

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH. ON CENSORSHIP OF WORLD WAR I INFORMATIVE AND PROPAGANDA FILMS IN SPAIN (1914-1918)

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I. WINDS OF WAR

Throughout the First World War, Spain maintained official neutrality. Nevertheless, both traditional and more recent histories emphasise that life in Spain between 1914 and 1918 was completely determined by what was known at the time as the “European War”. Spanish film in those years was not exempt from this situation. Of the many examples of this, I will focus on the censorship of newsreels and propaganda films imposed by the political authorities in a context of powerful tensions between the neutrality maintained by successive governments of the day and a society profoundly affected and divided by the war.

The Spanish government declared the country’s neutrality at the very outset of the conflict, on 30 July 1914. From that moment, however, Spanish society began the process of aligning either with the Allies or with the faction of Central European empires led by Germany. Overall, re-

straint was the predominant note during the first months of the war.¹ In 1915, however, there began a gradual confrontation between those who supported the Allies and those who supported the German side, a confrontation which grew and became tied up with other conflicts, such as industrial and agricultural workers’ protests because of the unstable political and economic situation. Over four years, various governments came and went, each with a different attitude towards the two sides of the conflict and each hampered in its actions by powerful swings in the economy. It was no accident that Spain, because of the war, became a refuge for European capital, witnessing the creation of large fortunes thanks to new business opportunities, both licit and illicit, at the same time as it suffered from dramatic shortages of basic necessities.

The Spanish film milieu of the day responded to this state of affairs, beginning with distribution and exhibition.² As is well known, the First World

War was decisive for the shift in power relations amongst the Western film powers. Hollywood succeeded in establishing itself as the main supplier of films in Europe after the logical decline in European production, particularly in France and Italy. In Spain, this process took the form of a serious distribution problem, because of both the drop in production, especially French and Italian, and the communication difficulties. This problem gave rise to others, such as the pirating of film prints, to which was added the problem of censorship.

The practice of censorship, specifically of informative and propaganda films, was not an exceptional circumstance limited to Spain, as it was a constant found in every country involved in some way in the war, beginning with the principal combatants: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Russia until 1917 and, beginning that same year, the United States. Discussion of this topic in international publications on the war often connects it to the growth of the newsreel as a film genre and to the increased use of propaganda as a political tool. This is the case in the first studies of note to address the question, written in the 1970s and 80s,³ and in our own day, when we find a greater number of studies centred on the relationship between the first global war and the cinema.⁴

From these sources there emerges a panorama of a historical period marked by the proliferation of informative content on movie screens, and especially of the aforementioned newsreel format, which arose in 1908 and, when the war began, was in the midst of a phase of gradual internal organisation: “programs became structured, news reports became more diverse, and coverage became broader” (PAZ REBOLLO and MONTERO DÍAZ, 2002: 20). The years of global conflict were precisely the time when film information gradually, and especially after 1917, began to co-exist with – when it did not merge with – propaganda. This was a tool used by both sides of the conflict, both abroad and at home, and its importance became

THE PRACTICE OF CENSORSHIP, SPECIFICALLY OF INFORMATIVE AND PROPAGANDA FILMS, WAS NOT AN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCE LIMITED TO SPAIN, AS IT WAS A CONSTANT FOUND IN EVERY COUNTRY INVOLVED IN SOME WAY IN THE WAR

so great that governments ended up establishing official services and institutions charged with carrying it out. The two sides in the conflict competed with each other in the organisation of their propaganda systems, and the cinema, beginning with supposedly informative content, was a key cog in the machine, operating in tandem with others such as photography, political literature and public spaces such as live entertainment venues, which were used for patriotic spectacles and speeches.

In this context, the enforcement of official censorship fluctuated in intensity according to the country, circumstance and period. In broad outlines, in the case of film production there was a total ban on filming on the battlefield, but not so much on the rearguard. With respect to exhibition, censorship was justified by the authorities responsible for implementing it by the need to avoid demoralising or aggrieving the population with the images shown in newsreels – above all “anything that might be painful for mothers”, in the condescending expression of a French police prefect of the day (BRUNETTA, 1985: 46) – but also to prevent the spreading of political ideas contrary to national interests, or showing information that could end up being used by the enemy.

Where does the case of neutral Spain fit into this international panorama? From the outset, it should be noted that the vast majority of newsreels, by now well-established on Spanish film programs, were French, made in particular by the companies Pathé and Gaumont. At the time,

it would appear that Spanish manufacturers had made very few attempts to produce newsreels, with the exception of *Revista Español* and *Revista Estudio*, made by the Barcelona-based company Estudio Films in 1915 (MONTERO DÍAZ, PAZ and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, 2001: 186; PITARCH FERNÁNDEZ, 2014: 186; GONZÁLEZ LÓPEZ, 1987). But newsreels were not the only films of a supposedly informative nature that were exhibited; there were also films of varying lengths from the combatant countries, shown independently. These were more clearly a part of the war propaganda machinery. Films of this sort, originating from both sides of the war, were shown on Spanish screens of the day, becoming yet another space for the ideological combat taking place in the country (ALBES, 1995: 77-101; MONTERO DÍAZ, PAZ and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, 2001: 184-88; PONCE, 2014: 292-321).

