

“The Population Needs to Know the Dangers They Face!”: Cinematic Consumption and Rhetoric of Fear in *Belle Époque* Rio de Janeiro

“A população precisa conhecer os perigos que corre!”: consumo cinematográfico e retóricas do medo no Rio de Janeiro da Belle Époque

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the journalistic series *Cinemas-arapucas* (*Trap-cinemas*), published by the newspaper *A Noite* between August 8 and 16, 1912, which denounced some movie theaters in the central areas of Rio de Janeiro because of noncompliance with rules related to public safety. We intend to verify how the journalistic series was inserted in the dissemination of a rhetoric of fear regarding cinematographic consumption – and, by extension, with which other fears it engaged and what mechanisms of power it triggered from this. As a central question, our proposal is to analyze the *Cinemas-arapucas* series to verify some relations among the press, authorities, cinematographers, and cinema audiences in Rio de Janeiro in the first decades of the 20th century. To do so, we used the evidential paradigm methodology, as proposed by Carlo Ginzburg.

Keywords: Cinema; Consumption; *Belle Époque*; Rio de Janeiro; Press.

RESUMO

Este artigo aborda a série jornalística *Cinemas-arapucas*, veiculada pelo jornal *A Noite* entre os dias 8 e 16 de agosto de 1912, que teve como foco a denúncia contra alguns cinemas das áreas centrais do Rio de Janeiro por conta do não-cumprimento de regras relativas à segurança do público. Pretendemos verificar como a série jornalística inseriu-se na disseminação de uma retórica do medo em relação ao consumo cinematográfico – e, por extensão, com quais outros medos dialogava e que mecanismos de poder acionava a partir disso. Como questão central, nossa proposta é analisar a série *Cinemas-arapucas* para verificar algumas relações entre imprensa, autoridades, donos de cinematógrafos e público de cinema no Rio de Janeiro das primeiras décadas do século XX. Para tanto, adotamos como metodologia em nossa pesquisa o paradigma indiciário, tal como proposto por Carlo Ginzburg.

Palavras-chave: cinema; consumo; *Belle Époque*; Rio de Janeiro; imprensa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On a cold August night in 1912, the readers of the newspaper *A Noite* found an alarmist article on some cinemas in Rio de Janeiro on its cover. With the bait-title *Alguns dos nossos cinemas são um gravíssimo perigo!* [“Some of our cinemas are a very serious danger!” in free translation] and a picture of a cinema, some of the risks that these motion picture theaters posed to the lives of their spectators were described in detail.

Possibly, the reaction of its readers varied between a sensation of fear triggered by the article or a more cautious – but not terrified – reaction due to its content, or even a *blasé* attitude (Simmel, 1973) in the face of another piece of news addressing these risks, since they were already used to this type of content in newspapers at that time.

However, these readers did not expect an extensive coverage of the dangers posed by the habit of going to the cinema in *A Noite*, which would publish the journalistic series *Cinemas-arapucas* between August 8 and 16, 1912, with some after-effects in isolated articles in the following months. This fact led to a wide debate among journalists, cinematographers, police authorities and readers/spectators about the conditions of some cinemas in the restructured center of Rio de Janeiro or in the surroundings.

Although *A Noite* had already produced some journalistic series, this practice was not common in other publications at the time, which preferred other formats, such as columns, *fait divers* and editorials. Added to this, going to the cinema was a recent habit, as the first one was opened in August 1907 by businessman Giacomo Staffa, on Avenida Central (Araújo, 1985), even though the fruition of moving images already occurred from a much earlier time.

We intend to focus our analysis of the series as an attempt to retain readers by the newspaper *A Noite*. The series format was relatively new in Brazilian journalism of the first decades in the 20th century, so it is possible to consider it an experimental format of the journalistic narrative, operating in very similar ways to the narrative genres in cinema, which was also seeking to guarantee its audience.

In this context, we can infer that this series is probably the first one to address the habit of going to the cinema in Rio de Janeiro in a denouncing tone, although the news, letters from readers, cartoons, and editorials about it were not unusual for readers of periodicals at the moment analyzed. In a survey carried out since 2009 in periodicals kept at Biblioteca Nacional, and after an-

alyzing about 750 publications edited in Rio de Janeiro between 1896 and 1916, we did not find any material similar to this one.

