

TOURADAS, CAMPINOS AND CAVALEIROS: TAUROMACHY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN PORTUGUESE CINEMA

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Resumo: This paper aims to introduce some relevant aspects of Portuguese films which have used tauromachy in their plots in order to present an artificial ideal of national identity. A textual analysis of some popular films – from *A Severa* (José Leitão de Barros, 1931) to *Ostouros de Mary Foster* (Henrique Campos, 1972) – shows how a false sense of belonging to a class-structured society has been promoted and perpetuated through specific symbols and images of the world of the *touradas*. Through a comparison with the analogous Spanish filmography of the periods of the two dictatorships of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) and Francisco Franco (1939-1975), it will be suggested that the fixed hierarchy and the ritual of bullfighting have often provided a sort of easy metaphorical language in which to present the ideal society – characterized by fixed gender roles, social classes, and cultural-religious values – and the specific idiosyncrasy of Portuguese national (tauro-)cinema will be underlined.

Palavras-chave: Cultural Studies, Hegemony, Taromachy, Popular Culture, National Cinema, National Identity.

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Traditionally, images and metaphors of tauromachy in films are associated with the concept of Spanishness, both culturally and geographically. From the beginning of the Seventh Art in 1895, with the short films produced by the first film companies – such as Lumière, Pathé, Gaumont – and throughout the 20th Century, we find a hegemonic presence in world cinema, in which bullfighting is always linked to the cultural identity of the Spanish nation. Even the scarce literature published to date shows the same focus: with the exception of Paco Ignacio Taibo, who researched national Mexican cinema through representations of tauromachy in films (Taibo 1987), the other published investigations generally seek to infer a genuine representation of the Spanish ritual (the *corrida à espanhola*), approaching the topic from a historical point of view (Fernández Cuenca 1963; Colón Perales 1999 and 2005; Feiner 2010). Some of the authors of these studies are also *aficionados taurinos*, they know the cultural milieu of the Spanish *mundillo taurino*, and though they may personally

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defend the *fiesta brava*, this does not indicate a lack of a critical approach in their research. However, the focus is always on the so-called *tourei* a pé as performed in Spain.

This dominant ‘Spanish factor’ in films about bullfighting is mainly due to two factors: first, Spanish films about tauromachy are simply more numerous than Portuguese ones; the second is the uniqueness of a cinematic macro-genre linked with the representation of bullfighting: the *españolada*. Spain is in fact one of the few nations – together with India and its Bollywood cinema – to have a genre (in world literature, music, cinema and other visual arts) related to its national identity (Navarrete Cardero 2009; García Carrión 2007 and 2014). Hundreds of films with bullfighting images identify the Iberian country; they are often set in Andalusia, one of the most important cradles of tauromachy; and are usually reminiscent in their plots of the *españoladas par excellence*: *Carmen* and *Sangre y Arena*.

Nevertheless, Portuguese cinema has produced a remarkable number of bullfighting films. The number of these productions is indicative of the insistence, especially during the Salazarian regime, on specific meanings and values related to it, and - as in Spanish cinema - linked to a controversial concept of national identity. On the one hand, we can find in Portugal the presence of tauromachy in films since the primitive cinema, in the form of a pre-narrative description of folkloric Portugal (Baptista 2008, 303-304). The first decades of the 20th Century were the so-called Golden Age of the Bullfight², and Portugal - as in neighbouring Spain - had its heroes of the *touradas*, who sometimes became film stars - such as António Luís Lopes – or leading protagonists of the newsreels, such as Simão da Veiga and João Branco Nuncio. On the other hand, some films with a bullfighting plot occupy a crucial position in the history of Portuguese cinema: *A Sereia de Pedra* (Roger Lion, 1923) was the first film written and produced by a woman (Virginia De Castro e Almeida); *A Severa* (José Leitão de Barros, 1931) was the first Portuguese

² The ‘Golden Age of the Bullfight’ (*Edad de oro del toreo*) includes the decades of the 1910s and 1920s, when the most famous bullfighters of the 20th Century (i.e. Joselito el Gallo, Juan Belmonte and Rodolfo Gaona) were performing across Spain, Portugal, France and Latin America, becoming popular stars.

sound film; *Sangue Toureiro* (Augusto Fraga, 1958) was the first colour motion picture. Furthermore, some of the directors of this period occupy a special place in Portuguese Film Studies, such as José Leitão de Barros and António Lopes Ribeiro.