CENSORSHIP ACTIVITY CONSISTED NOT ONLY IN BANNING, BUT ALSO IN AUTHORISING AND, OCCASIONALLY, IN IMPOSING FINES IF THE FILM WAS DEEMED OFFENSIVE TOWARDS ONE OR THE OTHER OF THE OPPOSING CAMPS

But how was censorship organised? How was it carried out on the kinds of films under discussion here? Answering these questions is the main objective of this article. To do so, I will focus on Spanish press sources between 1914 and 1918 in order to delve deeper into a specific source which already began to be examined in work which is an obligatory reference point for my own: MONTERO DÍAZ, PAZ and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA (2001: 184-88), in which press sources are combined with book and film sources; and ALBES (1995: 77-101), whose few references to press sources are part of the diplomatic documentation employed in a magnificent exploration of German propaganda films shown in Spain during the war. My use of the press is, how-

ever, conditioned by two historical circumstances: on the one hand, the censorship of Spanish periodicals during the four years of war, which was constant and at times fierce and was denounced by journalists of all stripes on numerous occasions; and on the other hand, the exploitation of these periodicals as instruments of propaganda, paid for by foreign money tied to one or the other of the two sides, which subsidised many very distinguished Spanish publications so that they would serve their cause (GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, AUBERT, 2014: 225-65, PONCE, 2014: 298-312). Both circumstances may result in a partiality in the news reports found that is not always easy to identify and work with.

When I began this research I posited two main hypotheses. The first: influenced by the example of Spanish film censorship under Franco on the one hand and on the other by censorship during the First World War, principally in countries such as France, Great Britain and the United States, I thought of Spanish censorship from 1914 to 1918 as a structure organised on a national scale. The second: given that neutrality was maintained through to the end of the conflict, I thought it likely that official censorship had contributed to this, succeeding at a minimum in controlling the exhibition of informative or propagandistic films from both sides. As my research advanced, both hypotheses were modified in different ways.

2. CENSOR IN ORDER NOT TO FIGHT

Neither the academic literature on the subject nor my own examination of press sources leave any doubt that, from the beginning of the war, media censorship was one of the main instruments the Spanish government used to maintain its official policy of neutrality. With respect to film exhibition, in the beginning the government applied the earliest regulations on film censorship in Spain, which had come into effect on 27 November 1912. The initial goal of these regulations had been to protect children from the supposed dangers posed

by cinema, requiring that before public screening every film be presented to the authorities in every province, or to the town council of every municipality, for authorisation or prohibition. Following various modifications in following years, the regulations focused on the provincial government as the censorship agency. This institution was behind the majority of decisions regarding the prohibition or authorisation of informative films on the war that are known to us to date.

It may thus appear that official censorship was organised from the outset on two levels, with legislation at the national level and implementation at the provincial level, and more precisely in the hands of the provincial governors. In practice, however, the latter ended up with more room to manoeuvre. At times the procedure for reviewing a film was not exactly an internal matter for the provincial government. We can see this in the case of the film *Los nueve países en guerra* (The Nine Countries at War), about the “nine countries which [were at that moment] in dispute, their customs and military and naval power” (*La Vanguardia*, 22/01/1915: 6). The film’s owner, Lorenzo S. De Besa, rather than submitting it to the legally established bureaucratic procedure of going through a commission within the provincial government devoted specifically to censorship, organised a private screening for the provincial governor of Barcelona, accompanied by other authorities such as Sultan Muley Hafid, in the same cinema, the Saló Cataluña, in which the film opened to the public four days later, on 25 January 1915 (*La Vanguardia*, 26/01/1915: 16). This private screening was promptly reported by the press the following day and served as publicity for the film on the eve of its release. At the same time, there was no lack of governors who went beyond ruling case by case on requests for authorisation to screen a film, issuing orders to prohibit the exhibition of all films on the war. These include the governors of Tarrasa and San Sebastián in September 1914 (*La Vanguardia*, 01/09/1914: 9 and 30/09/1914: 12, re-

spectively), Madrid in March 1915 – in this case, concerning the exhibition of German films (ALBES, 1995: 81) – and Barcelona in April 1916 (*La Correspondencia de España*, 19/04/1916).