This article intends to explore some sources found in this newspaper in order to verify some expectations of the public regarding the experience of going to the cinema. More precisely, we want to investigate how this journalistic series was inserted in the dissemination of a rhetoric of fear in relation to cinematographic consumption – and, by extension, with which other fears it dialogued and which mechanisms of power it triggered from this.

As a central issue, our proposal is to analyze the series *Cinemas-arapucas* to verify some relationships between the press, the authorities, the cinematograph owners and cinema audiences in Rio de Janeiro in the first decades of the 20th century¹. Our main hypothesis is that the series turned out to be a moral crusade (Becker, 2008), in the sense of trying to constrain the police authorities, the legislators and the cinematograph owners to create and/or apply safety rules aimed at the physical protection of the spectators during the projections². We believe that the focus on this series may reveal some of the readers’ expectations regarding the act of going to the cinema and broader social processes, such as the relationship between citizens, bureaucracy and social hierarchization in a city that had just undergone a radical urban reform.

We adopt the definition of consumption as a ritual activity projected in time and space that “uses goods to make stable and visible a particular set of judgments in the fluid processes of classifying people and events” (Douglas; Isherwood, 2004, p. 115). This means to state that consumption should be evaluated considering concrete subjects immersed in socio-historical relationships and not from idealistic or moralistic perspectives around it.

We incorporated Miller’s critique in relation to the work of Douglas and Isherwood into our article, since they “entirely ignore the interests and power of commercial institutions. They tend to assert the overwhelming desire for cognitive order, and thus offer an unrealistically cohesive model of cognition itself which ignores the problems of ideology and framing” (Miller, 1987, p. 146). In this regard, we see consumption here not only as the activation of interpretative categories in a spatially and temporally located culture, but also according to the interests and actions of the State and of private agents already mentioned.

Regarding the sources, we adopted the methodology of the evidential paradigm (Ginzburg, 2007), as already presented by us in another moment of this research (Lapera; Souza, 2010). Although it was thought within the scope of historiography, this methodology was conceived having within a horizon

related to ethnographic questions in the work of the historian and a dialogue with the Social Sciences, in addition to intending to connect historically incidental facts to structural questions (Ginzburg, 2007, pp. 143-179).

2. MORAL CRUSADE IN RIO DE JANEIRO'S *BELLE ÉPOQUE*: FEARS AMONG SPECTATORS IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

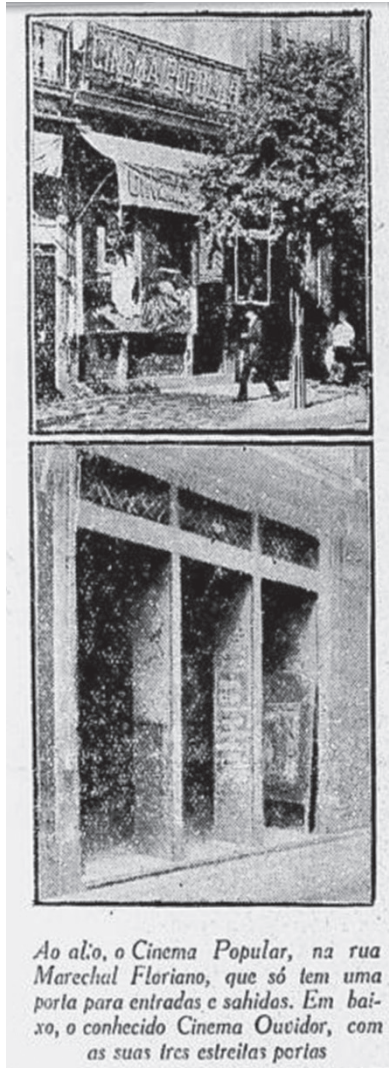
Founded by Irineu Marinho in July 1911, the newspaper *A Noite* had an agenda of *fait divers* about daily life in Rio de Janeiro and debates on politics and customs (for example, divorce and the civil campaign were featured in it), often attracting intellectuals for this purpose. Moreover, it embraced a very critical tone towards the legislative, judicial, and public administration authorities, especially the police, often denouncing cases of corruption, negligence by public agents, etc.

