

Finding redemption by educating the masses: the shift in Portuguese intellectual discourses around silent cinema

A procura da redenção mediante a educação das massas: a mudança nos discursos dos intelectuais portugueses sobre o cinema mudo

Elena Cordero Hoyo
Faculdade de Letras, Centro de Estudos Comparatistas
Universidade de Lisboa
Lisboa, Portugal
ehoyo@campus.ul.pt

ABSTRACT

In this article I aim to identify, among the various discourses that were elaborated about the effects of cinema during the first decades of the twentieth century, those that were central reactions of the Portuguese intellectual elite during the decade from 1914 to 1924. While in the mid-1910s, cinema was severely critiqued for its demoralizing effect on the masses, at the beginning of the 1920s a difference was coined between the cinema made abroad and the “typical Portuguese” cinema. The hypothesis that I develop is that the main reason that nuanced the discourse against cinema was the beginning of a precarious film production industry in Porto and Lisbon that lasted from 1918 to 1925. In this sense, cinema found redemption in its indoctrinating potential, reason why part of the intellectuality and bourgeoisie argued to work in cinema, despite its inherent contradictions. In addition, the modernist discourse in favor of mass culture imported from the United States and symbolized by cinema gained strength after the First World War. In this article, the dynamic between rejection and acceptance is exemplified by the writer and film producer Virgínia de Castro e Almeida’s trajectory, who, in 1922, created Fortuna Films and produced two feature films with a pedagogic and patriotic mission, although, in 1914, she had warned about the harmful effects of cinema in the masses’ moral.

KEYWORDS

Portuguese silent cinema, Intellectual elites, Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, Modernism, Mass culture

RESUMO

Neste artigo, proponho identificar, dentro da variedade de discursos elaborados nas primeiras décadas do século XX sobre os efeitos do cinema, aqueles que foram centrais para a elite intelectual portuguesa na década 1914-1924. Enquanto que, em meados dos anos 1910, o cinema era duramente criticado pelo seu efeito desmoralizador relativamente às massas, no início dos anos 1920, surgia uma clara diferenciação entre o cinema feito fora das fronteiras e o cinema “tipicamente português”. A hipótese que sustento é que o motivo principal da modificação do discurso contra o cinema coincide com o início de uma precária indústria de produção de filmes no Porto e em Lisboa, activa entre 1918 e 1925. Neste sentido, o cinema encontrou uma via de redenção no seu potencial doutrinator, motivo ao que parte da intelectualidade e da burguesia recorreu para justificar a sua dedicação ao cinema, apesar das contradições inerentes. Além disso, o discurso modernista a favor da cultura de massas importada dos Estados Unidos e simbolizada pelo cinema ganhou maior força após a Primeira Guerra Mundial. No artigo, esta dinâmica de rejeição e aceitação será ilustrada pelo percurso da escritora e produtora cinematográfica Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, que, em 1922, criou a Fortuna Films, produtora de duas longa-metragens com uma missão pedagógica e patriótica, mesmo tendo, em 1914, alertado para os efeitos nocivos do cinema para a moral das massas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Cinema mudo português, Elites intelectuais, Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, Modernismo, Cultura de massas

Introduction

In 1933, the writer and cinema producer Virgínia de Castro e Almeida (Lisbon, 1874-1945) described the turbulent times that people like her, born and educated in the nineteenth-century Portuguese style, had experienced in the process of modernization in the first third of the twentieth century. In the prologue of *Crianças mal educadas*, a book written in 1891 by the French Fernand Nicolay that de Castro e Almeida translated into Portuguese, she explained to old-style parents how they were obliged to adapt their values to the “new cycle” of cosmopolitanism in which new values were arising:

As condições económicas do mundo; a facilidade de comunicações entre países diversos; a luta pela existência, áspera, dura, os progressos da ciência encurtando as distâncias, tornando o mundo muito mais pequeno e vulgarizando a cultura; a civilização decadente exasperando-se na sua ânsia de conforto material e devorando vertiginosamente o tempo; tôdas estas coisas e muitas outras, constituem as causas profundas do desequilíbrio a que assistimos, que nos envolve e nos arrasta, e precipitadamente, desordenadamente, vai transformando as próprias bases sobre as quais assenta a sociedade humana.

[The economic conditions of the world; the ease of communication between diverse countries; the struggle for a rough and hard existence, the progress of science in shortening distances, making the world much smaller and vulgarizing culture; decadent civilization exasperated in the thirst for material comfort and dizzily consuming time; all these things and many others, are the root causes of the imbalance that we are witnessing, that wrap us up and drag us down, and that hastily and untidily are transforming the very foundations on which human society is based] (1933, pp. 11-12)¹

In this description of her time, de Castro e Almeida mentioned all the elements that were both triggers for and consequences of the modernization process that Portugal, among other Western European countries, went through from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. The switch from an agrarian to an industrial economy; the facilitation of communication between countries, not only due to technological advances but also the understanding of the need for intergovernmental societies to communicate, collaborate, and assure peace (the main example being the creation of the League of Nations in 1920 in which de Castro e Almeida collaborated); the use of science in daily life and its widespread uses in transport and entertainment; and the development of new perspectives and experiences of space and time which seemed to have become shortened and accelerated—these all seemed unstoppable changes. Furthermore, they produced frictions and tensions with nationalistic tendencies and bourgeois traditional identities.

