

A SCOPE e-BOOK



USING MOVING IMAGE ARCHIVES

Edited by Nandana Bose and Lee Grieveson

Critical Reflections on Film as a Historical Source: A Case of the Military Regime in Brazil

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Introduction

The relationship between historians and film has been difficult. The first step for historians was to recognize film as a worthwhile source to study, a process which started in the 1960s. Paul Smith's *The Historian and Film*, published in 1976 (Smith, 1976) was the first publication in the English language on this topic and has been regarded as a milestone (Jackson, 1977: 713). By then, films were generally accepted as additional evidence with the potential to elucidate incidents in the past (Pronay, 1983: 366). This development was related to general historiographical changes, in the course of which historians increasingly opened up to alternative sources – most importantly, the influence of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism rejects what historians wrongly name “Rankean History,” a history that is “fact”-based and “objective” in the pursuit of “historical truth” (Burke, 1995: 3, 5-6). Today, historians regard historical writing as “bias” and “opposing voices,” for, as Burke puts it, “every historian reflects reality indirectly depending on his culture” (Burke, 1995: 5-6). In particular, postmodernism has drawn upon these thoughts and questioned the idea of historical knowledge as a coherently understandable past. The skepticism formerly shown towards films has been transferred to traditional sources including archive documents. The historian Robert A. Rosenstone has promoted postmodern historical films as supplementary sources to “traditional written” history (Rosenstone, 1995). Thus, historiographical developments have contributed to establishing films as historical sources.

Smith's landmark publication arguably initiated a second transformation in the relationship between historians and films. Subsequently, the decisive question was not so much *whether* to use films, but *how* to use them as sources (Jackson, 1977: 713; Pronay, 1983: 366). Historians started pondering films' specific characteristics, and how to differentiate between “factual” and “fictitious” films given the power of both in forming attitudes (Pronay, 1983: 369). They wondered which methods, cinematographic skills and additional sources were needed (Pronay, 1983: 370, 392). Scholars today continue reflecting on how to read films as sources, what methods to choose, and what additional material to consult. The aim of this article is to reflect critically upon what film sources can deliver, and to what extent the availability of sources besides the film material determines our analytic method and conclusions. As such, it addresses not only historians, but a wider audience.

This study refers to the official propaganda during the military regime in Brazil, 1968-79. An important goal is to illustrate the broad range of additional sources consulted for this project, and to report on the challenges in finding and interpreting this material. In the case of the military regime in Brazil, many sources are supposedly missing. Yet even in this difficult case, many sources can be lo-

cated. The main body of sources here are oral history interviews with former propaganda personnel. Special emphasis is put on the "intention" of the propagandist. The intention forms an important characteristic of the rather broad propaganda definition used in this article. Propaganda, I propose, is a deliberate attempt by a power to strengthen, alter or form public opinion through the monopolization and transmission of ideas and values. These ideas might be rational or irrational, and epistemologically true or false. Based on this propaganda definition, this study will demonstrate that besides the films themselves, it is vital to use further sources elucidating the production context of propaganda and, ideally, its reception. The reception of propaganda during the military regime has never been investigated before. What follows in this piece will give a short introduction to the nature of military rule, literature on the regime's propaganda, and the research questions of my project.

The Nature of the Regime and Propaganda Research

During the 1960s and 1970s, military regimes seized power in nearly the whole of Latin America. The military regime in Brazil (1964-1985) was long, and ended with a slow and "peaceful" transition. In contrast to Chile or Argentina, Brazil was ruled by five different military presidents and not a single dictator. Although the exact numbers are debated, a Brazilian Special Commission estimated that 474 people died and disappeared in Brazil, whereas in the Argentinean case human rights organizations talk of 30,000 (Secretaria Especial dos Direitos Humanos, 2007: 17; Aquino, 2000: 271). One of the prime characteristics of the military regime in Brazil was the internal division into different military camps (Fico, 2003: 30). As a problematic but useful heuristic categorization, scholars distinguish between "hardliners" (*linha dura*) and "moderates." "Hardliners," on the one hand, supported repression and wanted the military regime to continue (Stepan, 1973: 18, Fico, 2001: 23). They rejected a liberal democracy but used its rhetoric (Skidmore, 1988: 108). "Moderates," on the other hand, were also authoritarian, but in principle rejected repression. They furthermore regarded military rule as a transitory phase with the ultimate goal to hand over power to civilians (Castro, 2006: 4). The Brazilian military regime is an expanding field of historical research. Important primary sources including those of the former intelligence unit SNI have been made available only recently, and many documents are still missing. Whereas some aspects (censorship, left-wing resistance) have been well-studied, the official propaganda remains under-researched (Fico, 1997: 16).

