unconscious) fears. In this sense, we endorse Marc Ferro’s position, according to which cinema allows for a “counter-analysis of society,” based not only on the explicit content of each film but principally on what it hides, on its lapses or assumptions: “These lapses of a creator, of an ideology, or a society constitute privileged significant signs that can characterize any level of film, as well as its relationship with society.”⁴⁸ Despite the fact that Ferro’s interest in cinema is limited to its use as a historical document, his emphasis on lapses, on latent or avoided themes, can be transposed onto our analysis. Moving beyond history, including the history of ideas, this study highlights the mutual influences of cinema as art and industry, on the one hand,

and New State ideology, on the other. In this context, psychoanalysis provides us with a series of useful interpretative tools, which we complement with historical and discourse analysis, as well as with a detailed examination of the cinematographic object in itself, in order to paint a comprehensive portrait of Portuguese cinema as the staging of the New State regime.

The films discussed in this book include adaptations from novels and plays, like *Severa* (*A Severa*; Leitão de Barros, 1931), based on a play by Júlio Dantas, and *Spell of the Empire* (*Feitiço do Império*; António Lopes Ribeiro, 1940), whose plot draws inspiration from a homonymous novel by Joaquim Pereira Mota Júnior. We also analyze historical films, some of which were adapted from nineteenth-century novels, while others focus on the life of important figures in Portuguese culture or narrate decisive events in the country's history, like *Camões* (Leitão de Barros, 1946) and *Chaimite* (Jorge Brum do Canto, 1953). In addition, we interpret dramas, including *Wild Game* (*Gado Bravo*; António Lopes Ribeiro, 1934), *Fátima, Land of Faith* (*Fátima, Terra de Fé*; Jorge Brum do Canto, 1943), *Black Mantels* (*Capas Negras*; Armando de Miranda, 1947), or *Ribatejo* (Henrique Campos, 1949). Finally, we also look at fictionalized documentaries such as *Maria of the Sea* (*Maria do Mar*, 1930) and *Up and Away!* (*Ala-Arriba!* 1942), both directed by Leitão de Barros.

Although foreign cinema, in particular American cinema, always dominated the Portuguese market,⁴⁹ especially after the late 1940s when the crisis in national production became more pronounced, and although overtly propagandistic films enjoyed, as we have already mentioned, little success with the public, many of the films that we will analyze in the following pages were box office hits. A noteworthy example is *Severa*, the first Portuguese sound film, which ran for more than 6 months and was seen by an estimated 200,000 viewers. This success was repeated with *Black Mantels* and *Fado, the Story of a Songstress* (*Fado, História de uma Cantadeira*; Perdigão Queiroga, 1948), to mention only examples of movies about fado.

The popularity of many of these films led to a flourishing of the film industry in the first decades of the New State.⁵⁰ The genre that contributed the most towards this achievement was certainly the so-called Portuguese-style comedy (comédia à portuguesa), which had a brilliant start with *Song of Lisbon* (*A Canção de Lisboa*; Cottinelli Telmo, 1933). The comedy reached its climax, in terms of production, in the first half of the 1940s, afterwards rapidly declining, with *The Great Elias* (*O Grande Elias*; Arthur Duarte, 1950) as its swan song. Comedies privileged the parochial experience of Lisbon's *petite bourgeoisie*,

which constituted the vast majority of Portuguese filmgoers. Employing actors who were already famous in theater, like Beatriz Costa and Vasco Santana, the movies centered on misunderstandings and mistaken or switched identities. Their plots, which captured the urban bourgeoisie's aspirations to wealth and social ascent, progressively became fixed in increasingly schematic and repetitive patterns. At times compared to the White Telephone films in Mussolini's Italy, the Portuguese comedies were an escapist cinema, in which the conflicts, in themselves superficial—unrequited love, a hoax laid bare, the impossibility of obtaining tickets to see a soccer match—dissolved to the beat of popular marches and were resolved by the marriage of the leading male and female characters. Avoiding references to either the political situation⁵¹—the apogee of this genre coincided with the Second World War—or the serious social problems that affected the country during this period,⁵² the comedies forged the image of a poor but happy Portugal and of a Lisbon organized like a village, where a few meager trademarks of modernity (cabarets, automobiles, electricity, etc.) peacefully coexisted with a traditional, patriarchal, and hierarchical social structure.

In this book we do not undertake a detailed analysis of the Portuguese-style comedy as a genre, but instead include commentaries about some of these films in the various chapters. This decision is justified, on the one hand, by the existence of several studies that examine different aspects of this group of movies, such as Paulo Jorge Granja's essay "Portuguese-style Comedy or the Black-and-White Dream-Making Machine of the New State" ("A Comédia à Portuguesa ou a Máquina de Sonhos a Preto e Branco do Estado Novo"), in which the author shows how the comedies conveyed the conservative values of the New State. On the other hand, we opted for a thematic approach in the chapters that follow, choosing to organize the films according to the topics that we deem central to the filmography of the period, and incorporating, when relevant, an analysis of some of the comedies in the various sections of this study.