Cinema was one of the main examples of how the modernity process modified the experience of time, space and culture based on “la superación, mediante la síntesis, de barreras espaciales (naciones) y temporales (tradiciones)” [the overcoming, through the synthesis, of spatial barriers (nations) and temporal barriers (traditions)] (Benet, 2012, p. 19). Being those two of the main pillars that sustained a certain bourgeois Portuguese social class, early cinema was accused of vulgarizing culture, and it raised high criticism from the cultural elites that opposed

it for moral or aesthetic reasons. It was an intrinsically transnational medium, exhibited among other popular spectacles and controlled by external Western countries, and the national elites did not know how to use it for their own benefit. According to Vicente Benet (2012, pp. 48-49), cinema had, for part of the intellectuals of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an uncomfortable fascination for the urban working and middle classes, who were satisfied with a spectacle that, despite being born from technique and modernity was traditional in its understanding of narrative and scenographic formulas, at a moment when the emergence of pictorial and literary vanguards was challenging them radically. Thus, cinema was perceived as a disrupting element that collaborated neither with an Iberian intelligentsia’s nationalizing and didactic project nor with a politically progressive—and mainly anti-monarchic—agenda. Therefore, the only way in which cinema could find redemption among the elites was conforming to the bourgeois agenda and contributing to the construction and divulgation of the two elements that it essentially disturbed: the nation and the tradition.

This article explores one of the main narratives that intellectual elites disseminated in the press around cinema about the harmful effects that it had over lower social classes’ moral. However, far from being a simplistic and monolithic discourse, it changed in parallel with the institutionalization of the medium and the emergence of the firsts Portuguese feature film production companies from the mid-1910s to the mid-1920s. To illustrate the evolution, this article draws on press articles and public conferences by some prominent cultural figures that were published between 1914 and 1924, such as Manuel Maria da Costa Veiga and António Ferro. However, a special emphasis is put in the case of Virgínia de Castro e Almeida. Her film-related trajectory allows us to exemplify what was the crucial element of cinema’s redemption as popular entertainment: to educate the masses, meaning to adjust to a certain cultural, pedagogical and nationalistic mission at the service of the elite.

Cinema, “where all evil of humanity is learnt”

As Vicente Benet points out, early twentieth-century elites were incapable of predicting the effect of the new mass culture based on “la producción en serie, la inmediata comercialización, la democratización del acceso y su dependencia de los avances de la técnica” [the serial production, the immediate commercialization, the democratic access, and the dependency on technical advances] (2012, p. 48). Coming from the technological advances of the nineteenth century and led internationally by businessmen, early cinema achieved commercial success by being exhibited together with other attractions as cheap entertainment for the popular urban masses (Cordero-Hoyo in Araújo, 2021, pp. 22, 30). According to Benet, cinema, unlike other more established cultural artifacts, was a medium that did not need the tutelage of intellectuals driven by a charitable aspiration to instruct and indoctrinate. However, this does not mean that intellectuals did not have that aspiration. For that reason, the ambivalent relationship between Portuguese cultural bourgeoisie and cinema alternated between hostility towards a medium that they did not totally understand and attraction, leading some intellectuals to write extensively about it and, in some cases, experiment with film production, distribution or exhibition. The reason behind this alleged contradiction was Portuguese film production’s increasing autonomy (although the evolution was not lineal) during the three first decades of the twentieth century and cinema’s supposed capacity as informal educator of the masses that the

bourgeoisie intended to lead and control as part of a whole tendency of cultural nationalism.²

Focusing on Virginia de Castro e Almeida's case, it was cinema's pedagogic potential what drove her towards the new medium. In 1922, the Portuguese writer, who by then was settled in Paris, showed her interest in cinema as a sponsor and cultural promoter. She created a cinematographic prize in France of 5,000 francs to be awarded to the best picture of the year. The award was named Prix de Castro and the jury was composed by delegates of French cinematographic and literary societies, as well as film critics, and it was bestowed on the film *Jocelyn* (M. Léon Poirier, 1922). Her decision was severely criticized in the Portuguese press, which considered it antipatriotic as the French cinematographic industry did not need incentives in the way that Portuguese cinema did (Ribeiro, 1983, p. 202).

Previously, de Castro e Almeida had shown an interest in cinema and its effects as a spectator of and commentator on cultural affairs in the press. Eight years before the Prix de Castro, she had published an analytical and cautionary article about the new medium, comparing the situation in Portugal with the measures taken in Switzerland and Germany against the damage that films could do to children's education by exposing them to crime and vice. In her article titled "Cinematographos" in the journal *A Capital*, she reflected on film's power of suggestion and how it could be taken advantage of "como elemento de ensino e de moralisação por meio de fitas que são lições de coisas e outras que mostram os abismos onde o vicio pode levar as suas victimas" [as a teaching and moralizing element through films that are lessons or others that show the abyss where vice can take its victims] (1914b, p. 1). She wrote about her experience "nas salas escuras (onde a atmospha viciada pelo fumo e pela respiração de centenas de espectadores já por si constitue um envenenamento)" [in the dark movie theatre (where the foul atmosphere with the smoke and respiration of hundreds of viewers is already in itself poisoning)] and described it as a place where "um publico heterogeneo, com todas as suas facultades de sensibilidade e de intelligencia presas á tela iluminada, vê desfilar a serie de dramas emocionantes ou de farças ridiculas" [a heterogeneous public, with all their sensitive faculties and intelligence captivated by an illuminated screen, see a series of moving dramas or ridiculous farces parade]. Merged into the audience, she tried to analyse the public's reactions to what they were watching as an external anthropologist.