The few existing studies on propaganda during the military regime in Brazil (Garcia, 1990; Assis, 2001) are predominantly Marxist and operate with oversimplified notions of a "dominant class." Garcia argues that the upper-class used the regime's propaganda-machine as an instrument to spread its ideology (Garcia, 1990: 38). Similarly, the journalist Denise Assis argues in her non-academic book that pre-coup propaganda (1962-64) was organized by the upper class, who defended its homogenous ideology (Assis, 2001: 15-16). Although the question of which social groups were behind propaganda is valuable, this interpretation is simplistic not only because of the stereotypical use of "class." Firstly, the Armed Forces often had a different agenda than the political or economical elites (Diniz, 1994). But even more importantly, these accounts neglect that the

military regime was divided into a hardliner and a moderate camp. In sum, simplistic Marxist approaches to propaganda in Brazil have failed to consider the diverse interests among the Armed Forces, the economic and political elites.

Apart from these reductionist Marxist approaches, Maria L. M. Galetti investigates propaganda volume and content between 1968 and 1979. However she uses propaganda film catalogues and not the films themselves (Galetti, 1980). The best propaganda study of the regime is written by the Brazilian historian Carlos Fico. He takes a new cultural history approach and examines how the propaganda manipulated recurrent cultural images following Eric Hobsbawm's work on the "invention of tradition" for national and colonial projects. Although Fico is the first scholar who reconstructs the problems between AERP personnel and hardliners, he ultimately does not distinguish between the factions when arguing that they shared the same propaganda intention to cover up repression. In sum, scholars have neglected to investigate the propaganda reception, its overall function within the system, and have ignored or simplified the internal division of the regime into hardliners and moderates. Focusing on the hardline President Médici (1969-1974) and the moderate Geisel (1974-1979), the aim of my project is to elucidate and compare how the official propaganda was planned, produced and received. Decisive questions are whether this propaganda qualifies as "political propaganda" or rather as "civic education," whether intra-military frictions are apparent in the propaganda system or the propaganda "text" itself, and what the overall function of propaganda is in stabilizing military rule. Moreover, I ask in what way the propaganda of the AERP/ARP shaped Brazilian society in the short and long term.

The Propaganda of the Military Regime

Propaganda was not officially institutionalized in Brazil straight after the coup. It was only in 1968 when students, workers and progressive Catholics protested against the regime in São Paulo and Rio, that an official propaganda institution was finally founded, the AERP, Special Public Relations Consultancy (Decree no. 62.119). Between 1969 and 1973 the AERP was led by Colonel Octávio Costa, who set up the principles for the AERP propaganda. The successor organ of the AERP, the so-called ARP (Public Relations Consultancy), largely maintained Costa's principles. Thus, the mastermind of the propaganda concept between 1969 and 1979 was Colonel Costa. Besides similarities between the AERP and ARP in terms of strategy, there was a crucial continuity concerning the staff. A former AERP official and friend of Costa, Colonel José Maria Toledo Camargo, later became the leader of the ARP.

The AERP/ARP's most important and innovative means of propaganda were radio and television spots (Costa, 1970: 9, Garcia, 1990: 78). Quantitatively, radio was still the most accessible media for the majority of the population (Mattos, 1982: 130-31). Although television predominantly reached the middle and upper class who could afford a television set, it was growing rapidly (Interview Costa, 2 March 2007). Oral-history interviews with former AERP officials and witnesses of the time suggest that short films were of particular importance. They were popular, and unlike radio propaganda, are often remembered vividly today (Fico, 1997: 103-4). Therefore, although radio spots were quantitatively the most sig-

nificant propaganda channel, short films were frequently more important qualitatively, and this is why they form my study's main body of propaganda sources. The National Archives in Rio de Janeiro holds a rich section of film material including newsreels, and educational films (Fundo Agência Nacional, Code EH, Section CODES). Under the label educational films, the Archive holds 99 AERP/ARP propaganda short films. During a research trip to Brazil, I furthermore was able to copy the annual production catalogues from the former AERP/ARP leaders. The catalogues list the film titles, year of production and voice-over text of each film. This enabled me to compare the archive films with the catalogues and in most cases find out the basic production details of each short film.