Chapter 1, "Propaganda in New State: *The May Revolution*," discusses the different meanings of the concept of propaganda in the New State through a detailed analysis of the regime's propagandistic efforts as exemplified in António Lopes Ribeiro's film *The May Revolution*. For Salazar, propaganda was, above all, meant to convey information and to disclose the truth. Conversely, António Ferro believed that works of propaganda should present an ideal version of reality, and that society should progressively seek to approximate this ideal. The chapter ends with a commentary on how the figure of Salazar is presented in

Lopes Ribeiro's film, which uses documentary images in order to promote the population's identification with their leader.

Chapter 2, "Poets on the Silver Screen: *Bocage*, *Camões* and the Heroes of the Regime," examines two films directed by Leitão de Barros, *Bocage* and *Camões*, which lend a cinematic voice to António Ferro's wish to promote historical cinema based on national literature. Both movies have poets as heroes and suggest that the New State was the climax of a series of glorious accomplishments and illustrious personalities that reach their apogee with Salazar. However, by presenting the protagonists' amorous fickleness as the cause of their misfortunes, these films may also be interpreted as an admonition to the too sentimental and often frivolous Portuguese public. The movies condemn the political inconsistency of the Portuguese and call for fidelity to Salazar's regime.

Chapter 3, "Rural Life in Cinema: In Defense of a Natural Society," analyzes the so-called "regional or folkloric films" that have rural Portugal as their background. These movies depict an idealized version of rural life, where social cohesion and solidarity enable the inhabitants of the countryside to overcome the difficulties created by nature. In contrast to the rectitude and the purity of rural life, the city emerges as an unhealthy environment, permeated by foreign habits, and as the source of immorality. The New State implicitly presents itself as a translation of the naturalness of rural life into political terms, and corporatism is shown to be the most natural way to organize society.

The centrality of Fátima for the Church during the New State is the topic of **Chapter 4**, "The Miracle of Salazarism: *Fátima, Land of Faith*." Brum do Canto's film focuses on the Faith/Reason dichotomy that has structured the debate about the miracles of Fátima since the First Republic. It ends with the film's protagonist, a famous doctor and professor at the University of Coimbra, concluding that religion is not incompatible with scientific reason. The doctor's conversion to Catholicism at the end of the movie prevents his fall into nihilism and signifies his reintegration into the traditional society of the New State. The film equates the miracle of this conversion with the political miracle of Salazarism and thus inscribes the regime in a teleological, religious history of Portugal.

Chapter 5, "Gender Stereotypes in New State Cinema," addresses the image of the woman in Salazarist film, focusing particularly on movies about fado singers. The New State reduced women to their roles as wives and mothers since, for Salazar, feminine independence and women working outside of the home

endangered social stability. Films about female singers showed the reverse side of the official image of the submissive woman, in that female artists transgressed the norms imposed on the majority of Portuguese women. These singers paid for their violation of the prevailing codes of behavior with ostracism, exile, and even death at the end of the movies.

The last two chapters deal with the representation of the colonial empire in New State cinema. **Chapter 6**, “The Empire as Fetish: *Spell of the Empire*,” shows how the Portuguese African colonies may be read, from a psychoanalytical perspective, as a fetish, since their territorial extension and economic relevance compensate for metropolitan Portugal’s geopolitical insignificance. The protagonist of *Spell of the Empire*, a man of Portuguese descent who lives in the United States, becomes fascinated by Portuguese Africa. He learns to appreciate the country of his ancestors through its colonies, which are portrayed as the material embodiment of the Portuguese impetus to conquer and civilize.

The book closes with **Chapter 7**, “The Spirit of Empire in *Chaimite*,” in which we examine Salazar’s emphasis on the spirit as the bedrock of his political project and the implementation of this spirituality in the African colonial empire. Criticizing materialism, which brought the Western world to its decline, Salazar highlights spiritual values as the cornerstone of the regime. This spirituality is manifested overseas through the civilizing influence on and Christianization of the colonial regions. In *Chaimite*, a film directed by Jorge Brum do Canto, spiritual values confer upon the colonizers a moral superiority that distinguishes them from their enemies. The Portuguese moral supremacy helps them to win difficult battles and to defeat the African insurgents, adherents to a reprehensible materialism that does not allow them to appreciate the advantages of colonization.

Notes

- 1 In 1926 a military coup ended the Portuguese democratic First Republic (1910–26) and inaugurated a period of military dictatorship (1926–33). The Portuguese New State was the authoritarian regime that followed the military dictatorship. António de Oliveira Salazar was the founder of the New State and he served as prime minister of Portugal until 1968, when he was sidelined because of an illness and replaced by Marcelo Caetano. Caetano governed until the end of the New State with the 1974 Carnation Revolution, which paved the way to democracy. The

influence of Salazar's personal style of governing was so great in the New State that the thirty-five-year period during which he served as prime minister is often called Salazarism.