In her opinion, at the cinema "a pobre costureirinha ou a creada de servir" [the poor sewing girl or serving maid] learns that prostitution can lead to luxury and grandeur. In addition, "o estudante do liceu ou o empregadinho do commercio" [the secondary-school student or the store employee] learns that to succeed and make a fortune, they need audacity and lack of scruples instead of persevering with an honest job. Finally, the worker can learn the systems of "a revolta e o crime" [revolt and crime]. Although these films' stories ended with a moralizing message, she was afraid that the public—constituted in her opinion mainly by illiterate and ignorant people—could not understand the plot and would become startled by the temptations of money, seduction, and crime. After being captivated by their first experience of moving pictures, they "não entendem, não ligam os factos, perdem toda a sensibilidade, habituam-se ás scenas de horror, amollecem e desmoralisam-se com a visão do vicio requintado, com o spectaculo

das scenas morbidas do amor culpado" [do not understand, they do not link the facts, they lose their sensitivity and get used to scenes of horror, they become weak and demoralized with the vision of refined vice and the morbid spectacle of guilty love]. The "inesperadas, espantosas, monstruosas" [unexpected, frightening and abnormal] examples of people laughing during tragic scenes or whistling at moments of tender love alarmed her as she considered them symptomatic manifestations of the decadence and demoralization of a race. De Castro e Almeida's remarks, in this and another previous article published in *A Capital* also in 1914 (in which she complains about the uncomfortable situation of having a child who has not paid for a ticket to the *animatograph* sitting on your knees) (de Castro e Almeida, 1914a, p. 2), demonstrate the uneasiness that cinema's democratizing effect produced in her, as part of the cultural elites.

Although mixed audiences were not exclusive to cinema, during the second decade of the twentieth century this was taking it a step further. In most established cinemas the audience would not be segregated by social class inside the venue, but it would be segregated by price, localization (centre-periphery) and kind of programme (first release or rerun, for example) (Baptista, 2007). Analysing both columns in *A Capital*, we could interpret that de Castro e Almeida was anxious by the collective experience in a closed space mixed with people of different social classes enjoying the same entertainment. She perceived the dark room as threatening, being a hypnotizing and tempting environment for people without judgement. Therefore, in de Castro e Almeida's opinion cinema was a dangerous place where an unqualified public could be easily influenced, unlike a cultured audience who would be able to maintain their higher morals and informed opinion in front of the big screen.

As de Castro e Almeida's column proves, the elites' distrust was originated by the unpredictability of the effect that watching films could have on noncritical spectators. However, she was not the only voice warning about the dangers that an unregulated entertainment as cinema could present to the Portuguese society. This was a frequent topic of discussion in the press among those who were also worried about the immorality represented on screen and asked for regulation that conformed the incipient industry to certain formats, either non-fiction views or feature films that showed the national monuments, landscapes, and traditions with a pedagogic, moralising, and patriotic effect for the masses. As Tiago Baptista points out (2003, 2013) those motives—monuments, landscapes, and traditions—were the core that every Portuguese silent film should contain (as well as being adaptations of eighteenth or nineteenth-century canonical novels and the participation of well-known theatre actors) to be appreciated by film criticism and be considered truly Portuguese during the most prolific period from 1918 to 1925.

Surprisingly, it was not rare than the suspicion towards cinema as a perverting entertainment came from people that participated in the industry at some point of their lives. For example, Manuel Maria da Costa Veiga, considered a pioneer of Portuguese cinematography, in 1923 declared in an interview to *Jornal dos Cinemas* that modern cinematography unfortunately was "a escola pratica do crime, do vicio e da prostituição" [practical school of crime, vice and prostitution] (1923, p. 31) where all evil of humanity was learnt. Costa Veiga's accusation referred mainly to films coming from the United States and excluded the Portuguese production because "somos contudo aqueles que nas nossas infimas produções, mais nos temos aproximado da realidade e que menos desmoralisamos, talvez porque possuímos uns sentimentos diversos" [we are, nevertheless, those who, in our pitiful films, have

² By educator I do not refer to the educative films that were regulated in 1925 to be exhibited in formal education to teach history, geography or science to schoolchildren (Baptista, 2013, p. 87) but to the institutionalization of cinema as a mass media whose effect on the popular public was equally feared and desired by the national and nationalist *intelligentsia*.

gotten closer to reality and we demoralise less, maybe because we are able of having diverse feelings]. In his declaration, he pointed out to the difference between attending a foreign film screening as detrimental for the moral order and a national production as patriotic. This division affected mainly specialized press whose work of film criticism was constantly intertwined with identarian issues of political order, specially at the moment of judging national productions. Journalists in innumerable articles mixed their opinion about films with expressions of support to the production companies that were making efforts to create a Portuguese film industry. In this sense, criticising certain films would be read as having a lack of confidence in their countrymen endeavour and, therefore, lack of patriotism.

Also, one year later, in 1924, the first Portuguese association of “friends of cinema”, precedent of the film societies, *Associação dos Amigos do Cinema*, presented their objectives: “defender o cinema nacional, moralizar o cinema por meio da palavra escrita ou falada, fomentar o entusiasmo pela Arte do Silêncio e produzir película logo que a situação financeira o permitisse” [to defend national cinema, to moralize cinema using written or talked words, to encourage the enthusiasm towards the Art of Silence and to produce films as soon as the financial situation allows it] (Alves Costa, 1978, p. 53). As seen, their mission mirrored those recurring obsessions with moral and nationalism coming from a conservative elite sector. But what had changed during the decade that separates the early warning articles written by Virgínia de Castro e Almeida and those written around mid-1920s?