As can be seen, these events encompass the first two years of the war. This manner of proceeding on the part of certain governors appears to indicate an emphatic reaction to the orders of the central authorities, particularly in the earliest cases mentioned, soon after the war began. Perhaps it was a way of preventing a possible struggle with exhibitors. But did such a struggle exist? For whereas some sources state that during 1915-16 “the war was practically absent from Spanish movie screens” (MONTERO DÍAZ, PAZ and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, 2001: 185-86), others argue that the screening of newsreels did not halt during those years (PITARCH FERNÁNDEZ, 2014), when activists for the German cause themselves deemed that the presence of French film propaganda was “extremely strong” compared to that of Germany (ALBES, 1995: 83-84). Perhaps this is not a contradiction if we consider an approach to film exhibition that will be discussed below: a two-fold strategy, the first involving the commercial circuit and the second consisting in charity events and invited audiences (which sometimes involved trying to work with conventional screening venues and at other times did not). While the former strategy was clearly subject to censorship in order to exhibit a film publicly, the latter had a more ambiguous status given the supposedly private nature of the events, which in principle situated them outside the purview of the censorship regulations. It was thus a situation in which commercial movie theatres in Spain, despite not having ceased to screen newsreels during the war – particularly French, with Pathé and Gaumont in the lead, but also German films from the Messter company – had barely informed its patrons about the war in these early years of the combat because of a two-fold censorship process: Spanish censorship and that exercised from the beginning, when the film

was made, by the governments of the combatant nations. As a result, information on the war included in newsreels was, between 1914 and 1916, neither abundant nor as close to the front as one might suppose. At the same time, however, the circuit made up of charity events had informed its audiences, or better yet had become a profuse channel for exhibiting not so much newsreels as propaganda films of varying lengths. Both sides used this kind of exhibition in a number of Spanish cities (ALBES, 1995: 77-101 and MONTERO DÍAZ, PAZ and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, 2001: 184-188).

The Spanish government introduced new censorship legislation in December 1916. And this was not a chance moment. On the international front, it was now assumed by the combatant nations that the war would be much longer than originally expected. This brought about the realisation that both the armies and the civilian populations of the countries involved would have to bolster their morale to endure the burden of the war. With respect to cinema, this gave rise to greater cooperation between “civil and military authorities and the various information media” (MONTERO DÍAZ, PAZ and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, 2001: 186) with the goal of stimulating war propaganda. In Spain, this increase in the flow of film propaganda came at a time when tensions between the pro-Allied and pro-German camps began to reach a critical point, even reaching into the government.⁶ And on 6 December 1916, a Royal Order was passed requiring authorities in the Ministry of the Interior to inform the public prosecutor of any unauthorised exhibition of “cinematographic films or [...] paintings and drawings” related to the war which could offend “the sovereigns of friendly countries or their armies” (R.O., quoted in FOLGAR DE LA CALLE, 1987: 127).

In reality, this edict was a re-enactment of another law dating from 1914, at the outset of the war, which referred specifically to the press and political speeches. Two years later, in view of the fact that the law was not being duly enforced, it

was not only re-enacted but “henceforth became applicable to the case” of film exhibition (R.O., quoted in FOLGAR DE LA CALLE, 1987: 127). This manner of legislating on the cinema by taking advantage of a law that was originally concerned with other fields suggests that the government was improvising with respect to a sector for which there may not have been adequate oversight, perhaps because of the amount of pressure being exerted to exhibit material about the war. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that the very existence of the Royal Order presumed as a fact that unauthorised films were being exhibited, given that this was the infraction the law sought to prosecute. In other words, prior censorship was not being imposed with the necessary regularity, either because the distributors and exhibitors themselves tried to avoid it or because the provincial authorities and the Ministry of the Interior itself lacked the will or the means to carry out the task. Doubt about the effectiveness of the Royal Order is cast by the fact that in early 1917 the government of Spain, at that time headed by the pro-Allied Count of Romanones, prohibited the exhibition of any kind of war-related film in the country (ALBES, 1995: 91).

3. CENSORSHIP ACTIVITY

Although prior censorship was not always applied, it was clearly present. Commercial film exhibitors and distributors were furtively leading the rise of professional associations that took place in Spain throughout the 1910s. The Asociación de Fabricantes, Representantes y Alquiladores de Películas, the Cámara Española de la Cinematografía, the Unión General Cinematográfica and the Mutua de Defensa Cinematográfica Española represented the first attempts at organising film professionals including, significantly, those working in distribution. From the beginning these groups shared a profound concern for the effects of prior censorship, such as “[the delay] in opening new film pro-

grams [...] additional cost for the impresario and a constant waste of time with decrees and meetings to discuss the various points and the topics to be censored” (RIBAS VELÁZQUEZ, 2010: 409). Their concern was so great that the Mutua de Defensa Cinematográfica Española, formed by distributors in 1915, took up censorship as one of the principal problems to address from its founding. Indeed, in 1919, just after the war was over, the Mutua adopted new statutes stipulating that the association would itself take on the task of carrying out the prior censorship of films (ANONYMOUS, 1919: 29).