This investigation, of which this paper is part of a more extensive publication (Caramella 2014), has been conducted from the perspective of the well-developed concept of Cultural Hegemony, introduced by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci in the *Quaderni del Carcere* (written between 1929-1935.) The traditional approach of Cultural Studies has been followed, considering media productions as a final product of a series of processes of negotiations between culture and power (Hall 1973), and identifying repeated and sometimes distorted meanings and values borrowed from the ritual and the cultural environment of Portuguese *tourada*. The analysed texts generally come from three main sources: 1) documentaries and short films, which offer examples of how the ritual of the *lide de touros* can be ideologically reduced, and inserted, into a specific cultural space, through editing; 2) the main narrative films with a relevant bullfighting plot, released between 1931 and 1972, which have presented socio-political discourses through their treatment of the theme; 3) finally, the newsreels of *Jornal Português*, *Imagens de Portugal* and *Visor*, which, for many years, were an official - and often the only - source of information for filmgoers. When these three major sources are displayed in a kind of synoptic table, the results show an impressive concordance. When compared - for instance - with the Spanish productions of the era of the Francisco Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), these Portuguese films appear as a sort of cultural monolith, always shining a positive light on the contemporary *status quo*, and on what can be considered the paradigm of the anthropological theory specific to Salazarism: that is, the natural origin of the existence of the different social classes, with no space for overcoming the limits of one's social situation (Acciaiuoli 2013).

The first series of texts, which includes the documentaries and the short films, shows the use of *tourada* for classic purposes of recording typical and folkloric aspects of the nation. "Tourada", "Tourada à antiga Portuguesa" or

“Tourada no Campo Pequeno” are recurring titles of the first shorts produced in Portugal. These films were distributed for the enjoyment of Portuguese spectators, who - as Manuela Penafria has shown persuasively – in addition to their attraction to exotic *vistas* of faraway lands, wanted to recognise themselves in the landscapes and themes of the films (Penafria 2013, 10-44). Though the majority of these productions are irremediably lost, there are some interesting films in the archives of the *Cinemateca Portuguesa*, including some amateur productions, which offer interesting ethnographic reflections. For instance, *Uma grande tourada à corda nas Doze Ribeiras* (1929), directed by António Luís Lourenço da Costa, and the amateur *Tourada em casa dos Borges*, shot by Frederico Oom in 1938, both tell the same story, one showing a real *tourada* in the Ilha Terceira dos Açores, the second representing, through the play of the children of a wealthy family, one *tourada à Portuguesa* with a remarkable attention to the details of the ritual. Notwithstanding the differences in typology between the two productions - one professional, the other amateur; the first presenting a real *tourada*, the second a children’s game - we can find in both some of the recurring themes seen in narrative films. Both films, in fact, present the social fields with a clear gender-distinction: the men on one side, dealing with bulls; the women acting as simple spectators of those who carry the responsibility of ruling the society. One is set in a rural, working class environment, and therefore the fight with the bull is performed in the socially permitted style (no elegant horses, no special clothes for the *lide*, but a popular *tourada à corda*); the second shows the style appropriate to the aristocratic *tourei*o, with the mini-*cavaleiros*, mini-*forcados* and little ladies, all dressed in accordance to their role.

To sum up, the *tourada* is portrayed as one of the main social events, placing these films on the same wavelength as proper documentaries, such as *Póvoa do Varzim* (Leitão de Barros, 1942), *Audácias e Touros* (Fernando Sousa Neves, 1949), *Espinho: Praia de Saudade* (Ricardo Malheiro, 1955). Indeed, as in the Spanish productions of the same era, the documentaries in which taumomachy is shown usually present it as a sort of final social prize for being a good worker and a good citizen. These films’ plots usually consist of a

schematised series of scenes: a geographic introduction to the location; the main historical and artistic heritage; a description of the principal centres of power (the city council, the church, the market); the work environment (usually agriculture and fishing); and the conclusion with the feast of the local patron saint and the great *tourada* with *cavaleiros* and *forcados*, as if the *touradas* were a reward for people's proper behaviour in society.