Cinema, “powerful element of construction and education”

From 1918 onwards, when the film production of feature films began to grow, first in Porto and later in Lisbon, the negative vision towards cinema did not disappear but gradually changed and became less alarming.³ Cultural elites’ concerns were related not simply to a classist fear of the empowered popular masses, who were the main public of this new entertainment under a new category of “spectatorship”, but more specifically to a certain ideal of patriotic mission alarmed by a foreign voracious medium. Therefore, according to Baptista, the fear of the foreign film’s reception by the nationalists played a decisive role for starting the Portuguese film production and for defining its social function as a tool for identity construction (Baptista, 2013, p. 72). When the same elites that previously warned about films’ harmful effects saw the possibility of creating a national film industry that could serve to their political agenda, some of them even entered cinema production. In this sense, at least a part of them foresaw a path of redemption for cinema: its huge educational or didactic potential as mass media.⁴

No cinema aprende-se a roubar com Arte, a matar com pericia, a perverter-se com elegancia. (...) Quem nos perverteu assim? Quem tornou assim tão decadente a raça portuguesa? O animatografo. Devemos então bani-lo, repudia-lo como

foco de infecção? Não!! Modifique-se, transforme-se, livre-se a tela dos elementos damninhos e, ela que agora serve de elemento de destruição será no porvir um elemento poderoso de construção e ensinamento.

[At the cinema, you learn to steal with Art, kill with expertise, get perverted with elegance (...) Who corrupted us in this way? Who made the Portuguese race become so decadent? The animatograph. Should we then ban it, repudiate it as the origin of an infection? No!! Modify it, transform it and free the screen from the harmful elements, and what now works as an element of destruction will in the future be a powerful element of construction and education] (Felcar, 1923, p. 7).

According to this position, cinema could achieve a constructive and dignified position if it reformed itself moving away from foreign influence and becoming an educational and nationalizing tool at the service of the cultural elites. Therefore, from the mid-1910s onwards a gentrification of the cinematographic spectacle took place and artistic dramas became the most recognized format substituting other cinematographic possibilities of moving image entertainment that had been popular until then (Baptista, 2013, p. 73). In addition, some of the main Portuguese production companies were created, being Invicta Films in Porto the most relevant of the period. Consequently, the discourse against cinema was slowly nuanced and the specialized press—that appeared in 1917 and grew in number and relevance on the following years—established a clear difference between the national cinema which was called “cinema tipicamente português” [typically Portuguese cinema] (Baptista, 2003, 2013) and the cinema coming from abroad. Therefore, the narrative around cinema changed from 1918 to 1925, when the national film industry was trying to emerge and establish itself. It went from rejection to a conditioned acceptance. The difference between accusing cinema of being a medium that perverted the masses and embracing it as an indoctrinating tool depended on the goal behind and the hands controlling it.

For that reason, the initial uneasiness with cinema did not prevent de Castro e Almeida to leap into film production in 1922 and create her own company called Fortuna Films. Her main achievements in cinema were the release of two films: *A Sereia de Pedra* (Roger Lion, 1922) based on the original short story *Obra do demónio* (1917) written by herself and adapted to the screen by Alberto Jardim; and *Os Olhos da Alma* (Roger Lion, 1923), which she wrote, produced, and supervised. Considering cinema the most powerful medium of propaganda and films made until that time in Portugal, imperfect —“por vezes, a acção é arrastada: o entrecho banal para as grandes plateias acostumadas a ter sob os olhos beleza e arte, ouvindo uma musica feita expressamente para o que estão vendo” [sometimes the action is slow-paced, the plot is banal for large audiences used to seeing beauty and art, hearing music composed expressly for what they are watching], (*Cine Revista*, 1922, p. 9),— she decided to invest her own money in film production with the purpose of capturing the natural beauties of her country, its monuments and popular traditions. As de Castro e Almeida stated, her main objective was to promote Portuguese culture abroad for touristic purposes and the internationalization of national cinematographic production. Nevertheless, she also wanted to use cinema to communicate what she considered patriotic and moralistic messages to the population, as can be deduced by her statements and the analysis of filmic and non-filmic sources.

3 This thesis is supported by Maria do Carmo Piçarra (2013, p. 52) who identifies the period from 1912 to 1917 as a severe film production crisis in Portugal. However, “[é] a época em que, paradoxalmente, em Lisboa, abrem onze novas salas de cinema —novidade viabilizada pela luz eléctrica— e a burguesia adere ao espectáculo” [it is the time in which, paradoxically, in Lisbon, eleven new film movie theaters opened—a novelty allowed by the electric light—and the bourgeoisie adhered to the spectacle]. [The emphasis is mine].

4 To read more about cinema’s persecution by religious and intellectual sectors except for its educational potential in the Spanish context (more specifically, in Catalonia), see Minguet Batllori’s work (1998, 2004).

The lack of preserved film prints of *A Sereia de Pedra* and the multiple edited versions of *Os Olhos da Alma* pose methodological challenges in analysing de Castro e Almeida's actual transposition of ideas to the films and what messages got to the audience. The plot of *A Sereia de Pedra* is only available through press summaries, photographs, and written testimonies from people working on the production. *Os Olhos da Alma* presents another issue: the preservation of two 35mm versions with different editing and duration in the conservation centre of Cinemateca Portuguesa (Arquivo Nacional da Imagem em Movimento/ANIM).⁵ In addition, a novelization titled *Os Olhos da Alma*, signed by de Castro e Almeida, can be found in the library of Cinemateca Portuguesa.⁶ All these materials offer different versions of the story adapted to different mediums and audiences, thus complicating the interpretation of the sources. Finally, there is a third project titled *Noblesse* (1924) that de Castro e Almeida unsuccessfully tried to produce with Fortuna Films before its dismantling and whose *scenario* is available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