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO SEE HOW THE AUTHORITIES’ DISCOMFORT WITH THE EXHIBITION OF INFORMATIVE AND PROPAGANDA MATERIALS GREW ALONGSIDE THE INCREASING DIFFICULTY THEY EXPERIENCED IN ENFORCING THE OFFICIAL SPANISH POSITION OF NEUTRALITY

Beyond the principle of the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, the jurisdiction that each provincial government had over censorship only increased the possibility of greater arbitrariness or, at a minimum, partiality. It was a constant complaint of propagandists for each camp that the censors had not allowed the exhibition of its informative films while authorising those of the opposite camp (ALBES, 1995: 81-82). News reports in the press of the day relate the repressive activities of the censorship bodies against venues which screened films showing events in the war. These reports, as mentioned above in the introduction to this article, were determined by a battle between two combatants: press censorship and the use made by both camps of numerous periodicals, to which they gave money in exchange for serving their propagandistic interests. The news reports I have come across are thus what remains of this

intersection of factors. It would therefore appear likely that what was published does not reflect the true extent of the repression. In this way, the diplomatic documentation shows that the volume of informative and propaganda films exhibited, both Allied and German (ALBES, 1995), was clearly higher than what the press reports consulted would lead one to believe.

With respect to the commercial exhibition circuit, most of the news reports on censorship I have uncovered to date are concentrated in the period between the autumn of 1914 and the autumn of 1916. Unfortunately, however, in few cases does the news report in question inform us of the title of the film or films so affected. Censorship activity consisted not only in banning, but also in authorising and, occasionally, in imposing fines if the film was deemed offensive towards one or the other of the opposing camps. The fact that the news reports are concentrated in the period indicated appears to stem from the fact that the legislation of December 1916 and the prohibition of early 1917 produced their desired coercive effect, whether with respect to exhibitors’ intentions of programming informative and propaganda films on the war or the publication of reports in the press about repressive activities on the part of the authorities, or both. This possible coercion, if it did exist, was limited to conventional commercial screenings. For, as was already discussed in the previous section of this article and as we will see again in the following section, outside this mode of exhibition the flow of films and the censor’s activity – or, better yet, inactivity – operated differently. The period prior to late 1916 thus seems to be one of greater absence of clarity, characterised by a tug of war between the political authorities and the film exhibition sector. In this sense, it was reported that in a few places in Spain, such as Tarraça and San Sebastián mentioned above and others such as Tarragona (*La Vanguardia*, 11/10/1914: 7), the outbreak of war in Europe produced the immediate reaction of banning films referring to

the war in the interests of maintaining the country's neutrality. In the first two towns the ban was a general one affecting all films making reference to the war.

Nevertheless, the news reports hint at the fact that almost immediately there began a process whereby general prohibition was shelved in favour of censoring or authorising individual films. While authorisation was logically given by the censors prior to screening (*El Siglo Futuro*, 19/09/1914: n.p.), there were times when prohibition occurred after a film had been scheduled or even exhibited. This occurred in Barcelona, for example, with the film *Invasión de Serbia por los ejércitos de los Imperios centrales* in April 1916 (*La Correspondencia de España*, 19/04/1916: n.p.), and again in San Sebastián, where in July of that year the governor fined a cinema for showing "films vexatious to Germans" (*La Vanguardia*, 08/07/1916: 13-14). Cases such as these confirm that prior censorship, at least during the initial years of the war, was not always observed within the commercial circuit, as noted above. To this we might add that the very exercise of prior censorship made it more arbitrary, in that it was carried out independently by each province. Thus, whereas the governor of Barcelona began to authorise certain informative films on the war in mid-September 1914, the governor of Tarragon maintained a total ban on them until well into October. And when the latter lifted this prohibition, he did not use his own judgement to decide which to authorise but rather accepted "those which had been released in Barcelona and in which our neutrality is not called into question" (*La Vanguardia*, 11/10/1914: 7). There were thus both cases that reflected a disparity in the criteria for the decisions and other cases where one censor influenced another.

It is also possible to see how the authorities' discomfort with the exhibition of informative and propaganda materials grew alongside the increasing difficulty they experienced in enforcing the official Spanish position of neutrality. To return to

the case of *Los nueve países en guerra*, for example, this film was shown in early 1915 in Barcelona (*La Vanguardia*, 22/01/1915: 9) and Zaragoza (*El Heraldo de Aragón*, 11/02/1915: n.p.), accompanied by an explanatory lecture by its owner, Lorenzo S. De Besa. A few months later, the company which had scheduled it in Gijón asked the public to abstain from "demonstrating any sort of opinion during the screening" (*El Noroeste*, 07/05/1915: n.p.). This means not only that the lecture had disappeared, but that there was even an attempt to prevent any kind of verbal utterance with respect to the films. This gradual disappearance of any inkling of orality during the screening demonstrates the eagerness on the part of distributors to avoid any possibility of interpreting informative films beyond the images themselves, such as the risk of exchanges between viewers, giving rise to clashes in the venue itself between the pro-Allied and pro-German camps, which was not at all infrequent during those years (SÁNCHEZ SALAS, 2016: in press).