Propaganda Analysis Methods

Locating films and getting the permission to copy them is only the very first step. Methodological questions on how to analyze the material follow, and this in turn depends on the concept of propaganda applied. I suggest considering two levels of analysis: the "perspective" and the "time-level." Firstly, researchers need to decide from predominantly what perspective they want to examine the medium: that of the producer, the actual film text, or the reader. In 1983, the Director of Studies at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* in Paris, Marc Ferro, pointed to the interrelatedness between artist, industry, the film itself and society (Ferro, 1983: 359). Setting events or aspects into their historical contexts is what historians are specifically trained for. Most propaganda studies write either on the production, the text or the reception, thereby artificially dissecting a relation which forms a whole. Reductionist Marxist studies tend to overemphasize who controls the production, thereby underestimating the audience's agency. Studies focusing on the film text itself contribute to an aesthetic and artistic understanding of a film corpus but lack the dimension of power and the ability to explain the larger social and cultural significance of films. Rejecting such a dissection in ways similar to Ferro, the sociologist Gerd Albrecht demands in his major study on Nazi feature films that propaganda analyses should consider the whole process from designer to recipient (Albrecht, 1969). My original intention has been to link this holistic approach of propaganda with theories on identity formation and memory, which have shifted the focus from ideological persuasion of elites to the notion of self-construction of identity.

A second layer of analysis linked to the perspective is the dimension of time, the prime category that distinguishes history from other disciplines. Historians analyze developments and look for continuities and changes, preferably in somewhat causal relations. However, the problem of film, as of any other cultural symbol, is that a clear-cut notion of time dissolves. Films can be regarded as products and creators of culture. This resonates with Anthony Giddens's concept of structuration (Giddens, 1984). Giddens suggested that scholarship should not focus exclusively on social structures nor on individual agency, but should instead analyze their interrelatedness by examining "social practices ordered across space and time" (Giddens, 1984: 2). This dual time-level has also been incorporated by more recent approaches to the film text, which is no longer conceived of as fixed, but as partially constructed by the recipient who gives meaning to the text while reading it (Simpson and Pearson, 2001: 366-371). My aim has been to reconstruct in what way propaganda elements were used by Brazili-

ans to (re-) construct their identities. Thus, I tried to establish to which degree propaganda functioned as a “creator” and not as a “product,” or in other words, to what extent propaganda was successful in shaping Brazilians in a desired way or not.

New theories have changed the meaning of the film text and the concept of propaganda. Formerly, scholars such as Siegfried Kracauer (1984) feared propaganda as an all-powerful and dangerous tool of manipulation for the malleable and passive masses. The Frankfurt School, which shifted researchers’ attention to the cultural industry, similarly overemphasized the might of media ownership. In the 1940 and 1950s, questionnaire-based studies used the “stimulus-response” model to measure media effects, presupposing a cause-effect relationship. A prime study was Paul Lazarsfeld’s study (1944) on the 1940s U.S. Presidential elections. He discovered that a direct relation between party propaganda and voting behavior did not exist. When the stimulus-response model failed, researchers realized the complexity of media effects, and that the social and cultural environment played a crucial role. Scholars still debate the degree of freedom and constraint set by the media industry (Simpson and Pearson, 2001: 368-370). We might summarize the consensus of this discussion as follows: media producers and potential propagandists frame the text and limit its possible readings. The reader has a restricted choice of giving meaning to the film. Thus, information about the reception of films is vital to apply this approach attributing agency to the film reader. Moreover, the aspect of reception is indispensable in order to evaluate propaganda and determine its social function during the regime, which in my case was one of the prime research purposes. Both levels of analysis, the perspective and time-level, are determined by the availability of sources.