The plot of *A Sereia de Pedra*, which can be known following the press description of the film, and the photographs printed in the press, is a love-triangle story that takes place in Tomar. Comparing the two-page press synopsis of the film published in *Jornal dos Cinemas* in January 1923 (based on the film) with the tale *Obra do demônio*, it can be seen that the cinematographic adaptation resulted in a more complicated and softened version of the literary source. Character names were changed, and secondary sub-themes only mentioned briefly in the story were given more importance, adding folkloric notes to the screen, aiming at international distribution. Anecdotal moments of the plot, such as bullfights, were chosen as promotional photographs for the French press to reinforce the romantic and legendary archaic imaginary attached to Portugal for foreign spectators. In contrast, *Obra do demônio* was a gothic tale that was a dark and sexual warning about the devil's influence in weak and non-virtuous people's lives. There is no punishment for evil actions or rewards for good ones, and almost none of the characters have a sincerely good heart. Hence, essential adaptations to the plot were necessary to make the film accessible to all audiences and be a saleable product for an international market. For instance, the end of the film was adapted to suit stricter moral codes, and the characters become righteous. Although *A Sereia de Pedra* was still promoted as "un violent drame d'amour et de jalousie comme en sont friand tous les amis du cinéma" [a violent drama of love and jealousy, which all the friends of cinema are fond of] (R. J., 1923, p. 23), the implemented modifications fundamentally changed the dramatic and terrible story into a more commercial movie with a happy ending considered appropriate for large audiences. For that reason, even the title was updated.

However, in *Os Olhos da Alma*, the didactic efforts of de Castro e Almeida to shape the low and high classes' behaviour were more evident and can be analysed in depth as we have access to film prints. As Baptista notes, this was one of the first Portuguese films that showed urban spaces and had a political discourse (Baptista, 2010, p. 1). As artistic director and producer, de Castro e Almeida used cinema as a

tool for promoting an ideological discourse against progressive ideas of breaking the boundaries between social classes and denouncing the corrupt and chaotic condition of politics in Portugal. It was a critic to the modern urban elite's ambition of decision-making power and material comfort instead of maintaining their rural and family tradition. For that reason, the evil character decides to enter politics, symbolizing the corruption, violence, and chaos that come with the loss of identity, the depth of family roots, and the disgrace derived from seeking equality among all men, disregarding their inherited "social position". Also, she showed the fishmongers' traditions from Nazaré, the grandiosity of the Church of Batalha, and the dangers that the urban environment of Lisbon presented.

Finally, *Noblesse* is a story of the decadence and extinction of the aristocracy that de Castro e Almeida strongly critiqued. It was about the loss of meaning of past moral principles and honourable behaviour that were no longer exclusively linked to tradition, genealogy, or family names. She confronted a reality of nobles and vassals—that she knew during her youth—with the modern era. She also denounced the closed mindset (described as from the Middle Age, *moyennageuse*) of the main character, a Count, who pays little attention and gives only basic female education to his daughter in opposition to his son, who symbolized the continuation of the dynasty. The screenplay contains picturesque scenes, including several moments in the urban environment of a *fado* tavern and rural festivities.

In summary, Fortuna Films' productions followed the paradigm of the "typically Portuguese" films of the 1920s, embracing a nationalistic perspective and a patrimonial vision of popular culture (Baptista, 2013, p. 78). In her projects, de Castro e Almeida argued for the need of contributing to the community, keeping a right and honourable position in life, and warned against the dangers of succumbing to modern temptations and primitive passions. She portrayed intelligent and strong women who were committed to the traditional role of wife and mother. Also, she presented the long-term relation between classes as differentiated in rights and duties, static, immutable, and connected by mutual respect and esteem without problematizing the material and status inequality and unfair lack of opportunities. In addition, folkloric scenes related with rural and urban popular traditions were included for an international audience. In this sense, her films were conceived as "life lessons" to adjust to a certain idea of national identity and social order.

During her whole career, de Castro e Almeida maintained her loyalty to three ideas: the power of education, the need for internationalization, and the dissemination of the vital part Portugal had played in the construction of Western "civilization". These axes played a fundamental role in her filmmaking career, which she described as a "o meu antigo sonho de aproveitar o cinema para espalhar algumas ideias uteis, um pouco da beleza que eu for capaz de criar" [my old dream of taking advantage of cinema to spread some useful ideas, a little of beauty that I am able to create] (de Castro e Almeida, 1925). Despite her objective of entering cinema production still being rooted in the nineteenth century conception of culture as a way of indoctrinating and educating the masses in traditional values, it also pushed her to take control of her own film enterprise. In this sense, she differentiated herself from the other intellectuals who criticized or supported the new medium in the literature and press articles without risking anything. For that reason, the journal *El Cine* described her as a "woman of action" who, after watching *J'Accuse* (Abel Gance, 1919), decided to consider cinema as an art form with pedagogic potential and space for improvement (Zappia, 1922, p. 1).

5 The Portuguese version was restored by Cinemateca Portuguesa in the laboratory of L'Immagine Ritrovata (Bologna) in 1995 and reproduces the original tinting over 1.440 metres. The French version, in black and white, comes from the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France) and is 1.524 metres. Both present important differences in the storyline's development.

6 The book was published by the Anuario do Brasil on 8 June 1925 and is illustrated with original photographs taken during the filming of the movie. It seems to be a novelization of the film written expressly for commercial distribution after making the film, instead of being the novel on which the movie was based.

Cinematografite, a modern epidemic

Around the 1920s, cinema was portrayed in the trade press as a promising business for fearless entrepreneurs or unknown actors seeking novelty and excitement and who wanted to make money quickly as part of the wave that was agitating the cultural circles in the cafés. This fever of being at the centre of the filmmaking world was named sarcastically ‘*cinematografite*’ in an article published at *Cine-Lisboa* (H., 1923, p. 14):

Entra-se num café, e não tarda que sejamos abordados por alguém, con indícios epidémicos. Apresenta-se ela com sintomas diferentes, todo o cerebro atacando. Este, vae fundar uma empreza colossal, com capitaes mirabolantes. Aquele, é galã no primeiro film doutra empresa... fantastica. Outro, que nunca ‘posou’ pensa num futuro papel com o qual ‘tout le monde’ ha de ficar atonito, etc. Não será isto uma epidemia? (...) Nas senhoras, felizmente é em menos numero os casos constatados.