These years were also when statements began to appear in the advertisements for screenings with informative films, in response both to censorship and to a public that was becoming increasingly sensitive to the conflict, to the effect that these films presented "nothing that could be a reason for the supporters of one nation or the other to engage in protests to the contrary" (*Diario de Cádiz*, 13/02/1915: n.p., quoted in GAROFANO, 1986: 275). Calls of this type were part of a prevailing atmosphere in which the obstacles put in place by the authorities through censorship were clearly felt both by viewers of the film and by professionals working in the industry. Thus, in June 1915 a group representing Catalan distributors explained to the governor of Barcelona their distressing situation with respect to the problems censorship caused for them in their work (*El Heraldo de Madrid*, 16/06/1915: n.p.),⁷ while nearly a year later, in April 1916, the popular commentator Ariel in *La Vanguardia* deplored the fact that the authorities

were overdoing it “in their zeal to achieve complete observance of neutrality and [...] suppress films about the war which, when all is said and done, are a valuable source of information and the best propaganda against the war itself” (*La Vanguardia*, 20/04/1916: 10). Two months later, the specialised publication *Arte y cinematografía* complained that prior censorship “kills the energies of the [film] industry, the [film] business and [film] exhibition” (nos. 134-5, 15-30/06/1916: 5-6, quoted in FOLGAR DE LA CALLE, 1987: 130).

4. CENSORSHIP INACTIVITY

In light of this situation, we might interpret a kind of film program mentioned earlier as a defence mechanism against censorship: the private charity screening, often intended to raise funds for one side or the other and featuring informative or propaganda films more than newsreels properly speaking. This screening model was organised in one of two ways: by collaborating or not with the commercial circuit. In the former case, most often the promoters of the event reached an agreement with a commercial venue to screen films for one or more days which would be attended by an invited audience, although there was also the possibility of attendance by the general public. Whether invited or not, the audience normally paid for their ticket; the funds went towards the costs of acquiring the film and renting the exhibition venue, with the rest going to a charity connected to the organisers, such as the French or German Red Cross.

The data known to us to date indicate that there was a greater number of these screenings between 1914 and 1916 than later, as was the case with commercial exhibition. There was a very clear period when pro-German films were shown, between September and December 1916, in towns such as San Sebastián, Bilbao, Santander, Gijón, Oviedo, Pamplona, Zaragoza, Alicante, Valencia, Granada and Seville (ALBES, 1995: 84-91).

These kinds of screenings were less frequent after this period, although there were a few, especially during 1918, such as one held in La Coruña as a benefit for the German Red Cross (*La Voz de Galicia*, 30/04/1918, quoted in FOLGAR DE LA CALLE, 1987: 57). There is also a noticeable upturn in these screenings with pro-Allied films, in particular from France, although there were occasionally others, such as Italian. Although such screenings can be identified as early as 1914, for example in Barcelona (*El Cine*, 05/12/1914: 10), there was a decisive period in which they occurred, in 1916, with screenings in Alicante (*El Luchador*, 12/04/1916, quoted in NARVÁEZ TORREGROSA, 2000: 87) and Santander (*La Vanguardia*, 12/10/1916: 8), and also in the summer of that same year in places such as Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Cádiz and Jerez de la Frontera (ALBES, 1995: 87-88).

From a contemporary perspective, this kind of screening brought together diverse interests under the status of “charity”. On the one hand, obviously, there was the goal of raising money through the hoped-for support of a part of the public which, in Spain, wore its support for one side or the other on its sleeve. At the same time, and even over and above this goal, there was the goal of propagandising which, as we have seen, was prohibited by censorship in the public sphere. There thus existed an exhibition framework involving a screening which was, at least officially, private, given that it functioned by invitation, despite taking place at a commercial venue. This kind of exhibition brought together audiences with a “charitable” intent and served as a pretext to ensure that the censorship authorities would not prohibit these screenings or issue fines in the event they had already taken place. The inherent ambiguity of this model, which could not completely efface its resemblance to commercial and thus public exhibition, appears to have been transmitted to censorship activities, which, depending on the time and place, prohibited such events or not. In Zaragoza, for example,

in November and December 1916, the governor refused to authorise certain “charity” screenings of two feature-length German propaganda films, while at the same time authorising screenings of British and French materials. The sense of ambiguity and, it is fair to say, arbitrariness increases if we consider that the governor also prohibited the screening of two French films on American artillery manoeuvres in the Thermaic Gulf, and that when, in a clear expression of the tug of war that went on between the political authorities and the pressure groups on each side of the conflict, the promoters of the German film screenings decided to partly defy the prohibition by screening films that dealt directly with the war, they were not penalised after the fact by the governor in any way (ALBES, 1995: 87).

