



Film history, market and State in the work of Jean-Claude Bernardet

*História do cinema,
mercado e Estado na obra
de Jean-Claude Bernardet*



Arthur Autran¹

¹ Professor at the Department of Arts and Communication of Federal University of São Carlos. Author of *Alex Viary: crítico e historiador*, *Imagens do negro na cultura brasileira* and *O pensamento industrial cinematográfico brasileiro*. Directed the documentaries *Minoria absoluta* and *A política do cinema*. E-mail: autran@ufscar.br

Abstract: This study addresses Jean-Claude Bernardet's reflection on the history of relations between Brazilian production, the market, and the State. Scholarship on Brazilian cinema and its insertion in the market has a long tradition that dates back to the 1920s. From the 1950s onward, this was an important vein for the development of the first research on the history of Brazilian cinema. Jean-Claude Bernardet's concerns are initially inscribed within this tradition. However, by questioning certain issues, especially the ties between filmmakers and the State, Bernardet poses a series of questions in order to reinvent this tradition.

Keywords: film history; State; market; Jean-Claude Bernardet.

Resumo: Este artigo aborda a reflexão de Jean-Claude Bernardet sobre a história das relações entre a produção brasileira, o mercado e o Estado. O pensamento acerca do cinema brasileiro e sua inserção no mercado tem uma longa tradição que remonta aos anos 1920. A partir da década de 1950, esse foi um veio importante para o desenvolvimento das primeiras pesquisas sobre a história do cinema brasileiro. É nessa tradição que inicialmente se inscrevem as preocupações de Jean-Claude Bernardet. Porém, a partir da interrogação de determinados problemas, principalmente os laços entre os cineastas e o Estado, Bernardet recoloca uma série de questões de maneira a reinventar a tradição.

Palavras-chave: história do cinema; Estado; mercado; Jean-Claude Bernardet.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to present and analyse Jean-Claude Bernardet's thoughts on the relationship between Brazilian film and the market throughout history, highlighting the question of the role of the state and the critical examination of the national-popular ideology, which was fundamental in underpinning left-wing conceptions of the cultural and economic role of cinema made in the country.

This text is part of a broader research project on the historiographical production of Jean-Claude Bernardet, undoubtedly one of the main authors to contribute to reflections on Brazilian cinema history. Furthermore, I aim to deepen the discussion about film historiography, which finds Bernardet (1979; 1995) himself as a fundamental reference, as well as other names such as Eduardo Morettin (2018), José Inácio de Melo Souza (2004), Luciana Corrêa de Araújo (2017), Luís Rocha Melo (2016) and Paulo Antônio Paranaguá (2000). It is also necessary to mention the inspiring work of foreign authors such as Michèle Lagny (1992), and Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery (1985), who instigatingly question the canons of film historiography.

My understanding is that it is only through the continuous critical study of the historiographical tradition that we can understand the postulates we work with, their limits and indicate paths – possibly unexplored – to new objects, methods, sections and even sources. In other words, re-examining tradition is an essential condition for advancing the frontiers of historical knowledge.

Brazilian cinema market and history

To begin with, it should be noted that debates about the difficulties of the Brazilian film product on the market date back to the 1920s, with important precursors such as Adhemar Gonzaga, Luiz de Barros and Pedro Lima. As early as the 1950s, when the first works on the history of Brazilian cinema appeared - such as the chapter “Balanço histórico-crítico do cinema brasileiro”, which is part of the book *O romance do gato preto*, by Carlos Ortiz (1952); the essay “As idades do cinema brasileiro”, by B. J. Duarte (1954); and, above all, *Introdução ao cinema brasileiro*, by Alex Vianny (1959) – the question of the situation of Brazilian cinema in the market appeared in some texts as one of the important threads to be investigated.

It is in the intellectual production of the latter author that the perspective of the need to know the past in order to avoid the mistakes that had been made before and thus start the economic development of Brazilian cinema, a development subsumed in its industrialisation and the occupation of the domestic market, is clearly evident:

Can Brazil sustain a profitable film industry with technically and artistically acceptable films?