According to Carvalho (2012, p. 83), *A Noite's* team journalists was made up of Irineu Marinho's friendship net, which was consolidated throughout his professional career as a reporter for the newspapers *Gazeta de Notícias* and *A Notícia*. The newspaper also counted on the collaboration of important names of journalism and caricature, such as João do Rio, Coelho Neto, and Raul Pederneiras.

Before moving on to the discussion, we need to make some considerations about the authorship of the series. The articles published did not have any signature by a journalist responsible for them. Considering the workflow of a newsroom, the need to verify a considerable volume of information from fieldwork and interviews, the number of articles published and some regular mentions of journalists in the plural, it is possible to deduce that the work on the series was done by more than one professional, although it obviously passed through the editor-in-chief's scrutiny. Then, throughout our text, we will call *A Noite* journalists as the "authors"³.

Within this critical tone, the *Cinemas-arapucas* series introduced the readers to the dangers of going to the cinema. Qualifying it as the type of show house most susceptible to fire, the opening article of August 8, 1912 pointed to the possibility of short-circuits in electrical installations and combustion and explosion of the film⁴ as the main risks. In addition, it pointed out the need for motion picture theaters to offer possibilities for fast evacuation due to these risks. It even published the photos of the reported cinemas, as we can see below:

Front of Popular and Ouvidor Cinemas



Source: Alguns dos nossos cinemas... (1912, p. 1).
Hemeroteca Digital da Biblioteca Nacional.

During the series, these arguments would be repeated in all articles. Nevertheless, in the article published on August 10, 1912, there is the most didactic explanation for the readers:

The fire can start anywhere in the room other than the projection booth. The theaters do not have projection booths nor incandescent lights close to a guncotton compound and they are all equipped with numerous exits in the possibility of a fire, whenever is possible!

Because the danger is not exactly in the fire, but in the confusion of the hasty rush of spectators from the session rooms, in search of a door. To register a rush like that, it is not even necessary the beginning of a harmless fire; it is enough that, as a joke, someone remembers to raise a false alarm so that the costumers have to suffer horribly when they are running over at the exit (A policia chega a permittir cinemas..., 1912, p. 1).

We can see in this moment some fears triggered⁵: the contact with the new technologies that started to occupy the urban scene; the fear of a sudden and tragic death; and, finally, the failure of self-control and surveillance mechanisms present in modern social life (Elias, 1994). The journalists also contrast the situation of cinemas with that of theaters, an entertainment that competed for audience in terms of content, attractions, artists, narrative genres, cultural legitimacy and, as we have just seen, security of show houses. In fact, cinematograph technology was used in the competition for audiences between theater and cinema, in order to highlight the dangers of the latter in relation to the former on several occasions.

As it was a ritual that involved an audience composed of many individuals, the act of going to the cinema was gradually constructed through a series of self-control mechanisms in terms of clothing, use of common spaces and seats, tone of voice, control of emotions/reactions to the films (Hansen, 1994), which, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, referred to an ethos of containment close to the civilization project of the First Brazilian Republic, specifically embraced by the elite and the middle class (Benchimol, 1992, pp. 268-271).

Nevertheless, these mechanisms had flaws on the part of individuals and also of regulatory bodies of life in cities. At this moment, the role of the press in the period begins to show itself more clearly, highlighting the *purpose* and the *content* of the journalists' moral crusade with the series analyzed: preserving the lives of spectators through the creation and the application of safety standards for motion picture theaters. We need to remember that the series was conformed to the expectations of its editor-in-chief, seen as "a defender of a more inclusive nation project, [which] followed the urban middle strata in their aspirations for an anti-oligarchic republic" (Carvalho, 2012, p. 14).

