

**PIÇARRA, M. DO C. (2015). *AZUIS ULTRAMARINOS. PROPAGANDA COLONIAL E CENSURA NO CINEMA DO ESTADO NOVO*. LISBOA: EDIÇÕES 70.**

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Published in april 2015, *Azuis Ultramarinos. Propaganda Colonial e Censura no Cinema do Estado Novo* is the result of the PhD project of Maria do Carmo Piçarra, a long research developed between 2008 and 2013. However, the work conducted by the author on the film history during the Estado Novo dictatorship goes back to 2005, in the scope of her master's thesis on Portuguese newsreels from which were published before *Salazar vai ao cinema. O Jornal Português de Actualidades Filmadas* (2006, Almedina) and *Salazar vai ao Cinema II. A Política do Espírito no Jornal Português* (2011, DrellaDesign). This brief presentation is required to alert that this author has a systematic and consolidated work on these issues of film representation and counter-representations, propaganda and censorship during the Estado Novo dictatorship, the Portuguese and European colonial projects, the instrumentalization of cinema as a political and ideological agent, the construction of memory and history, among other subjects.

Although it is a subject chronologically located in the middle of the 20th century, the research project of Maria do Carmo Piçarra aroused from a human and social experience lived by herself already in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The central question of this doctoral project has thus emerged a concrete experience, and a current question, clearly political, that remains relevant and necessary in order to better understand the present: “How was built this representation according to which the Portuguese are not racist?” To answer this question, the author thought a Hegelian device that communicates and relates:

*A reminiscent screen/off screen/reverse screen* in which the representations of colonialism by the newsreels propaganda films of the Estado Novo dictatorship, countered the look-aware censored/banned authors and films about the former Portuguese colonies to go revealing – in off screen – through ‘images-flash’, an ethics of remembering (and forgetting). (p. 13).

Elaborated from the perspective of communication sciences, this work contributes also to the state of art of different scientific areas, expanding considerably documentary and filmic corpuses, consolidating a space for reflection and action around the Portuguese and European colonial heritages. This original research was developed in several documentary funds of Torre do Tombo (including the SNI - Secretariado Nacional de Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo) and several private collections, which allowed to reclaim or recover a priceless series of data and unpublished materials (including

shooting photos and up to 11 minutes of cuts censorship inflicted on *Catembe!*), as well as several interviews that give a different view of the history as it was written and is conventionally, attached to various constraints that this research exposes and denounces.

The chapter devoted to the *screen*, the look of the colonizer, naturally synthetic, does not cease to be exhaustive to draw a panoramic look at the nationalist and colonial propaganda device, compared to other international cases. Piçarra goes further, particularly in matters concerning the projection and perception, introducing various data that help build her central argument, the construction and promotion of representation of a singular colonialism. Throughout this extensive chapter, Piçarra reports a meticulous work of viewing and study of the two main newsreels produced during the Estado Novo dictatorship, but also of the colonial fiction films (*Feitiço do Império* e *Chaimite*) and the whole process of colonial indoctrination lived in Portugal during this period.

In the chapter devoted to the *reverse screen*, the disruptive look, the author writes an alternate history that from now ceases to be. Based on three case studies, Piçarra builds a complex narrative that was muffled and hidden for decades and now allows review and reread the Portuguese colonization process in the light of other assumptions. For its uniqueness, this is undoubtedly the high point of this research work, constituting a central part of the author's thesis, specifically the reading of *Catembe* case. Although several new data revealed in the previous chapter, is this *reverse screen* that propose a new narrative, very well supported in several documents and unpublished sources, which allows to rewrite a significant part of the history of Portuguese cinema in the 1960s, a delicate period concerning the colonial issues.

In *off screen*, a more reflective chapter, a more comprehensive proposal is tested, to relate the colonial images from the past (Holocaust) and the history of cinema (direct cinema), but also on the construction process of her own personal archive that allowed her to review the history and collective memory. Strangely, there is a feeling that this chapter could have been more developed, exploring the different directions that are being exposed in the two previous chapters. Despite an extensive, comprehensive and adequate bibliography, used throughout the investigation, would have been very interesting call other relevant considerations to this chapter in particular, like Frantz Fanon (1967), Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) or Amílcar Cabral (1974), which would allow follow some of these other directions.

In short, *Azuis Ultramarinos* is a mandatory book to any library of the humanities and social sciences, a work that goes beyond thematic barriers and proposes a rereading of a moment of Portuguese history of the 20th century. More than offering just an alternative view, Piçarra also leaves elements so that other can build other looks from the materials and sources recovered from oblivion. To paraphrase Hannah Arendt, and the actual quote that begins this book, the whole thought process is the result of a personal experience, a "rethink" with a view. This is even one of the great lessons left by this book, which states (and confirms) himself as a political look against oblivion, looking at the past from the present, which challenges the archive and memory, from a singular and subjective point of view. ✍

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**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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