The question – basic in any discussion of the problems of Brazilian cinema – requires, as an answer, a detailed and in-depth study of our economic and cultural conditions, *which relates the attempts of the past to the few but encouraging successes of the present, which points out the mistakes of yesterday and today as lessons for tomorrow*, which takes into account Brazil's international commitments, and which, above and beyond all, presents concrete data on the domestic film market. (VIANY, 1954, p. 30, my emphasis)

In other words, the interest in the past lies in the “lessons” it can leave for the present and the future, hence the urgency of historical research.

The low profile of the history of Brazilian cinema, which characterised the early years of Jean-Claude Bernardet's critical activity, began to give way in the second half of the 1960s to an intense intellectual curiosity about the past. It is possible to detect the beginning of this transition in an article he wrote about the cinema of São Paulo, in which he gives an overview of the main prospects for production in 1967, but not without first making negative comments about the Vera Cruz experience:

The myth that still hung over the São Paulo filmmaker is the white elephant of Brazilian cinema: Vera Cruz. Wanting to create the Hollywood of South America, Zampari built a gigantic studio where films of a high technical-artistic standard would be made: exquisite lighting and complex camera movements combined with the tormented psychology of characters living on sumptuous sets. Everything must suggest that the São Paulo bourgeoisie is capable of producing art. [...]

Vera Cruz's mistakes are many, but the biggest – the fatal one – is that it thought about production before knowing how and to whom the product would be sold. Vera Cruz didn't devise a distribution system and was forced to give its tapes to other companies. [...] In 1954, when *O cangaceiro* was enjoying great success in São Paulo, Vera Cruz closed its doors. This led to the impression that cinema was only good for making millions, and even today cinema is by definition bad business. In reality, if Vera Cruz's production (a Vera Cruz film costs up to five times more than a normal production) and distribution systems had been properly analysed, this irrational and inhibiting impression might have been avoided. (BERNARDET, 1967, p. 95-96)

The acidic view of the Vera Cruz experience was already a hallmark of Alex Viány's thinking. Nor is there anything new in the hypothesis that analysing

the past could help us understand the problems of the present. What this article marks is simply the process of transition that I pointed out within Bernardet's own work. But from then on, an important part of his intellectual work will be dedicated to reflecting on the history of the situation of Brazilian cinema in the market, its production conditions and State support.

Without a doubt, Alex Viány's influence was decisive in this process. In 1968, Bernardet sent correspondence to the Rio de Janeiro critic in which he attached a research project entitled *A comédia cinematográfica no Brasil: Estudo de um gênero cinematográfico*². The project would be presented to the São Paulo State Research Foundation (Fapesp) for funding and Bernardet asked for a letter from Viány in which he signalled his interest in the research, as well as asking for any suggestions that the author of *Introdução ao cinema brasileiro* could make. It's worth noting that Viány had a unique position in his generation because, unlike most prominent critics, he recognised the economic, cultural and even artistic importance of the *chanchada* at the very moment – the 1950s – when this type of film was the main Brazilian cinematic product. The majority of critics at the time, on both the left and the right, despised the *chanchada* entirely.

Bernardet's research project was carried out in a context in which the *chanchada* had already lost its place in the market, but that doesn't mean that comedy had disappeared as a mass product on the silver screen. Films of this genre with a mischievous tone had been occupying cinemas, such as Roberto Farias's *Toda donzela tem um pai que é uma fera* (1966). The project's justification was as follows:

The comic genre in Brazil has developed, despite momentary declines, from the beginning of the century to the present day. It is the genre with the greatest continuity in Brazilian cinema.

Comedy is the only form of cinema in Brazil that has regularly managed to attract a wide audience.

Comedy is the only genre that has managed to reconcile the interests of production, distribution and exhibition, i.e. the three stages of the film industry and trade.

[...]