Sources and the Reconstruction of Reception

More often than not, sources to reconstruct the reception of films are scarce, or completely lost. Many historians do not even try to examine propaganda reception. Firstly, it is difficult to locate sources. Secondly, since reception is a challenging field, historians need to spend precious time thinking about an appropriate method. Thus, most historians of propaganda neglect the reception and consequently conceive of films as products rather than creators of culture. They fail to advocate agency to the film reader and to grasp the wider cultural meaning of films at a specific moment in time. In the following, I will report which sources I have explored, and illustrate why in this case it is difficult to make substantial comments on film reception. Sources utilized comprise public opinion surveys, archival documents from the private Archive of President Geisel, documents of the former intelligence service SNI (National Intelligence Service), oral-history interviews with former AERP/ARP officials, qualitative oral history interviews with contemporaries, and newspaper articles.

Starting with interviews, I conducted twelve oral-history interviews in Rio de Janeiro in 2007. The small qualitative sample was divided according to gender, age and class. Thus, I conducted interviews with men, women, people who were younger and older than eighteen years at the time, slum-dwellers and middle- and upper-class Brazilians. Due to the difficulty of finding interviewees, I only

conducted a total number of twelve interviews. My main finding was that these sorts of interviews are not appropriate to reconstruct the propaganda reception of those days. Too much time has passed since, many interviewees could not remember the propaganda, and most did not even distinguish between the different military presidents. Above all, apart from a few upper- or middle-class interviewees, people were not interested in politics at all, since what mattered was the mere survival of their families. The most important results of the interviews were, first, that there was no socio-economic, gender or age pattern. Critical and sympathizing voices could be found among all groups. Secondly, the narratives told more about the present than about the past. Many interviewees, particularly, the slum dwellers told a narrative of the "golden past." At the time of the interviews, in 2007, their economic situation was difficult. But more importantly, due to wars between different drug gangs and the police, the interviewees faced violence on a daily basis. Most interviewees portrayed the military regime as a prosperous and peaceful era. Senhor Fridinan commented on the regime: "At least there was not so much chaos as there is today" (Interviewee Caitano, 19 July 2007). A rhetorically almost identical position was taken by an anonymous local politician: "There was not as much chaos as there is today" (Interviewee Anonymous, 12 October 2007). Yet, Dona Dalva regards the threat of violence as continuous when she argues: "It was exactly like it is nowadays" (Interviewee Dona Dalva, 31 August 2007). All three interviewees allude to unemployment and violence. Thus, the oral history interviews brought interesting results, yet did not directly answer my research question. Rather than giving evidence on how propaganda was received, they illustrated how economically and politically polarized Brazil is today. Brazilian society has not yet constructed a commonly accepted historical version of the military regime. It remains a controversial issue.

Besides qualitative oral-history interviews, I had hoped to find public opinion reports in the archive of the former intelligence service SNI (National Intelligence Service). These documents held by the National Archives in Brasília have only been made available in late 2005. The documentation was taken over in its original form, and can only be accessed through keyword searches. If the documents are not categorized under the exact term asked for, there are no retrievals. Various keywords including "public opinion" did not bring substantial results. The few sections in the intelligence files labeled "public opinion" summarize critical press articles, denounce opposition groups, or report about expected voting behavior near the elections. Nonetheless, this lack of documentation was a crucial finding. It proved for the first time that the Brazilian intelligence service SNI did not systematically investigate public opinion. There are other historic examples of authoritarian or even totalitarian regimes where such a vigilance system existed. Arguably, the most prominent example is the Nazi regime. The Nazis sent out spies to the cinemas who reported on how the audience reacted when seeing the films. Historians can use editions of the so-called "Meldungen aus dem Reich" (Boberach, 1984). These were monthly reports of the SD (Security Service) which regularly were sent to Berlin. Apparently, the Brazilian SNI was ill-equipped with personal and financial resources, and less professional in terms of surveillance (to the benefit of Brazilian citizens). In sum, intelligence files fail to provide evidence for public opinion on the military regime, let alone on propaganda campaigns.

Public opinion poll data is scarce, too. Before 1975 the only existing opinion poll institute in Brazil was the IBOPE whose files are currently held at the Edgar Leuenroth Archive of the University UNICAMP in Campinas, São Paulo State. The IBOPE allegedly was corrupt, conducted very few surveys, and used inconsistent methods. Furthermore, the IBOPE did not interview in the slums, and thus its polls insufficiently represent the common people. Since 1975, the U.S. opinion poll institute Gallup has been undertaking surveys that were published in the newspapers at the time and that are more trustworthy. However, they only act as very general indicators. The polls were undertaken rarely, and the questions were very unspecific, for example on the degree of happiness of the Brazilian population. Nonetheless, these public opinion polls which were frequently published in the newspapers at the time provide some general hints on public opinion, yet not on propaganda reception itself. The Gallup polls at least show that President Médici was popular among Brazilians (*Jornal do Brasil*, 6 February 1977), although paradoxically he was the most violent ruler of the whole authoritarian era. Under his successor, the more “moderate” President Geisel, Brazilians became increasingly dissatisfied with the regime.