[We enter a café, and we are soon approached by someone, with signs of the epidemic. It [the illness of *cinematografite*] presents itself with different symptoms, attacking the entire brain. This one will create a colossal enterprise, with celebrated directors. That one is the heartthrob in the first film of another company ... Another, who never ‘posed’ [in front of the camera] thinks about a future role with which ‘tout le monde’ will be astonished, etc. Is this not an epidemic? (...) In the ladies, fortunately, there are fewer verified cases].

The ironic description in the above quote gives an idea of the projects and dreams that were being discussed in the cafés in Lisbon in 1923, discussions about a business that, at that moment, seemed promising and open to experimentation. This modern epidemic could be summarized as the “desire to make movies” that affected many men—and some women—who risked their capital to produce films or other related works.⁷ For that reason, adventurers and professionals from different artistic and cultural backgrounds integrated themselves at a certain point of their careers into cinema, just as an experiment, curious about the different options that the medium had to offer to their careers and objectives. Furthermore, the position of some intellectuals towards cinema had shifted during a decade which normalized the modernist trend, and many of them were embracing its commercial opportunities and formal language (Costa, 1991, p. 39). However, most of the filmmakers during the 1920s usually still dismissed what had been done previously in national cinema for either being too popular and conservative in form and content, from a vanguardist point of view; or for having a harmful moral effect on the lower classes, from a more traditional perspective, as discussed above.

While the first generation of Portuguese modernist artists, who had published in the journal *Orpheu*, had not paid attention to cinema as they were more interested in other artistic languages, including literary, visual, and stage arts, the Portuguese modernists of the second wave, which joined in the journal *Presença*, were fascinated by the language, principles, and tendencies of the new medium (Frias, n.d.). It is interesting to note how this situation paralleled the Spanish one, where the

⁷ Jane Gaines (2002, p. 101) theorizes about the “desire of make movies” or “movie-making desire”, describing it as the “wanting-to-produce-phantasies” that involved numerous people in the formative years of the film industry.

Generation of ‘98 dismissed or ignored cinema while the Generation of ‘27 was enthusiastic about it, reinforcing the connections between intellectuals across the border.⁸ The subversion of turn-of-the-century bourgeois values that cinema and the new mass culture coming from abroad produced was specially celebrated by some modernists after the end of First World War, being the conference *A Idade do Jazz-Band* by António Ferro the best example.

A Idade do Jazz-Band was written and presented in Brazil in 1922 by Ferro, the future director of Estado Novo’s Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional in charge of cinema. The conference had the ambition of becoming the futurist Portuguese manifest, and it was the prophecy of a happy post-war 1920s in Portugal by one of its greatest defenders. His speech was a multimedia performance preceded by a short introduction by recognized Portuguese or Brazilian intellectuals (Ronald de Carvalho at the Trianon of Rio de Janeiro on June 21; Carlos Malheiro Dias at the Teatro Lírico of Rio de Janeiro on July 30; and Guilherme de Almeida at the Teatro Municipal of São Paulo on September 12). After the presentation, Ferro began his conference about the age the world was entering after the First World War, named the Jazz-Band age. The reason for the name was that Ferro considered jazz-bands as the epitome of all the elements associated with modernity: “No *Jazz-Band*, como num *écran*, cabem todos as imagens da vida moderna” [In a Jazz-Band, as on a screen, there is space for all the images of modern life] (Ferro, 1924, p. 61). Mainly, Ferro (1924, p. 61) associated it with the streets of the metropolis, big cities that he described as:

[R]uas doidas com olhos inconstantes nos *placards* luminosos e fugidios, ruas electricas, ruas possesas de automoveis e de carros, ruas onde os cinemas maquilhados de cartazes têm atitudes felinas de mundanas, convidando-nos a entrar, ruas ferozes, ruas-panteras, ruas listradas nas taboetas, nos vestidos e nos gritos...

[crazy streets with shifting eyes on the bright and elusive placards, electric streets, streets possessed by automobiles and cars, streets where cinemas are embellished by posters with the feline attitudes of socialités, inviting us to enter, fierce streets, panther streets, striped streets by the signs, the dresses, the shouts...]

Also, in a jazz-band, there was space for the domestic, today’s homes decorated with all the comfort and elegance and where the furniture “bailam na vida inquieta, na vida tumultuosa dos lares modernos onde as coisas parecem mover-se juntamente com as pessoas” [dance the restlessness life, the tumultuous life of the modern homes where things seem to move together with the people] (Ferro, 1924, p. 61-62). Besides, there was space for women and men, today’s Art, and also life: “a vida industrial que é um *jazz-band* de roldanas, de guindastes e motores, a vida commercial que é um *sud-express*, a vida intellectual onde as palavras pensam por si...” [the industrial Life that is a jazz-band of pulleys, of cranes and motors, the commercial life that is a sud-express, the intellectual life where words think by themselves...]. Summarizing, the whole Universe had space inside a jazz-band.

⁸ The Generation of ‘98 is the name attributed to a literary group of Spanish writers that were heavily influenced by the Hispano-American War of 1898 and were concerned with an aesthetic, social and cultural renewal. The Generation of ‘27 is also a literary group defined around the anniversary of the death of the Baroque poet Luis de Góngora in 1927. For more about the relationship between the Portuguese first modernists and the Spanish Generation of ‘98 and the Portuguese second modernists and the Spanish Generation of ‘27, see Sáez Delgado and Pérez Isasi, 2018.