However, it is in the narrative films that bullfighting is most clearly used to convey meanings related to an ideal (and ideological) concept of national identity. In this, Portugal cinema has its own proper idiosyncrasies and social peculiarities, which differ not only from Spanish cinema, but also from French and Hollywood productions, which have treated the same bullfighting themes. According to Leora Lev (1995), we can list four fetishisms related to bullfight: the cultural, the socio-religious, the economic and the psycho-sexual. Usually, in film, one or two fetishisms prevail over others. For instance, in French and Hollywood cinema, the ritual of the *lide de touros* is essentially a metaphor for the man and woman's ritual of seduction and, sometimes, for their sexual encounter. So, the editing of these films, such as *Blood and Sand* (Fred Niblo, 1922) or *Soleil et Ombre* (Jeanne Roques Musidora, 1922), associates the fight between the male torero and the bull with the courtship of man and woman, anthropomorphising the bull, and creating the controversial parallelism between the *estocada* and the penetration. In Spanish cinema, however, the social-religious fetishism is dominant: the bull assumes divine qualities, as of a judge on earth of the *torero's* behaviour in his social climbing (see, for instance, *Currito de la Cruz*, directed in 1925 by Alejandro Pérez Lugín and Fernando Delgado). In fact, the main subject in Spanish productions is clearly the account of the social struggles of a poor man, who finds in the *touraio* the way to redeem his personal economic situation. In the micro-cosmos of the *praça de touros*, which represents the different social fields with its division of the *tendidos de sol y de sombra*³, the protagonist is allowed, depending on the film's

³ In the uncovered bullrings, the seating area is more expensive in the shade (*sombra*), whilst the seats under the sun (*sol*) are the most uncomfortable – due to the high temperatures - and the furthest from the torero's performance. This visible social division creates a metaphorical representation of the social fields.

contemporary political situation, to overcome his social class when acting in accordance with the mainstream political culture. Indeed, the historical fracture between the 1920s - the Miguel Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930) – and the Francoist regime (1939-1975) – is reflected in a change in the use of bullfighting metaphors in cinema. In the 1920s, the torero (that is, the working class), is permitted to achieve a better economic situation, but is not allowed to try to change his social field, for instance by a relationship with an aristocrat (as in *Pepe-Hillo*, directed by José Buchs in 1928, or in *Sangre y Arena*, directed in 1917 by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez) . With Francisco Franco, the social classes are not as fundamental as in the past: now the torero can become whoever he wants. The most important thing, in order to avoid (in film scripts) the mortal goring, is to act as a good soldier of Franco (virile, catholic, supporter of the nation). The matador is culturally defending the national traditions, and for this he is the perfect national hero. Real matadores, such as Manuel Benítez *El Cordobés* and Palomo Linares have even played themselves in cinematic representations of these very Spanish fairy tales, such as *Aprendiendo a morir* (Pedro Lazaga, 1962), *Nuevo e nesta plaza* (Pedro Lazaga, 1966), *Solo los dos* (Luis Lucía, 1968).

What happens when the *tourneiois* traditionally linked with aristocracy? How does this historical tradition convey nationalist discourses which are able to reach the entire nation, including the working class and the sub-proletariat? This is essentially the focal point of Portuguese *cinema tauromaquico*: the *tourada à portuguesa* is certainly an art which can represent tradition, local history and filmic adventures; however, the *corrida a cavalo* has never passed through a process of social “democratisation”: to be a *cavaleiro* one needs horses, land and wealth (Thompson 2012). The *cavaleiro* often comes from a high social class, and therefore it is difficult to transform him into a national hero: in order to instil desires of identification and imitation into the general audience, Portuguese cinema is in need of a popular main character. This is when the *campino* makes his entrance in national cinema. The *campino* becomes the upholder of tradition; he defends the right ideals from the corruption of modernity; he is the proper parallel to the Spanish *torero*: male, brave and

obedient to the social *status quo*. In the decades in which cinema, according to the Portuguese film scholar Tiago Baptista, “exudavanacionalismo” (2009, 312), the *campino* is a perfect image of the essence of the nation.