Let us now look at the other way of organising “charity” screenings; these too were intended for an invited audience, away from the specific venues that had been established for conventional film exhibition. Within this model, informative films on the war often accompanied a lecture; these were unique events that were not repeated. Such screenings, apart from the question of the validity of their charitable status, include some presented as scientific, academic or religious events, always with a humanitarian dimension. Most of the data we possess at present on this kind of screening are from 1917 or later. The reason for this may lie in the prohibition against exhibiting any kind of war-related films in commercial venues, which had been in place since the beginning of that year. An exhibition model such as this one would appear to elude such prohibition by emphasising its humanitarian and above all non-commercial quality, as the screenings often occurred under the aegis of associations which answered to private interests – in the present case those represented by foreign embassies, pressure groups and sympathisers with one of the two sides in the war.

This may account for the screening in Barcelona in early 1917 of no fewer than six fea-

ture-length German propaganda films on the role of its navy in the war, backed by the German Fleet Association Abroad; or for the long-term propaganda activities of the “Cercle Interallié de Propagande Cinématographique”, popularly known as the French Circle, which was formed in Madrid in late 1916 and rented the Teatro Benavente to show informative films daily promoting its cause (ALBES, 1995: 92). The French Circle screened material not only from France, but also from other allied countries. In late 1916, for example, it screened the famous British film *The Battle of the Somme* (G. Malins and J. McDowell, 1916). There was also a highly representative example of the exhibition model under discussion here on 26 December 1916, when as part of the Circle’s activities a lecture by a Mr Vercesi, an Italian journalist but also a priest, accompanied the screenings. Vercesi, “before the distinguished and select audience in the hall” (*La Época*, 27/12/1916: n.p.), justified the entrance of Italy into the war against the Central European empires alongside the “Sacred Union” made up of England, France, Belgium and Serbia. He went on to praise the military priests and their self-sacrificing work at the front, claiming that he did not know which he should esteem more, their patriotism or their loyalty to the Pope. Two informative films on the extremely difficult work of the Italian army on the front high in the mountains followed the talk. From the dates and description given by the newspaper reporter, it is possible that one of the films was the well-known *La guerra d’Italia a 3000 metri sull’Ademello*, shot in 1916 by Luca Comerio (BRUNETTA, 1985: 47).

In the *La Época* article one senses the eagerness to demonstrate the importance of both religious values and the Allied propaganda message. The article thus expresses in words the event’s dual intent in that it was not prohibited. We also find this dual intent in other cases in which, instead of the religious pretext there was a scientific one, the most common in the examples encountered. This is seen, for example, in the inauguration, also in

Madrid, of the screenings of the “Cinematógrafo Científico” on 6 December 1917. Before a hall full of medical authorities, various films on this theme were shown, including *Las operaciones del doctor Doyen* (sic), about the eminent French surgeon, enormously popular in the day because of his early work in film (LEFEVRE, 1994: 100-14; BAPTISTA, 2005: 42-50). Amidst these films, however, a film was shown which the journalist did not justify as part of the evening’s scientific program: *París después de tres años de guerra* (sic), which “also received a lot of interest” (ABC, 07/12/1917: 16). In this and other cases, this was the method used to try to conceal from the censor the propagandistic intention of the event.

SUCH SCREENINGS TOOK PLACE IN SOCIAL SURROUNDINGS THAT WERE MORE RESPECTABLE AND THUS POLITICALLY MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN COMMERCIAL EXHIBITION

Within this exhibition model there were also screenings without any pretext and with a clear propagandistic intent. The screenings at the British embassy in Madrid are one example. In late 1916 and March 1917 the ambassador hosted figures from the international diplomatic milieu and the aristocracy and showed them films on the war (*El Imparcial*, 16/12/1916: n.p.; *La Acción*, 29/03/1917: 5). In order to elude censorship, cases such as these rested entirely on the event’s supposedly private nature. Significantly, in reporting on one of these sessions at which a film on the Battle of the Ancre was screened, the journalist pointed out the private nature of the event and remarked that he found the prohibition against screening films about the war in public inexplicable (*La Época*, 10/03/1917: n.p.). Given the date, the prohibition referred to is clearly that issued by the Ministry of the Interior in early 1917.

Nevertheless, with respect to this form of exhibition we cannot overlook another factor which accounts for the censor’s inaction, especially if we consider that, as we have seen, numerous screenings of this sort continued to take place after the critical date of early 1917, when the authorities stepped up their censorial zeal. Such screenings took place in social surroundings that were more respectable and thus politically more influential than commercial exhibition. Among the people behind the screenings and in the audience were ambassadors, diplomats, renowned medical doctors, priests and, as in other examples not mentioned here, university professors (*La Vanguardia*, 20/04/1915: 12). All were participants in events often cloaked in the prestige of a lecturer, at times a guest speaker from abroad, such as the priest Vercesi, who spoke of the dramatic consequences of the war in his country, after or during which informative or propaganda films were shown. It is likely that the social class of those involved in these screenings was another reason for the censor’s inhibitions with respect to this kind of screening, given that their influence over the political authorities – and even at times their being politically powerful themselves – was greater than that found in the commercial circuit.