In other article published on December 13, 1912, the journalist added another risk to the lives of spectators, also related to the nature of cinemato-

graphic film: “the deposit of tapes also needs to be built in such a way as not to present a fire hazard. In order to emphasize the need to oblige cinema owners to install them in an appropriate place, it suffices to say that the fire at Cinema Rio Branco started in the tape deposit” (Os Cinemas-arapucas. Uma Pretoria..., 1912, p. 1), alluding to the recent traumatic fire at Cinema Rio Branco, which had wide media coverage over the following weeks, including the police investigation and the process to which its owners and its manager were submitted.

When addressing the development of the cinematographic technology in the historiography of American cinema, Musser (1990, pp. 181-183) pointed to the fact that accidental fires caused by projectors, which often produced a significant number of fatal victims, attracted the attention of administrative, legislative, and judicial authorities in the USA. Thus, it is possible to infer that the inconveniences provoked by the cinematographic apparatus were not a local issue, but were inserted in the same global scale of its dissemination.

Another point that we need to address is the presence of cinemas in the urban reform of Rio de Janeiro, conceived by Mayor Pereira Passos and carried out between 1902 and 1906, the year of the inauguration of Avenida Central, thought of as the artery of the new city. Within the “tropical civilization”, the capital of the new republican regime should take the lead in the production and consumption of cultural and luxury goods (Needell, 1993). The assertion of cultural dominance by Rio de Janeiro went hand in hand with the need to legitimize the republic and, in this situation, the spectacles played a fundamental role in shaping sociability networks, patterns of cultural consumption and in the affirmation of values linked to higher classes (Benchimol, 1992).

Having appeared soon after Pereira Passos’ reform, cinemas proved to be important entertainment venues for consolidating the image of Rio de Janeiro as a national and international cultural center, even relating to other cultural consumption habits, such as going to the theaters, reading newspapers and illustrated magazines, going to the cafes, among others. This means that cinemas were immersed in the logic of spectacle of the urban space present in the urban reform proposal carried out by Pereira Passos, a clear appropriation of the Parisian model. It is in this intersection between these consumption habits that the *Cinemas-arapucas* series needs to be framed.

The article of August 14, 1912 portrays an interesting panorama:

The exploitation of the cinematographer has lately taken a big step forward in Rio. It is no longer just in the center of the city that they are festively illuminated, hungry mouths, bringing, from session to session, a very high number of people, who in the “counters” leave, at the thousand réis, a fabulous sum that the entre-

preneurs are conveniently digesting, risking very little, since they are cautious with fire insurance. They risk a small capital and earn fortunes.

The recent formation of two joint-stock companies, with high capital and managed by people who are only used to entering large-scale businesses, is a clear proof that there is no better business today than the exploitation of cinema.

Fortunes made in these “counters” have already been pointed out.

The fabulous profits had to give margin to the entrepreneurs to introduce improvements in the installations in order to guarantee efficiently the life of the public.

Instead of registering this fact, what we see throughout almost all of Rio de Janeiro is the trap-cinema, operating with the essential license, and even with compliments, from our criminal police, an ignoble character (A Exploração do cinema-arapuca..., 1912, p. 1).

In addition, the text highlights the cinema targeted by the complaint as well as in the other articles, as we can see in the following photo:

Front of Cinema Central



Source: A exploração do cinema-arapuca... (1912, p. 1).
Hemeroteca Digital da Biblioteca Nacional.

In this way, the *targets* of the moral crusade are exposed: the owners of the cinemas portrayed in the series. Described as greedy and unscrupulous, they are characters of a predatory cosmopolitanism that permeated business in Rio de Janeiro at the time and became one of the symbols “of the Olympic consecration of aggressive careerism under the pretext of democracy and the triumph of intemperate corruption in the name of equality of opportunities” (Sevcenko, 1983, p. 26).

Interestingly, cinemas are only exposed through mentions and descriptions in the text and a photo published with the articles. There was no mention of the name of any owner of these cinemas or employees responsible for them⁶. This contrasts with the advertisements that publicized its schedule, with the social notes about parties, lectures and other events, or even with news about specific negative facts that occurred, in which the mention of the owners was a current practice.