With the exception of *A Severa* (Leitão de Barros, 1931) - one of the few Portuguese films about bullfighting in which there is a clear nuance of social criticism -the Portuguese ritual of the *tourada* cannot serve as a metaphor for the whole society. In the *lide de touros a cavalo* the heroism of the *cavaleiro* is shared with the other *tooureiro* in the bullring: the horse, and this can dilute the theatricality of the human's performance. There is no final *estocada* in the *tourada à portuguesa*, and so the shadow of an imminent death is also sanitised⁴. The stylishness of the *marialvas*⁵, their financial possibilities, their traditional and well-known habit of descending into the moral hell composed of gypsies, *fadistas* and women of easy virtue, cannot be the central story to elevate the national spirit of the common citizen, though it certainly forms part of it (Vale de Almeida 1997).

Therefore, the working-class character of the *campino*, the man who breeds the bull-God, and is therefore the real ally of divine justice, is often transformed into the *deus ex machina* of the plot. We can see this in several films: *Campinos do Ribatejo* (António Luis Lopes, 1932) *Gado Bravo* (António Lopes Ribeiro, 1934), *Um homen do Ribatejo* (Henrique Campos, 1946), *Ribatejo* (Henrique Campos, 1949), *Os toiros de Mary Foster* (Henrique Campos, 1972). The *campino* is not only conducting a proper, moral life (enjoying his low social status, living in harmony with the countryside, not looking for a social overcoming), but is also fighting to preserve the rural world, the Portuguese essence of the nation, from the corruption of modern times. Temptations are usually represented by foreign *femmes fatales*, who are seducing the master *cavaleiros*, to the point that the entire *lezíria* – and therefore the *campinos*' workplace - is in danger; or are embodied by unscrupulous businessmen who are trying to destroy the countryside in

⁴ Portuguese bullfighting always ends with the *forcados* performance of the *pega do touro* (literally, catching the bull), taking the limelight off the *cavaleiro*.

⁵ A nickname for the *cavaleiros*, taken by the real Conde de Marialva (1713-1799) and the homonymous main character of Leitão de Barros' *A Severa*, based on Júlio Dantas's play (1901).

turning the land from agricultural to industrial use. The resolution of the plot is often due to the *campinos'* actions or, as in *Sangue Toureiro* (Augusto Fraga, 1958), a film in which the “democratic” *toureiro a pé* has substituted the “aristocratic” *lide a cavalo*, it is the land itself which is calling the good citizen to fight for its preservation.

Preservation is the key-world of Portuguese *cinema tauromaquico*. The cultural and historical traditions related to the world of bullfighting are, in summary, an easy way to promote the official - and mainstream - ideology. Together with narrative films, the newsreels give the main role to the auxiliary components of the *tourada*, once again to the detriment of the wealthier *cavaleiros*: in this case, the main characters are certainly the *forcados*. The newsreels, often in reality propaganda vehicles to create the national image and imaginary (Sánchez-Biosca and Tranche 2006), also insist on elevating the bravery of the historical auxiliaries of the *tourada*, up to the point that the names of the *cavaleiros* are often omitted⁶. The voices-off repeatedly underline the courage and strength of the *forcados* as a symbol of the *raça portuguesa*, who are performing a very Portuguese activity. For decades, Portuguese films with and about bullfighting have been a sort of representation of the “política do espírito”, fitting into the ideology linked to the Estado Novo, using the social language proceeding from the real *mundillo taurino*, which was divided *ad intra* in fixed social classes, but it was also perverted *ad extra* for political purposes. Paraphrasing scholar Patricia Vieira (2001: 66-67), who lists a threefold dynamic of these kind of popular films, Portuguese productions about bullfighting have clearly conveyed the “official” promotion of the national identity through 1) the defence of the simple rural life, 2) the “spiritual elevation” of the countryside as the repository of authentic values and virtues, 3) a constant criticism of wealth and class changes, showing a striking social stability. This can be seen as the cultural distinctiveness, as compared with other national cinemas, of Portuguese *cinema tauromaquico*.

⁶ *Imagens de Portugal* n. 33-1954; *Visor* n. 6-1961.

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