His conference was interspersed with performances of jazz-bands made-up of Black musicians playing music and a woman dancing. This performance was coherent with the discourse that was being presented, and it was supposed that the woman would act as a mirror of his art, and her body in dance would summarize the whole discourse. It was also crucial to Ferro that the musicians were Black while the whites were dancing in figurative chess. For Ferro, Black art's influence on modern art was indisputable as he conceived them in a permanent infantile stage being the owners of the truth, the essence of art (Ferro, 1924, p. 71). Therefore, women and black people (together with 'crazy' people and children) symbolized the epitome of modernity but in a destabilizing way. They represented the otherness that in a disembodied, fragmented, and energetic way would apolitically conquer the territory of the bourgeois traditional civilization, but always mediated by the modernist white male artist. So, this act of conquering will only be formal, not political.

Apart from the dance, Ferro established a direct connection between cinema and women. He added that while women distrusted modernism and pretended to detest modern art and prefer traditional realism, they did not know how influenced their superficiality was by modernity and how they were models of "the cinematographic" restlessness of the century "que nos desdobra, que nos multiplica, que nos renova, constantemente..." [that unfolds us, that multiplies us, that renews us, constantly...] (Ferro, 1924, p. 66).

As previously noted, Ferro was not an exception among the Portuguese modernists of the second wave that emerged around the journal *Presença*. For example, José Almada Negreiros had also participated in the enthusiasm and was involved in different cinema professions.⁹ Therefore, from a vanguardist point of view, modernity, coming from the United States after the First World War in the form of electricity, jazz, dance, and reaching its peak with cinema, was insufflating life and youth in a decadent and aged Europe. The disruptive and artificial elements that presented a threat to the bourgeois traditional culture and way of life were interpreted as a positive change as they were assimilated and improved by European societies. Although antagonistic to the bourgeois objectives, the modernist discourse also permeated society and contributed to merge cinema with a certain sector of the intellectuality that was present during most part of the 1920s—mainly as film critics—but would gain force also as directors from 1926 onwards and would reject all the previous efforts made by the national film industry (Costa, 1991, pp. 40-45; Baptista, 2013, p. 90). It was called the generation of the first "cinema novo".

In any case, the precarity of Portuguese film production derived from its economic and technical handicaps—and general financial and political crises—provoked the creation of a national industry (with a patriotic mission) always to remain an ideal for the future more than a reality. For that reason, the discussion about the potential of films to be propaganda vehicles inside and outside national borders was always present in the press even when the silent cinema was being substituted for the new optical sound technologies that would impose themselves from the 1930s onwards.¹⁰

9 José Almada Negreiros participated as an actor in the film *O Condenado* (Mário Huguin and Afonso Gaio, 1921), as a drawer of the credits in the movie *A Canção de Lisboa* (José Cottinelli Telmo, 1933), as a decorator of the Cinema San Carlos in Madrid during his period living in the Spanish capital and, also, as theorist with several articles about Charlie Chaplin for *Diário de Lisboa* (1921, p. 3) and a comparison between cinema and theatre in *Sudoeste* (Almada Negreiros, 1935, pp. 13-19, pp. 20-22).

10 As an example, see the article by Frederico Rosa (1931, October 15), "Propaganda de Portugal pela cinematografia", *Cine-Teatro*, 30, 6-7, 13.

Closing remarks

In the 1910s, cinema, a massive entertainment that had gained an enormous popularity in a short period of time, was looked at with suspicion and disdain by the Portuguese intellectuality who considered it to be harmful for the moral of the lower classes. In addition, as it was being controlled from foreign companies, cinema was seen as a dangerous and disruptive element for the bourgeois principles of nation and tradition.

One decade later, however, the Portuguese film production had emerged and established itself in precarious industrial bases sited in Porto and Lisbon. Then, the cultural elites foresaw the nationalizing and educative effects that films might achieve by gaining the attention of the general public (many of them being illiterate) and influencing their habits and decisions. The dream of a true national cinema controlled by Portuguese hands that would help to construct the national identity, reinforce the patriotism of the masses and get Portugal known internationally, made that the initial critical discourse became nuanced and an important difference between foreign and "typically Portuguese" cinema was introduced.

Consequently, when analysing the early discourses about cinema coming from the cultural elites in the mid-1910s of the twentieth century, the first discourses demonized the new medium and claimed for regulation and censorship meanwhile, in the early 1920s, Portuguese cinema production was a reality—a struggling reality but a reality—and, therefore, the film critics and other intellectual sectors made a distinction between those films coming from abroad and the national production. The medium that they initially saw as essentially dangerous, pervasive and disruptive presented new opportunities of being used as an indoctrinating tool to access and impact the masses.

In this sense, de Castro e Almeida's decision was to take charge of cinema as a powerful media. Changing her status from an anonymous spectator and analyst to film judge/critic (remember the Prix de Castro), screenplay writer, and producer, she would control the discourse. She would remain in a powerful position to shape the narrative and distribute her "moralizing" messages—such as the need to avoid rendering oneself to the "passions" and to maintain a clear distinction among social classes and genders—through cinema as a tool to inspire common people's acts and habits.

In addition, a post-First World War celebratory discourse about cinema and its foreign origins, heavily influenced by modernism, began to be heard in the public arena. This vanguardist perspective was crucial to distance future filmmakers from the previous Portuguese film ideal and get them closer to a more modern perspective of cinema that would become the hegemonic one at the end of silent cinema period that coincided with the beginning of the Estado Novo.

