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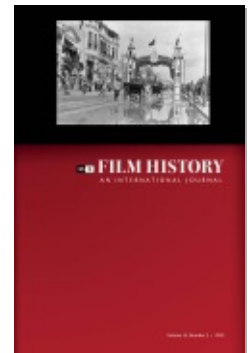
Institutional Film and Social Public Policies in Portugal
during the Late Authoritarian Regime (1957–1969)

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Institutional Film and Social Public Policies in Portugal during the Late Authoritarian Regime (1957–1969)

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to contribute to a better understanding of the complex, diffuse, and negotiated relationship between the use of cinema and Portuguese government practices during the authoritarian regime in Portugal. The study focuses on the engagement of the Junta de Acção Social (JAS, Social Action Committee), a Portuguese public body. It was created in 1956 to implement the Corporatist and Social Training Plan that produced, bought, and distributed institutional films about work and education. The article analyzes the national and transnational conditions of the development of a type of governmentality regarding social public policies, molded by the organization of the field of institutional films, and the comprehensive dissemination of the film industry in Portuguese society.

KEYWORDS: institutional film, social public policies, film industry, Portugal, authoritarian regime

INTRODUCTION

Historical analysis of the connection between cinema and authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century has mainly emphasized the contribution of films to the construction and dissemination of an ideological framework. These studies have considered the films as quite homogeneous across this time period in terms of their function, forms of penetration, and reception in society.¹ In the case of the Portuguese Estado Novo dictatorship (1933–74), the film industry has been considered as a tool for propaganda that participated in the construction of a so-called taste reflecting the ideological values of the dictatorship, such as nationalism, traditionalism, and rurality.² New approaches to propaganda films have, however, yielded “a more active understanding of spectatorship,”³ albeit with limited empirical work on cinema distribution networks or films’ reception.

The study presented here analyzes uses of cinema by the Junta de Acção Social (JAS—Social Action Committee), a Portuguese public body created in 1956 to implement the Plano de Formação Social e Corporativa (Corporatist and Social Training Plan), launched that year by the Ministério das Corporações e Previdência Social (Ministry of Corporations and Social Welfare). The Cinema and Television Section created under the JAS one year later focused on the production and distribution of institutional films in response to this plan. Institutional films, understood here as one element of useful cinema, are works that have been produced and/or disseminated by state institutions with the aim of promoting public-policy initiatives. These films formed part of various public campaigns in domains such as training and education, and health and safety work measures. They had the aim of endorsing a new focus or direction in public action. In a much broader sense, they sought to promote certain moral values and ideological beliefs, spreading and strengthening what the plan referred to as the “*esprit de corps*” and “awareness of social cooperation duties.”⁴

This article aspires to contribute to a better understanding of the complex, diffuse, and negotiated relationship between the use of cinema and Portuguese government practices during the authoritarian regime. Between 1957 and the early 1970s, the JAS Cinema and Television Section implemented two types of action: (1) the establishment of a film catalog partly comprised of original JAS productions, and (2) a distribution plan via a network of local bodies. The JAS’s objectives and means of action shifted and were continually challenged by the transformation of cinema and cultural consumption patterns in the late 1950s and in the 1960s. After engaging in privileged, internal, and autonomous production activity, the JAS invested in the organization of a film distribution circuit that started to function in March 1962, with less control on content. The study of this institution thus requires us to query the meaning of this transition in an attempt to appreciate the extent to which this movement formed part of a greater wave of change in national public policies in the area of the economy and work.

The term *institutional film* as used in this article refers to the subject matter in relation to other expressions in the field of film studies, such as “useful cinema” or “sponsored film.”⁵ In the postwar period, useful cinema was conceived as a means of fulfilling an economic and social function. In Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson’s book,⁶ we find twelve case studies on the use of films in North America in mid-twentieth-century institutions, such as libraries, museums, and companies, with cinema occupying a functional role, as is also the case in Portugal with the films of the JAS. Various categories have been used to classify these films in prior research according to their content, ends, target audiences, and entities that produced or financed them: educational films, touristic films,