- 2 “J’ai pris goût à ce filme. Trop peut-être, car je n’ai pu dormir, ensuite. Ce matin-là, je n’ai pu travailler comme d’habitude. [...] Je vous prie donc de ne plus me pousser à ce genre de distraction.” Garnier, *Vacances avec Salazar*, 97. In this quote, Garnier does not refer explicitly to *The May Revolution*, merely mentioning “a Portuguese film” (97). João Bénard da Costa tells the same story in an interview with Maria do Carmo Piçarra, in which he identifies *The May Revolution* as the film that had troubled Salazar. Bénard da Costa heard the story from António Lopes Ribeiro, who told it to several other people. As a result, the case became known and interpreted as symptomatic of the relationship between Salazar and cinema. According to Bénard da Costa, Salazar told Ferro, when asked his opinion of the film: “I liked it a lot, a lot. But the film troubled me a lot and at night I couldn’t sleep because I was thinking about it. Don’t take me to see more of such things.” (“Gostei muito, muito. Mas o filme perturbou-me muito e de noite não consegui dormir a pensar naquilo. Não me leve mais a ver coisas daquelas.”) *Salazar vai ao Cinema II*, 130. I thank Maria do Carmo Piçarra for referring me to the source of this episode.
- 3 Christine Garnier collected a series of her interviews with Salazar and with some of his close associates, as well as her impressions about the statesman gathered during two stays in Portugal, in the book *Vacances avec Salazar*, published in France in 1952.
- 4 The change in name from SPN to SNI resulted from the transformations that took place in European politics toward the end of the Second World War, when the word “propaganda” fell out of favor. The Secretariat of the State for Information and Tourism (Secretaria de Estado da Informação e do Turismo, SEIT) replaced the SNI in 1968. We will refer to these institutions by their respective acronyms. When speaking of the actions of the regime’s propaganda services from the 1930s to the 1940s in general, we will use the abbreviation SPN/SNI.
- 5 After António Ferro, the SNI knew a number of directors, including José Manuel da Costa, Eduardo Brazão, and César Moreira Baptista. The reason for António Ferro’s removal from the SNI is unknown. Fernando Guedes mentions that the most common explanation for his replacement refers to health issues. However, the author questions this explanation and states that the reason is likely to have been the change in the international political situation after the defeat of Fascism in the Second World War (32). Heloísa Paulo points out that Ferro’s departure from the SNI is frequently interpreted as a sign of the increasing distance separating the institution from the values of the regime (98). In a speech given during the inauguration of the exhibition “14 Years of Politics of the Spirit” (“14 Anos de

- Política do Espírito”) in 1948, Ferro himself lists some of the reasons why the activities of the SPN/SNI could not have a broader reach, including lack of trust in his policies and the misunderstanding with which some of his projects were received (*Política do Espírito, Apontamentos*, 18–20).
- 6 “[...] só existe o que o público sabe que existe.” Salazar, “Propaganda Nacional,” in *Discursos (1928–1934)*, 259–68.
 - 7 Salazar, “Fins e Necessidade,” in *Discursos e Notas Políticas (1938–1943)*, 196–9, 210. According to Salazar, the SPN/SNI is not an institution created to praise the government, but rather to show facts and educate the Portuguese: “[...] the Secretariat calls itself of *national propaganda*. Whoever understands well the meaning of this will grasp that it is not an institution to praise the government [...]; will realize that the Secretariat is not an instrument of the Government but rather an instrument of governance in the highest meaning that the term may have.” (“[...] o Secretariado denomina-se da *propaganda nacional*. Quem penetrar bem o seu significado, entenderá que não se trata duma repartição de elogio governativo [...]; compreenderá que o Secretariado não é um instrumento do Governo mas um instrumento de governo no mais alto significado que a expressão pode ter.”) “Propaganda Nacional,” in *Discursos (1928–1934)*, 262.
 - 8 In an article titled “Cinema and Dictatorships” (“O Cinema e as Ditaduras”) and published in *Cinéfilo* magazine on 16 May 1936, J. Natividade Gaspar speaks to this issue: “The Portuguese dictatorship also seems willing to address the question of film with a focus that was absent in the preceding forms of government [...]. We are therefore not far from recognizing the advantages of dictatorial regimes in the field of cinema.” (“Em Portugal a ditadura parece também disposta a encarar a causa cinematográfica com uma atenção ausente nas precedentes formas de governo [...]. Não estamos pois longe de reconhecer as vantagens dos regimes ditatoriais no campo do cinema.”) Cited in Morais, “Vinte Anos de Cinema,” in *Estado Novo*, 194. Cinema was already recognized both by totalitarian governments and by democracies as an effective means of propaganda at least since the First World War: “The cinema, by this time [1919], was manifestly *the* medium of the urban working masses and it was recognised as inherent in the medium that it operated over the way individuals perceived their own relationship to the world in which they live and its capacity to envision different worlds.” (Pronay, “Introduction,” in *Propaganda, Politics and Film*, 16.)
 - 9 In Franco’s Spain, cinematographic propaganda also meant primarily documentary films, especially after the creation of *Noticiarios y Documentales Cinematográficos* (NO-DO) as part of the Vice-Secretariat of Popular Education in 1942. These documentaries were the only ones that could be produced in Spain and were screened in all movie theaters.