Besides opinion poll information, for the Médici government there is a paucity of any presidential documentation. At the time, Brazilian presidents were not yet obliged to archive their official papers. Historians presume they are hidden by the Médici family. Luckily, the private archive of President Geisel has been donated to the prestigious research institute Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV). Some months ago, these files have even been made available online. The only promising public opinion sources here were weekly summaries of letters sent to President Geisel (FGV, CPDOC, Ernesto Geisel Pr. 1974.11.25). However, since the original letters are not available, it is a mediated and highly selective source, which is insufficient to make valid assertions about the public opinion on the regime.

What remains are oral history interviews with the AERP/ARP officials and a few newspaper articles about campaigns. All former AERP officials believe that the short films were well received (Interviews Costa, 02 March 2007, Camargo, 07 March 2007, Rabaça, 14 March 2007, Baena Soares, 20 March 2007). The predominantly positive press coverage, albeit subject to censorship at the time, seems to confirm this view. However, most articles announced rather than commented on campaigns. Two articles in the most important newsweekly *Véja* praised the new aesthetic style of official propaganda (*Véja*, 25 March 1970, pp. 81, 84, and 6 January 1971, pp. 60-1). One article even mentions that the AERP won a film prize (*Véja*, 6 January 1971, pp. 60-1). A few articles give evidence about the popularity of specific campaigns (*Jornal do Brasil*, 21 November 1972, and 1 December 1972).

In sum, while other propaganda scholars have rejected making the effort to investigate the propaganda reception of the regime, my study has meticulously located all available sources. The result is that probably the films were received rather positively, yet there is not sufficient evidence to make valid and representative comments on how the Brazilian population reacted to the official propaganda. My project will contribute with a small and hypothetical section on re-

ception primarily based on two sources, the repercussion of the films in the press and oral history interviews. Modern media-text approaches emphasizing the reader and theories on identity formation could not be applied. Arguably, historians interested in applying these film approaches are restricted to propaganda systems which systematically undertook surveys like the Nazi system or the German Democratic Republic. In any case, the general media-historical context can always be reconstructed. Thus, knowing how many Brazilians had access to television at the time already redefines the audience. Moreover, researchers can try to find sources that reflect upon films including newspaper articles or discussions in talk shows which comment on films. A more challenging approach is to analyze whether propaganda shaped other film productions as to their aesthetic characteristics or contents. In the case of the military regime, the advertising sector copied aesthetic elements of the AERP propaganda films (AERP, 1974[?]).

The Films and Their Production

Due to the lack of reception sources, my film analysis, like most propaganda studies, focuses on the topics, ideological motives, and aesthetics of the film material, and attempts to define the level of constraint imprinted by the propagandist on the film text. In brief, the prime characteristic of the AERP/ARP short films was that they did not look like state propaganda; they neither glorified members nor programs of the military government. The films dealt with everyday topics and resembled civic education campaigns. They appealed to mothers to vaccinate their children, showed cartoon figures teaching the audience to drink filtered water to avoid illnesses, and they demanded that people economize on petrol usage during the oil crisis. The short films were highly professional as to their aesthetic look, and made use of at the time very modern filmic devices including split screens, slow motion and rewinding images. The AERP/ARP even became a trendsetter for the advertising sector which was coming of age in the 1960 and 1970s. The whole medium of TV was a novelty at the time which conveniently symbolized progress, modernity and the free market ideology—all important flagships of the regime. The apolitical topics and aesthetically innovative look contrasted with traditional political propaganda such as official newsreels, which were very clinical. Traditional propaganda had usually shown political ceremonies such as signing acts, had been accompanied by a matter-of-fact voice-over and been several minutes long. The AERP/ARP films were much shorter, mostly one minute long, had little text, normally just a moral at the end, and were all accompanied by either classic or cheerful *bossa nova* music. A particularly beautiful and entertaining series on hygiene was that of the cartoon figure *Sujismundo* (National Archive Rio, Fundo Agência Nacional, Código EH/Fil. 0733, 730, 728, 748, 751). The name is derived from the word “sujo” (dirty). *Sujismundo* always disobeys the rules; he refuses to shower, swims in the polluted river, and takes medicine without consulting the doctor. Normally, his little son warns him, *Sujismundo* does not listen, and he ends up in hospital where he is lectured by a doctor about his wrongdoings. Thus, the series sells values such as obedience, hygiene, and the notion of “civic development” in a comical and entertaining way.