In order for a film genre to be successful, mass production (even at an almost artisanal level, as is the case in Brazil) presupposes

² Letter from Jean-Claude Bernardet to Alex Viány. [São Paulo], 21 Mar. 1968. Alex Viány Archive, Cinematheque of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro.

that the audience finds certain dramatic elements in the films that satisfy them and that are expected. It also presupposes that these elements are placed in the films by the production as a result of the audience's prior knowledge, whether intuitive or scientific (BERNARDET, 1968)

In other words, what justified the research was the importance of comedy as a successful product on the market for long periods of time, which allowed an insight into the “image in which the public is projected” and the “production method” of this type of film. It seems that a (scientific?) understanding of how comedies work could provide a formula for success for Brazil's ailing cinema. My hypothesis resonates with the continuity of the text, which attaches great importance to the “high degree of redundancy”, since it is “redundancy that enables films to have commercial value”. It would therefore be a question of verifying the redundancies in films from a particular era, as well as any differences between them – but this last element takes up little space in the argument.

The project's justification seems to point to something more than the “lessons” of the past as a way of avoiding mistakes in the present and future. The research would provide elements that could guarantee the development of Brazilian cinema in the market. This is not stated literally, but it seems to me that this logic underlies the argument in defence of carrying out the research.

Seen today, the most instigating part of the project relates to the recognition of the need to analyse activities such as the circus, radio, popular music, the music hall, carnival and television in order to better understand the phenomenon of film comedy. These relationships had already been established by critics at the time, but they were marked by a strong sense of prejudice and served as an argument to belittle the *chanchadas*. In the research project, there is no hint of this. Quite the opposite:

Finding film elements in another area will be a valuable contribution both to the study of redundancy and to the study of the production system, since it was precisely the success of these elements in other areas that constituted the producers' prior knowledge of the public, an intuitive substitution for the market research that must precede the development of the product. (BERNARDET, 1968)

I have no information on whether the project was actually sent to Fapesp. With the enactment of Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5) in December 1968, political

repression and the arbitrariness of the dictatorship increased, leading to Jean-Claude Bernardet's compulsory retirement from the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1969³.

It is important to note that Bernardet's desire to understand the structures of the market served as a driving force for a deeper understanding of the history of Brazilian cinema. It was a process similar to that experienced by Alex Viany in the previous decade.

Furthermore, it seems to me that the historian's interest in comedy aimed at the masses is based on the connection between the filmmakers and the public made possible by this type of film. In the article "A consolidação possível" (The possible consolidation), originally published in *Visão* magazine in 1972, it is stated that the fact that the directors linked to Cinema Novo were unable to reach the general public was due to "the general problems of Brazilian society", as well as "the isolation of the filmmakers from the public", because the films were not shown regularly. In this way, "the filmmaker is an individual who has no dialogue with the public he works for, and the cinematographic imagination tends to work in a closed circuit" (BERNARDET, 1978, p. 153). There is a very important point here: the relationship between the filmmaker and the mass audience can stimulate creation and does not necessarily dull or limit it, as many on the left of the film industry repeatedly claim.

The role of the Stat

The military dictatorship significantly increased the State's presence in film activities in Brazil. In 1966, the National Film Institute (INC) was created, through which, according to researcher Tunico Amâncio (2007, p. 174), "the production activity was planned with careful consideration". The organisation

[...] was an autarchy with legislative, promotion, incentive and inspection functions, as well as being responsible for the foreign market and cultural activities. It incorporated the INCE (of the MEC) and the Executive Group of the Film Industry (GEICINE), of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, from 1961, at the same time as being equipped with some instruments for intervening in the market: the obligation to register producers, exhibitors and distributors, allowing for the

³ In addition to Jean-Claude Bernardet, other USP professors who were dismissed included Bento Prado Jr, Emília Viotti Costa, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Florestan Fernandes, João Batista Vilanova Artigas, José Arthur Gianotti, Mario Schenberg and Octavio Ianni. Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta carried out a survey in which it became clear how widespread the political persecution of professors was, affecting several universities across the country after AI-5 was passed. According to the historian: "The purge of professors in the second repressive cycle [after AI-5] had a far greater impact than in 1964" (MOTTA, 2014, p. 164).

prospecting and control of the activity, the determination of the obligation to show national films and also the application to Brazilian films of 40% of the tax due on the remittance of profits from foreign companies, which until then had been optional. (AMÂNCIO, 2007, p. 174)