5. THE FLU ON THE BATTLEFIELD: CONCLUSIONS

To be fair, the Spanish public’s final great obstacle to seeing informative and propaganda films on the First World War, whatever their stripe, was not censorship, but rather the flu. The influenza known internationally as “Spanish flu” broke out at the end of the world war and spread wildly because of it. In September and October 1918, film exhibition venues were deserted because of fear of the pandemic, which killed tens of millions of people around the world and some 200,000 in Spain alone. When film exhibition returned to normal, the international political situation had

changed, giving rise to parallel changes in the concerns of Spanish censorship, which did not disappear but now no longer had to safeguard the country's official neutrality.

At this point, we can conclude that censorship, in an attempt to enforce compliance with the country's official neutrality, had great influence on the exhibition in Spain of informative and propaganda film materials on the war. But its actions were arbitrary with respect to their criteria and application at given times and in given places and situations. The panorama that takes shape begins with understanding that, contrary to my initial conception of the censorship system, it was a structure which, although its regulations came from a national institution (the Ministry of the Interior), its application was primarily the work of provincial governments. These, in turn, operated within a framework in which observance of the established channel co-existed with other less orthodox means, such as screening films in situations outside the norm or prohibiting or authorising films on the war in general and not on a case-by-case basis.

This way of operating developed in the course of a stream of film screenings which went beyond the image provided by the press of the day. On the one hand was the interest of distributors, exhibitors and the public in screening information about the war, but on the other was the pressure exerted by groups of sympathisers or people directly involved in the cause of one side or the other, through activities such as subsidising periodicals or the screening of propaganda films, which occurred more frequently than one might suppose. Given this situation, however, can it be said that film censorship contributed to maintaining the country's official neutrality, as was suggested above in the introduction to this article? The recurring complaints by both sides to the effect that the authorities were more permissive with respect to screenings of informative films by the other side might suggest an affirmative answer to this ques-

tion. But it is clear that is difficult to state this with certainty given the context, in which the split between pro-Allied and pro-German positions gradually became wider, affecting both film audiences and the country's power structures at every level. This suggests that certain censors did not exercise their duties in an impartial manner. It is likely that the rhythm with which film censorship regulations were devised and applied throughout the war was a reflection of internal processes arising from the pressure noted above and from changes in the flow of informative and propaganda films in the struggle to get them on Spanish movie screens. But we must also take into account the effect of changes on the international scene, such as the growing collaboration between the military and film producers as the conflict dragged on and propaganda became more important as a tool for maintaining morale at home and for gaining supporters abroad. The increase in the number of films and in the attempts to get them on movie theatre programs may have led to the general ban passed by the Spanish government in early 1917.

In any event, there would appear to be a double standard in the country's censorship policies with respect to the different social settings in which informative and propaganda films on the war were screened: censorship was more restrictive in commercial cinemas, which were open to anyone buying a ticket and becoming a part of the anonymous and indiscriminate masses who went to the movies; and less restrictive in the case of the exhibition model usually involving supposedly private screenings intended for the most part to raise money for charities. Censorship was only occasionally present in the case of events of this sort, which took place at venues usually devoted to commercial screenings, although admission was by invitation only and the funds raised were donated to the Red Cross or to associations dedicated to the assistance of civilians or prisoners. It does not appear, however, that censorship was present when the event was organised by associations support-

ed by socially respectable groups at venues which were often not traditionally used for presenting films. In these cases the screening, although there was no lack of events which made no attempt to conceal the group's propagandistic intention, was almost always justified with charitable, scientific, scholarly and, in general, humanitarian motives. From the organisers to the invited guests, the audiences for these screenings came from the most respected sectors of society and those closest to the political authorities, and as such potentially more influential over those authorities.

To conclude, the degree to which censorship was applied between 1914 and 1918 clearly demonstrates how the political authorities had to view the cinema as a means of communication with a level of social penetration which, unlike the past, made its control necessary, in the same way it had been doing with older media such as the printed press. In this way, surveillance and the threat of sanction against informative and propaganda film screenings about the war gave to film exhibition the quality of being a new battleground as part of Spain's particular form of political, economic, social and cultural participation in the First World War. ■

NOTES

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1 On the situation of Spain in general during the First World War, see ROMERO SALVADÓ (2002). On more spe-

cific questions, see the following studies, published recently on the occasion of the centenary of the beginning of the First World War and relevant to the preparation of the present article: FUENTES CODERA (2014) and GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA y AUBERT (2014). See also GARCÍA SANZ (2014).