Only viewing the films, they give the impression that they were designed to be

escapist, and to distract from the violence committed by the repression organs. Scholars have interpreted the AERP films in that way (Weber, 2000: 205). However, this idea gets challenged when alongside sources of the texts and their reception, those of the production process are consulted. In other words, analyzing the films alone without additional sources can lead to simplified or false conclusions. Let us exemplify how a systematic investigation of the propaganda makers can lead to new conclusions concerning the wider meaning of films. In my case, research questions included *who* were the propagandists, *what* were their intentions and strategies, were they constrained in their work by their superiors or other forces, what exactly were their propaganda strategies, and how did they conceive of propaganda. In order to answer these questions, I gathered conference papers, newspaper articles, books, edited oral history interviews, and biographies of the leaders of the propaganda institutions, Costa and Camargo. Moreover, I researched intelligence files, documentation of the Ernesto Geisel Archive and the most important military archives, the Centre of Documentation of the Armed Forces in Brasília and Rio. Additionally, I collected and conducted oral-history interviews with further AERP/AERP officials in order to compare their accounts.

The Propagandists and Their Intentions

As already mentioned, documents of the Médici government have not been preserved. Everyday administrative records of the AERP/ARP are missing. In the Archive of the Marines, I could merely locate two insignificant letters sent by AERP leader Costa. Therefore, the most important sources on the propaganda officials and their intentions were oral history interviews. Fortunately, I managed to interview the five most important members of the AERP - General Costa, General Camargo, Ambassador Baena Soares, and the professors Rabaça and Cavalieri. This enabled me in a first step to triangulate these five interviews. Particularly, General Costa and General Camargo, the leaders of the propaganda institutions AERP and ARP, were of great help. Both were in their late 80s at the time. They provided me with vital information and allowed me to copy important documents which are not preserved anywhere else; the production catalogues, the AERP manuals, the founding documents, and the final report of the AERP. On the basis of this documentation, I reconstructed how the AERP/ARP functioned and how the campaigns were planned. In the interviews, I asked questions about the intention of the campaigns and whether they classified them as propaganda. It is important to keep in mind that particularly at the time of the AERP propaganda, the state rejected any opposition against the regime, and a repression system was operating which captured, tortured and assassinated mostly left-wing guerrilla groups, but occasionally also further critics of the regime including students and journalists. In the interview, Costa proclaimed that his intention was to change the national climate and contribute to a "disarmament of spirits" and a "harmonization of positions" (Interviewee Costa, 2 March 2007). He disliked the increasing violence and his strategy was to "create a positive climate" (Interviewee Costa, 2 March 2007). All five interviewees regarded the AERP productions as civic education campaigns and not as political propaganda. They all pointed out that the AERP never praised the government and that they did not show any politicians at all.

Even though they independently gave similar answers, oral-history interviews have to be handled with great care. In order to judge to what degree the answers were biased and filtered, I triangulated them with already edited oral-history interviews of Costa (Araújo, 1994) and texts written by the officials themselves including books, biographies, newspaper articles, and conference papers. I traced conference papers of Costa at the Superior War School, a military think-tank, and analyzed his newspaper articles of the 1960/70s. As we will see, these sources confirmed Costa's proclaimed intention. Thus, primarily oral-history interviews and a range of additional sources enabled me in a first step to find out about the propagandists and their proclaimed intentions.