Embrafilme (Empresa Brasileira de Filmes S. A.) was set up in 1969 by the military junta that ruled the country. AI-5 had been decreed in December 1968 and Brazil was immersed in one of its harshest phases of political repression. Initially, Embrafilme's main objective was to publicise and distribute Brazilian films abroad. The company was also granted funds from the tax on the remittance of profits from foreign distributors. Tunico Amâncio observes that "at that time, the most formally and politically engaged Brazilian cinema still enjoyed great international prestige, and the military regime's interest in maintaining effective control over the activity became evident" (AMÂNCIO, 2007, p. 175).

Despite the negative reactions that the creation of both bodies aroused, especially among the Cinema Novo group, gradually throughout the 1970s, even some of the filmmakers who opposed the military regime began to dialogue with the policies implemented by the State.

It was in this new context that Bernardet began to question the relationship between filmmakers and the state, analysing the present but also trying to understand how it had been in the past. The aforementioned article "A possible consolidation" is an example of this. The text initially characterises relations between producers and exhibitors as marked by mutual incomprehension. Despite being more focused on the discussion of its contemporaneity, in seeking to clarify the situation of producers, the author states that "the history of our cinema shows that production tends to take advantage of the gaps left by the market, gaps that can be more or less occasional or, on the contrary, consciously provoked". Among the "occasional gaps" were tapes made at the beginning of the 20th century based on local events, such as crimes, or documentaries and newsreels about events of interest, such as carnival and football. The "provoked loopholes", on the other hand, were related to the "Getúlio Vargas decrees" that forced the screening of short films and, later, feature films (BERNARDET, 1978, p. 151). In the field of short films, the compulsory law would have contributed to the growth of film production and the "brief flourishing of some companies", but without any significant results in terms of audiences. When it came to feature films, the legislation "created new relationships between production and the public" by investing in a genre that had a broad dialogue with Brazilian viewers: the musical comedy.

It is worth noting that the regular release of these films followed – not preceded – the measures that created the market reserve. In fact, while in the 1930s some comedies produced by Byington and Cinédia, appealing to radio stars, undoubtedly reached the general public – which created a favourable climate for the signing of the compulsory exhibition decree – this production only became systematised with Atlântida, which was founded in 1941, but only started producing *chanchadas* in 1947, when exhibitor Luiz Severiano Ribeiro joined the company. With the producer’s access to theatres, a balance was created between production and the market: *production is sensitive to the appeal of the market*, the feedback system works, the financial interests of production and exhibition are harmonised. (BERNARDET, 1978, p. 152, emphasis in original)

This excerpt resonates with the ideas of Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, whose *70 anos de cinema brasileiro* considers that the entry of exhibitor Luiz Severiano Ribeiro into Atlântida “recalls the harmony and never repeated economic conjuncture that reigned in Brazilian cinema between 1908 and 1911”, a time when there would have been a conjunction between production and exhibition (GOMES; GONZAGA, 1966, p. 88)⁴. It is curious to note that Bernardet even takes the word “harmony” from Sales Gomes. But Bernardet introduces something missing from the book: a reflection on the importance of protectionist measures to stimulate the production of musical comedies. The measures were necessary given the occupation of the market by foreign films, which was a central feature of our cinematographic reality, as pointed out in *Cinema brasileiro: propostas para uma história*:

It is impossible to understand anything about Brazilian cinema if one does not always bear in mind the massive and aggressive presence of foreign films on the domestic market [...]. This presence not only limited the possibilities for the affirmation of a national cinematography, but also largely conditioned its forms of affirmation. (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 11)

Confronted with the profound dominance of foreign films, throughout history, the State has been the sole entity capable of setting forth the requisite conditions for Brazilian cinema to exert any semblance of influence within its own market.

⁴ The book *70 Years of Brazilian Cinema* is authored by Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes and Adhemar Gonzaga, but there was a clear division of tasks. The former was responsible for the narrative text of Brazilian cinema history divided into five “epochs”, while the latter handled the rich iconography of the book, as well as the notes regarding each of the published photos.