2 . For an overview of film distribution and exhibition in Spain in the 1910s, see GONZÁLEZ LÓPEZ (1987) and LAHOZ RODRIGO (2010). For a more specific view of the exhibition of newsreels in Cataluña during those years see PITARCH FERNÁNDEZ (2014: 181-92); on film distribution in Spain during the First World War see ALONSO GARCÍA (2010: 131-45) and RIBAS VELÁZQUEZ (2010: 408-14).

3 Notable among the earliest publications are HURET (1984) on the situation in France; the classic study by FIELDING (1972) – an expanded edition was published in 2006 – and the first volume in the monumental series by CULBERT (1990), on the United States; ROBERTSON (1985), a very detailed study of film censorship from 1896 to 1950, and REEVES (1986) for the situation in Britain. Among the volumes published in the past twenty-five years, see the anthology edited by DIBBETS and HOGENKAMP (1995), especially the contributions on the situation in Germany: 171-78 and 188-97.

4 In the case of the United States, the monographs by MIDKIFF DEBAUCHE (1997) and CASTELLAN, VAN DOPPEREN, GRAHAM (2014) are worthy of mention. While the former paints a very complete and integrated picture of official censorship from 1914 to 1918 and of war propaganda, in particular from 1917, the latter provides very valuable information on the role of censorship with respect to the American filmmakers who travelled to European countries at war. In addition, HAMMOND (2006) is notable for his integration of censorship into the process which led to the creation of a popular film culture worthy of note in Britain during the war. Special mention is due to PADDOCK (2014) for completely integrating the relationship between film and film censorship and the propaganda strategies developed during the war by the various countries discussed in the volume. See also the book by PAZ and MONTERO (2002) in which, especially on pages 20 to 64, the authors take up the con-

fluence of newsreels, censorship and propaganda in their summary of the transformation during the war of what they call “informative cinema”.

- 5 On early legislation concerning film censorship in Spain, see GONZÁLEZ BALLESTEROS (1981: 109-14.) The information in this book is rounded out by that found in FOLGAR DE LA CALLE (1987: 121-27). See also VALLÉS COPEIRO (1999: 7-8).
- 6 This is also something that happened from the beginning of the war. In any event there was constant conflict at the time between the very pro-Allied prime minister, the Count of Romanones, and influential pro-German sectors of society, the press, his own cabinet and Alfonso XIII himself. In September 1916, for example, the Count of Romanones prohibited King Alfonso XIII from attending the funeral of the Austrian monarch Franz Josef and to use the occasion to attempt to mediate between the two sides in the war (ROMERO SALVADÓ, 2002: 225).
- 7 Given the date, it is likely that this was a committee of the recently established Mutua de Defensa de la Cinematográfica Española. See RIBAS VELÁZQUEZ (2010: 409).

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DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH. ON CENSORSHIP OF WORLD WAR I INFORMATIVE AND PROPAGANDA FILMS IN SPAIN (1914-1918)

Abstract

Although Spain officially adopted a neutral position during World War I, life in the country from 1914 to 1918 was totally conditioned by the development of what was known at the time as the "European War". Films were no exception, particularly in the case of state censorship of informative and propaganda films about the war. Repressive actions in this area reveal strong tensions between successive neutral governments, on one side, and a society deeply divided between sympathisers of the Entente and Central Powers, on the other. How was censorship organized? What kinds of restrictions were imposed on informative materials? These questions are explored in this article.

Key words

Spain 1914-1918; World War I; Censorship; Informative films; Propaganda films; Film exhibition.

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VIGILAR Y CASTIGAR. LA CENSURA EN ESPAÑA DE LA EXHIBICIÓN DE FILMS INFORMATIVOS Y DE PROPAGANDA SOBRE LA PRIMERA GUERRA MUNDIAL (1914-1918)

Resumen

Durante la Primera Guerra Mundial, España mantuvo la postura oficial de neutralidad. Sin embargo, la vida del país entre 1914 y 1918 estuvo totalmente condicionada por el desarrollo de la entonces llamada «guerra europea». El cine no se escapó de esta situación. En particular, llaman la atención los datos que nos hablan de la censura aplicada a la exhibición de las películas informativas y de propaganda sobre el conflicto bélico por parte del poder político. Su acción represiva en este terreno compone un cuadro que muestra las fuertes tensiones generadas por la colisión entre la postura neutral mantenida por los sucesivos gobiernos de la época y el estado de una sociedad profundamente dividida entre el apoyo al bando aliado o al alemán. Pero ¿cómo se organizó esa censura? ¿En qué consistió su acción sobre los materiales informativos? Estas preguntas guiarán el artículo.

Palabras clave

España 1914-1918; Primera Guerra Mundial; censura; películas informativas; películas de propaganda; exhibición cinematográfica.

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