REFERENCES

- Anonymous (1922, August). Films portugueses. Sereia de Pedra. *Cine-Revista*, 63, 9.
- Anonymous (1923, January 1). A Sereia de Pedra: Novela – Síntese. *Jornal dos Cinemas*, 1, 6-7.
- Anonymous (1923, February 1). Costa Veiga, o iniciador do cinema lusitano. *Jornal dos Cinemas*, 3, 31.
- Baptista, T. (2003). *Lion, Mariaud, Pallu: franceses tipicamente portugueses*. Cinemateca Portuguesa – Museu do Cinema.
- Baptista, T. (2007). Cinemas de estreia e cinemas de bairro em Lisboa (1924-1932). *Ler História*, 52, 29-56.
- Baptista, T. (2010). Cinema e política na Primeira República. *Congresso Histórico Nacional. 1 República e Republicanismo*. Cinemateca Portuguesa and FCSH-UNL, 1-11.
- Baptista, T. (2013). 1920-1929. O cinema “tipicamente português”. In P. Cunha & M. Sales (Eds.). *Cinema português. Um guia essencial* (pp. 70-92). SESI-SP.
- Benet, V. (2012). *El cine español Una historia cultural*. Espasa.
- Castro e Almeida, V. (1914a, January 4). Fogos-fatuos. Os filhos dos outros. *A Capital*, 1.231, 2.
- Castro e Almeida, V. (1914b, June 10). Cinematographos. *A Capital*, 1.384, 1.
- Castro e Almeida, V. (1917). Obra do demónio. In *A Praga* (pp. 95–188). Livraria Clássica.
- Castro e Almeida, V. (1925, February 17). Letter to her son José Lopo (Private Family Collection).
- Castro e Almeida, V. (1933). Prefácio. In F. Nicolay. *Crianças mal educadas*. Livraria Clássica.
- Cordero-Hoyo, E. (2021). Os primórdios do cinema. In N. Araújo (Ed.). *História do Cinema. Dos primórdios ao cinema contemporâneo*. Edições 70.
- Costa, H. A. (1978). *Breve História do Cinema Português (1896-1962)*. Oficinas Gráficas da Livraria Bertrand.
- Costa, J. B. (1991). *Histórias do Cinema Português*. Imprensa Nacional / Casa da Moeda.
- Felcar (1923, December 5). A arte do silêncio. Como meio de nacionalização. *Invicta Cine*, 7, 7.
- Ferro, A. (1924). *A Idade do Jazz-Band*. Portugalia Editora.
- Frias, J. M. (no date). Cinema e modernismo. *Modernismo – Arquivo Virtual da Geração de Orpheu* (website, IELT-FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa). <https://bitly.com/chpKwNp>
- Gaines, J. (2002). Of Cabbages and Authors. In J. M. Bean & D. N. Durham. (Eds.). *A feminist reader in early cinema* (pp. 88-118). Duke University Press.
- H. (1923, October 25). Cinematografite. *Cine-Lisboa*, 4, 14.
- Minguet Batllori, J. M. (1998). ¿Tú vas al cine? Mira que es un medio diabólico de perversion. (Sobre la recepción del cine en la España de los años diez). *Secuencias*, 8, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 12.
- Minguet Batllori, J. M. (2004). Early Spanish cinema and the problem of modernity. *Film History*, 16, 96.
- Negreiros, J. A. (1921, May 11). Charlie Chaplin. *Diário de Lisboa*, 30, 3.
- Negreiros, J. A. (1935, October). O cinema é uma coisa e o teatro é outra. *Sudoeste*, 2, Edições SW, 13-19.
- Negreiros, J. A. (1935, October). Encorajamento à juventude portuguesa para o cinema e para o teatro. *Sudoeste*, 2, Edições SW, 20-22.
- Piçarra, M. C. (2013). 1910-1919. Uma cinematografia “sem olhar” ganha o primeiro realizador, Leitão de Barros. In P. Cunha & M. Sales (Eds.). *Cinema Português. Um guia essencial* (pp. 45-69). SESI-SP.
- R. J. (1923, January 15). Ciné-Miroir au Portugal. *Ciné-Miroir*, 18, 23.
- Ribeiro, M. F. (1983). *Filmes, figuras e factos da História do Cinema Português 1896-1949*. Cinemateca Portuguesa.
- Rosa, F. (1931, October 15). Propaganda de Portugal pela cinematografia. *Cine-Teatro*, 30, 6-7, 13.
- Sáez Delgado, A. & Pérez Isasi, S. (2018). *De espaldas abiertas. Relaciones literarias y culturales ibéricas (1870-1930)*. Comares.
- Zappia (1922, December 16). La ilustre escritora portuguesa. *El Cine*, 557, 1.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elena Cordero Hoyo has graduated in Journalism and Media studies at the Univ. Rey Juan Carlos in Madrid (2011), from which she holds a Master’s degree in Spanish Cinema studies (2013). She was awarded a scholarship by the Portuguese national funding agency (FCT) for her research project on women’s access to the cinema industry in Spain and Portugal during the silent period. Apart from being part of the research project “Diálogos Ibéricos e Iberoamericanos” of the Centre for Comparative Studies (Univ. of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities), she is also member of the funded research groups “Football and Visual Culture under Francoism: Discourses of Class, Gender and National Construction in Cinema, Newsreels and the Press, 1939-1975” (Univ. Pompeu Fabra, PID2020-116277GA-I00) and “Visiones del cuerpo enfermo en el cine y la fotografía: patologías físicas y psíquicas” (Univ. de Girona) and she is an editor of *Secuencias*, an online film history journal.