Problematizing the relationship with the State: a break with Brazilian cinematic thinking

The chapter in the book *Cinema brasileiro: propostas para uma história* entitled “Novo ator: o Estado” [New actor: the State] is one of the key moments in Jean-Claude Bernardet’s work and, beyond that, in the Brazilian historiographical tradition. The leap in his own reflection on the relationship between filmmakers and the State, as well as the prevailing perspectives in the film industry in general, deserves to be noted. It should also be noted that this is the largest chapter in the book, made up of a total of six chapters, and that it takes up 33 out of a total of 103 pages.

The initial assertion already constitutes something extremely innovative for historiographical thinking and ideas about Brazilian cinema: “And here we address another element that, along with the presence of foreign film, essentially contributed to determining the forms of film production in Brazil: the presence of the State” (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 35). This was innovative because, until then, what was seen as a formative or structuring element of national cinema was the Herculean effort of filmmakers, especially the pioneers; or the desire to express Brazilian culture, which was understood in different ways according to the author; or the need for national production to become industrialised; or even the desire and talent of some filmmakers to integrate Brazil into the world concert of artistic quality cinema. What Bernardet proposes here is to put aside a historiography based on the ideological fickleness of historians and look at how the structures of Brazilian cinema were actually organised, whether well organised or badly organised. It seems to me that this was an enormous effort to provide a historiographical discourse with bases linked to dialectical materialism.

After pointing out the importance of the market reserve for Brazilian cinema as a way of getting films into cinemas, even if it always fell “short of the production possibilities” (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 36), the essayist compares the positions of film producers with industrialists from other areas to conclude that, in the first case, the defence of protectionism, at least until the 1930s, was less intense. This was due to the love of producers like Adhemar Gonzaga for Hollywood and the fact that they were ideologically subjected to the “coloniser”.

The text presents a panorama of other forms of State support over the years, culminating in the activity of the Embrafilme distributor – something contemporary to the writing of the book. Bernardet then points to the need to promote “the ideological analysis of forms of production” (1979, p. 42), something that would be uncommon

in Brazilian culture – the exception mentioned is Antônio Candido and his work *Literatura e sociedade*.

According to Bernardet, throughout history, State intervention has been requested by filmmakers for industrial and/or cultural reasons. The left in the field of cinema has not been immune to these demands. The author goes on to characterise the conception of the State behind these demands from the left:

There is even a certain idea or dream on the part of the left that the State doesn't defend class interests, but rather the interests of the nation, that the State is above class interests. So State intervention in cinema, if well guided, would not run the risk of being an intervention favourable to producers as potential capitalists, or favourable to certain ideological positions, but rather favourable to the interests of Brazilian cinema itself, and therefore to the cinematographic interests of the nation. (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 44)

[...]

It is worth asking what the objective effect of this link is on production, even if individual filmmakers remain critical of the State and the government. And the first impression is that no matter how great the efforts of some filmmakers, it is difficult to produce critical films, if these same films are made and marketed with the collaboration of the state, it is difficult to ask for and obtain State aid to make films that radically call into question the ideological foundations of this State and the society it believes it represents - although in some cases it may not be impossible. (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 46)

Specifically concerning the relationship between cinema and the State, perhaps the most complex case raised by Bernardet is Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Os Inconfidentes* (1972). Made in a context in which the Ministry of Education and Culture was encouraging the production of historical films as part of the celebrations for the sesquicentenary of Independence, the film is an caustic criticism of the *Inconfidência Mineira* and a reading that is completely at odds with the elegiac tone desired by the dictatorship. For Bernardet, the director seemed to accept the official proposal, but in fact inverted it; but even so, the discussion took place on "the grounds laid out by structures of power" (1979, p. 50).

In other words, if, on the one hand, historically, the State's action was important in creating a wedge in the market that made it possible for Brazilian cinema to be present in this space that was hoarded by foreign products, on the other hand, it was

an illusion to believe that such actions would be neutral. The centripetal force of the State attracted filmmakers to some extent, even those opposed to the regime in power. Bernardet does not mention it, but I think a film could serve as a counterpoint: *Orgia ou o homem que deu cria* (1970), by João Silvério Trevisan. Bernardet himself was cast as an intellectual who desperately eats books and ends up hanging himself. A radical film in terms of its narrative and its criticism of Cinema Novo, it was made with few resources and ended up being censored by the military dictatorship⁵. Evidently, there was no State support for the production or distribution of the film, which would place it in a more radical political position when compared, for example, to *Os inconfidentes*.