Film Production: A Field of Conflict

As a second result, I found plenty of evidence that the propaganda strategy was disputed among different military groups. As briefly explained before, the military regime was divided into competing camps generally referred to as "moderates" and "hardliners." The production process was characterized by constant frictions between the moderate propagandist Costa and hardliners (Fico, 1997). Whereas Costa produced "social" rather than "political" propaganda, the hardliners unsuccessfully pressured him to bluntly praise the government and produce a more radical propaganda. Whereas Costa's propaganda principles were "veracity" and "no personality cult," the idea of the hardliners was excessively anti-communist and fear-creating propaganda with a violent tone, not necessarily bound to truth. Various interviews as well as documents from the former intelligence service SNI and the Ernesto Geisel Archive give proof of this. Knowing about these frictions challenges the immediate interpretation of the propaganda films that their intention was to cover up repression. Although this is out of the scope of this work, it illustrates how vital it is to have information about the production conflicts. We have seen that Costa's propaganda intentions were reflected in his speeches and articles hosted by different archives including the Superior War School Archive, the National Library, and military archives. These sources show that he defended this point of view consistently from the 1960s onwards. In the late 1960s, left-wing guerrilla groups assaulted banks and kidnapped diplomats including the U.S. ambassador Charles Elbrick. Hardliners demanded a radical response to these incidents. Costa's proclaimed intention voiced in newspaper articles at the time and in several oral history interviews was to convey peace. Even in these tense moments when hardliners promoted violence, Costa repeatedly appealed in his newspaper articles to "harmony" and "reconciliation" from both sides -- left-wing resistance groups on the one hand, and hardliners who advocated repression on the other. These articles have been compiled in his book *Mundo sem hemisfério* (Costa, [?]).

Costa was not the only one who rejected violence as a means, but interviews show that the entire AERP members critiqued violent repression which they knew about informally through hear-saying. The former AERP officials Ambassador Baena Soares and Professor Rabaça both argue that the AERP was never supporting the repression (Interviewees Baena Soares, 20 March 2007, and Rabaça, 14 March 2007). Ambassador Baena Soares argues; "In no way were we allies of the repression [...] If you stimulate patriotic feelings [...] self-confidence [...] education – then you are exactly doing the opposite" (Baena Soares, 20 March

2007). AERP official Rabaça confirms this: "We did not agree at all with that form of repression" (Interviewee Rabaça, 14 March 2007). In sum, on the basis of a variety of sources and cautiously reflecting the nature of oral-history interviews, my study questions that the intention of propagandist Costa was to cover up repression. Historiography needs to carefully differentiate between "moderates" and "hardliners" to fully understand the nature of the military regime in Brazil. Internal conflicts among different military agents on an appropriate propaganda strategy need to be more addressed. Secondly, the debate about the "intention" of propagandist Costa, illustrates that it is crucial to distinguish between intention and consequence of propaganda or films in general. It is highly likely that the consequence of his apolitical propaganda was to distract from repression. However, given his constant frictions with "hardliners," it is inadequate to equate him and his staff with the "hardliners."

Conclusion

Taking the official propaganda of the military regime as a case study, this article has critically reflected upon the source value of films from a historian's perspective. The contribution of this article has been to illustrate the wide range of possible sources and demonstrate their importance in reconstructing the broader historical and social meaning of films. In general, this piece has suggested considering two levels of film analysis: the perspective (producer-side, film text and reader-side) and the time-level (whether the text is regarded as a creator or producer of culture). The availability of sources determines the focus of the analysis. In the case of Brazil it is a difficult task to find valid source material on the reception of propaganda. This article is the first study to examine how the propaganda of the military regime was received. It has consulted opinion-poll surveys, archival documents from the private files of President Geisel and the former intelligence service, oral-history interviews with former AERP/ARP officials, qualitative oral-history interviews with contemporaries, and newspaper articles. No valid and representative conclusions can be drawn on this basis. Yet, an important finding was that unlike in other authoritarian systems, the intelligence service SNI neither systematically investigated the reception of propaganda nor public opinion. The lack of reception sources forms one of the main challenges for historians to use films as historical sources. In contrast, a range of material was available to investigate the propagandists and their intentions: AERP/ARP documentation, annual production catalogues, oral-history interviews, biographies, conference papers, and intelligence files. This study has triangulated interview material with further sources in order to verify to what degree those interviews were trustworthy. Evidence from the production process leads to doubts whether the films were intended to cover up repression. Numerous sources demonstrate that AERP officials argued with radical officials about the appropriate propaganda strategy.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank her interviewees, the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro, as well as Lee Grieveson, Nandana Bose and Roberta Pearson from the Moving Image Archives program for their kind support. This research was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of Essex.

Archive material

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