Bernardet also raises cases in which there was clearly some kind of “cultural dirigisme” on the part of the State when it came to film production. One example is films produced as a result of an award, instituted in 1972, for adaptations of literary works by deceased authors. According to the essayist, this was due to the fact that the government was dissatisfied with the popularity of the so-called *pornochanchadas* while at the same time Cinema Novo was losing ground at international festivals. In any case, the government did not want to support films with critical content such as the Cinema Novo films:

The search was then on for a cinema that could have a certain cultural prestige, that could present itself with a cultural veneer, without offering the inconveniences of a critical cinema. The solution was literary adaptations, which transferred the cultural status of the original literary works to the cinema. An idea from literati. With a film like *Lição de amor* (1976), this policy achieved its goals. (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 53)

Directed by Eduardo Escorel, a filmmaker linked to Cinema Novo, *Lição de amor* (1976) was an example of how critical cinema was giving way to a production of “cultural varnish”, a process over which the State had control. In fact, when *Lição de amor* was released, the critic analysed in detail the relationship between the cultural policy of the dictatorial State and the film⁶. Even worse would have been the cultural elite’s support for Embrafilme’s decision to stop funding *pornochanchadas*:

⁵ The letter sent by the head of the censorship service to the producers of *Orgia ou o homem que deu cria* states that the film “has been considered inconvenient in almost its entirety”. The same document demands numerous cuts so that there can be a new evaluation, which is necessary for the film’s public exhibition. The document is reproduced in the catalogue *Cinema Marginal e suas fronteiras* (2012), organised by Eugênio Puppó.

⁶ For an in-depth analysis of Bernardet’s criticism of *Lição de amor*, see *Crítica de cinema e repressão: estética e política no jornal alternativo Opinião*, by Margarida Maria Adamatti (2019), pp. 111-129.

This is not an anonymously technical attitude, nor is it just an economic measure, but it undoubtedly refers to a cultural project. [...] By supporting Embrafilme's stance against pornochanchada, it was supporting something much more important: the clear and direct intervention of the State in the ideological, stylistic and thematic orientation of film production. [...] And the biggest problem was whether or not to legitimise, through the press, trade bodies, etc., a cultural project launched by the State. (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 55)

Throughout the 1970s, Embrafilme took on a leading role in the activity. Never before had a State agency had so much power over the film industry in Brazil. In a groundbreaking way for Brazilian cinematographic thinking, Bernardet demonstrated how the policies in favour of cinema implemented by the State effectively directed production on various levels (artistic, ideological, thematic, etc.). The always sought-after support from the State was being extended in an unprecedented way, but at the cost of the film industry's increasing submission.

But the filmmakers did not seem to realise the cultural dirigisme. On the contrary, what Bernardet identifies is a radical division in the struggle for State resources. On the one hand, there were filmmakers linked to "the cult area of production" (1979, p. 57), such as Glauber Rocha and Paulo César Saraceni; on the other hand, there were those who produced films for the mass public, especially *pornochanchadas*, represented by a name like Pedro Carlos Rovai. The positions seemed irreconcilable, because while the former wanted Embrafilme to support a cinema focused on aesthetic expression and national content, the latter felt that priority should be given to funding productions with a chance of box-office success. Although conflicts in the film industry are traditional and sometimes very aggressive, exposing their roots, as Bernardet did, was not common. As he himself points out, the occupation of the market by foreign films led to the idea of a "block" united against the main enemy: American cinema. This struggle ended up stifling the expression of the differences and conflicts within the Brazilian film industry, even though they obviously existed. Still according to Bernardet, the struggle of Brazilian cinema against Hollywood generates an image of the struggle of the "weak and dominated" against the "strong and dominant". The image:

[...] finds its roots in a traditional political thought that tends to interpret both colonialism and imperialism as a relationship between countries, dominators and dominated. It's a simplistic and false image, but it has the political function of presenting the dominated classes as having common

interests. The Brazilian ruling classes, dominated by and linked to imperialism, can then be legitimate interpreters of the aspirations of society as a whole. The oppression they exert and their pursuit of ideological hegemony not only become secondary issues but can also be seen as an expression of national aspirations. (BERNARDET, 1979, p. 61)

The influence of *Cinema: trajetória no subdesenvolvimento*, a seminal essay by Paulo Emilio Sales Gomes, is evident here. In this text, the author makes use of the notions of “occupied” and “occupier” (GOMES, 1980), in order to move away from Bernardet’s criticised perspective on colonialism. Often hastily interpreted, these notions, as Sales Gomes employs them, have the advantage of demonstrating the complexity of the social structure in underdevelopment, since the Brazilian elite is also an occupier in relation to the working classes; however, a Brazilian filmmaker is an occupier in the face of the market being taken over by American products. In fact, the same individual can be in different positions (occupant or occupied) depending on their social role.

Criticising the national-popular

Jean-Claude Bernardet’s identification and discussion of the divisions of the film medium were fundamental contributions to both the historiographical debate and the study of film politics. Although these divisions have existed since at least the 1920s, with different configurations throughout history, the left’s policy of forming fronts to fight the military dictatorship ended up eliding differences and divisions in the discursive field, seeking to see differences only in relation to foreigners and/or national sectors directly linked to the dictatorship.

In her research on film criticism in *Opinião*, the alternative newspaper in which Bernardet worked, Margarida Maria Adamatti points out that “national-popular culture, the herald intellectual, the language [of cinema] accessible to the public and the occupation of the market” (2019, p. 356) were issues initially defended by the members of this press organ in the name of the “cinematographic front”, but that, throughout the 1970s, this was eroded. These changes were not restricted to *Opinião*’s film criticism. In fact, they reflected fundamental changes in leftist conceptions of the relationship between culture and society, as well as the role of intellectuals, changes whose main sign was the progressive weakening of the national-popular ideology and its replacement by new ways of understanding and debating artistic production. According to Marcelo Ridenti:

At the end of the [19]70s, there was also a proliferation of the ideology of the new social movements, the futuristic cult of the *new* - which did go back to the previous wave of the *new*, in the [19]60s (Cinema Novo, Bossa Nova, Nova Objetividade Brasileira, etc.), but the novelty now was no longer to recover and overcome aspects of the past in order to affirm new ideas of people and nation, but to ensure a classist stance, especially for urban workers. To this extent, themes such as people, nation and Brazilian culture went into decline and were much criticised in political and intellectual clashes (RIDENTI, 2000, p. 356, emphasis in original)

An important expression of the critique of the *national-popular* culture was the collective research project coordinated by the National Arts Foundation (Funarte), which focused on various cultural manifestations: Philosophy, Cinema, Theatre, Plastic Arts, Music, Literature, Television and Radio. The research led to the book series *O nacional e o popular na cultura brasileira* [*The national and the popular in Brazilian culture*]. In the collection, Marilena Chauí published a dense essay criticising the *national-popular* movement in which she examines different foreign and Brazilian authors who developed conceptions of the national and the popular, often intertwining the two terms. In the philosopher's view:

The experiences of fascism, Nazism, "socialism in one country" (whose architect specialised in the question of nationalities), populism and authoritarian nationalism in Latin America put the expression "the national-popular" under suspicion and "national identity" as highly undesirable.

I would also like to propose that we avoid starting from some previous definitions on the subject that would lead us deductively to analyse cultural manifestations in order to decide whether or not they are national-popular. I suggest that we look for the ways in which, at different times and by different subjects, these ideas and images are constructed and why they are so, letting different ways of articulating or separating the two terms come to light, rather than looking for "the" national-popular that would materialise in all cultural manifestations. (CHAUÍ, 2000, p. 85)⁷

Marilena Chauí points out the distrust with which we should approach national-popular ideals, which were very present in authoritarian political regimes.

⁷ Marilena Chauí's text was republished unchanged in the book *Cultura e democracia: o discurso competente e outras falas* (2000), which I consulted for this article.

And instead of taking the “national-popular” as an essence to be verified in cultural production – as various left-wing and right-wing authors have done – it should be assumed that these are discourses, and it is up to the researcher to verify how they have been used throughout history. According to the author:

In anticipation of our considerations, we'll say straight away that nationalist and populist ideologies are ideologies precisely because they aim to exorcise the oscillations of terms, to capture them in a definitive, immovable and fixed practical and semantic field, turning them from the quality of social, political and cultural experiences to the condition of (imaginary) substances. (CHAUI, 2000, p. 94)

It seems that the different contenders (philosophers, social scientists, artists, politicians, etc.) sought in political-ideological battles to freeze the understanding of ideas, works and practices whose meanings were fluid. It was through the fixation and affirmation of a meaning seen as national-popular that one group tried to outdo the others, especially when it came to drawing up the nation's cultural policy.

The volume dedicated to cinema is entitled *O nacional e o popular na cultura brasileira: cinema. Repercussões em caixa de eco ideológica (As ideias de “nacional” e “popular” no pensamento cinematográfico brasileiro)*⁸, co-written by Jean-Claude Bernardet and Maria Rita Galvão. The authors followed the programme prescribed by Marilena Chauí and investigated how national, popular and national-popular were used by various filmmakers and critics over time. With regard to the historiographical work carried out by Bernardet on the debates about the market and the State, it seems that the emphasis on a filmmaker like Fernando de Barros, included in the 1950s part of the book, was made possible by his criticism of the national-popular. Fernando de Barros⁹ is the only person to have a subchapter dedicated solely to his cinematographic thinking, while other names are grouped together by affinity of ideas. This filmmaker's discourse is characterised, not without a certain irony, as “that of a businessman trying to be efficient” (BERNARDET; GALVÃO, 1983, p. 87). The historian considers Fernando de Barros's conceptions of the public and the State to be more “concrete” than those expressed in the texts published by the

⁸ The volume on Brazilian cinema is divided into three parts based on chronology: the first, “Nosso. Nosso?”, analyzes the 1920s and 1930s (authored by both); the second, “Os irmãos inimigos”, covers the 1950s (solely authored by Jean-Claude Bernardet); the third, “Nacional-Popular. Nacional-Popular?”, pertains to the 1960s (exclusively authored by Maria Rita Galvão).

⁹ Fernando de Barros (1915-2002), originally from Portugal, was a filmmaker based in Brazil. He made films such as *Caminhos do sul* (1949), *Appassionata* (1952) and *Moral em concordata* (1959).

group that revolved around the magazine *Fundamentos* - linked to the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). Finally, the essayist highlights the fact that Fernando de Barros is the only one of the authors analysed to realise the importance of television at the time of its emergence in Brazil. According to Bernardet: “This seems to have gone unnoticed by everyone, including those who were so concerned with making films for the people. The only exception was F. de B., perhaps because of his entrepreneurial vision” (BERNARDET; GALVÃO, 1983, p. 97). Bernardet’s insight is provocative: someone with an entrepreneurial mindset would have been able to understand the audiovisual context of the 1950s better than the leftist filmmakers of *Fundamentos*, who, as well as idealising the people and the public too much, were oblivious to such an important novelty as television.

It is an important inspiration for historians not to limit themselves to the canon of Brazilian cinema, in other words, that they do not just focus on names such as Alex Viány and Nelson Pereira dos Santos - whom they wrote about in *Fundamentos* - but look at other characters and conceptions of cinema that have not managed to stand out in narratives about the past. Sometimes, characters who have not been worked on much by historiography reveal broader possibilities that have not been developed by film production, as well as the limits and contradictions of the most popular names. Unfortunately, this questioning of the canon was only understood more clearly by film historians many years later, when Bernardet published the fundamental *Historiografia clássica do cinema brasileiro* (1995), a book in which he challenged established authors such as Alex Viány and Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes in a more structured way.

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