Some speculations are possible regarding this fact. Hiding the owners’ names could have been due to the fear of facing a lawsuit or due to sociability networks, which would prevent the exposure of their names, or even this caution was taken to not lose potential advertisements for the newspapers, since motion picture theaters used to buy spaces on the back of the newspapers to publicize their schedule⁷.

In common, all the target cinemas for the series were located in the prime areas of the renovated center or in areas close to it (like Lapa and Tijuca). This directly refers to the type of control sought by the urban reform of the previous years, that is, a control based on technical rationality, territoriality and privileged access by the upper and middle classes⁸ to the center.

Sevcenko (1983, p. 34) highlighted that the police forces were guided by this territorial dimension, seeing their performance in the central areas as essential for a feeling of security in the upper-class citizens of Rio de Janeiro, mainly due to social, political and economic turmoil that the city had recently gone through. It was no coincidence that the radius of action of the journalists’ moral crusade was precisely the region of Rio de Janeiro most prioritized by the recent reform.

By analyzing the cinema advertisements released in *A Noite*, we found that only two cinemas advertised regularly before the publication of the series. On the back of the newspaper, it is possible to see the schedules of cinemas São José and Rio Branco, from the issue of July 1, 1912. This pattern was maintained until August 22, 1912, when Cinema Parisiense also began to advertise in the newspaper and kept its ad up at least to the end of the following month.

Ironically, one of these advertisers – Cinema Rio Branco – was the target of one of the articles throughout the series, which raises the question whether a direct commercial interest was really behind this moral crusade effort. Although the target cinemas for the series were located in central areas, they were not so close to each other, which broadens our questioning around this supposed commercial interest, since location was one of the key factors in the dispute for the public. Furthermore, Cinema Rio Branco continued to advertise in the newspaper even after the negative article about it, which moves us away from a strict link between the advertisements and the choice of cinemas to be exposed in the series.

In short, most of the complaints against “trap-cinemas” referred to technical issues related to their physical space: narrow accesses and corridors; narrow or few exit doors; grids that separated the ambiances of cinemas and were installed inappropriately to the movement of the public; small or non-existent lounges; counters located in such a way as to make it difficult for the public to enter and exit the rooms; long and narrow exhibition halls; improper arrangement of chairs in exhibition halls; galleries with low ceilings and no direct access to exits, but only via stairs.

There were some criticisms on the choice of certain spaces for the motion picture theaters – especially when they were in two-story houses – and on the treatment of films by the cinemas: insufficient isolation of the projection booths; inadequate storage of films. In addition, elements related to labor were pointed out, such as hiring projectionists in precarious work arrangement, with long hours and poorly paid jobs, and the discover of child labor exploitation in one of the cinemas, where the projectionist was only 12 years old (*A vida do publico entregue...*, 1912, p. 1).

There is another element among all the reports in the *Cinemas-arapucas* series: the placement of the photos of the denounced cinemas on the newspaper's cover. In the visual economy of the newspapers, to occupy the cover was central to demonstrating the relevance of a subject to its editorial line. Besides, the photos that accompanied the stories assured the identity of the target and operated as a visual reiteration of the stigma (Goffman, 1981). It is possible to infer that the use of photographs by newspapers at the time also aimed to include readers with a lower degree of literacy in the narrative flow proposed by them, since they had the function of reiterating the content of the articles.

The use of photos in the series can be seen as an investment in orality, insofar as they refer to sociability networks for the dissemination of news, including even illiterates in the circuit of its dissemination. Furthermore, there

is an appeal to sensationalism as a form of communication (Lapera, 2019, p. 69), since these photos operate as a reaffirmation of the fear propagated in the articles and are directly related to the alarming headlines in the news.

Martins and De Luca (2006, pp. 42-43) argue that the incorporation of photographic services to newspapers took place slowly, due to high costs and gaps in copyright legislation that left publications in an unstable situation and subjected to lawsuits. Thus, we can infer that *A Noite*'s investment in a series with photographs in every article was an attempt to compete with the illustrated magazines, which had been conquering readers among the upper and middle classes of Rio de Janeiro due to their modern layout compared to the newspapers of the time (Lins; Oliveira; Velloso, 2010).

In addition, Oliveira emphasizes that the photographs published by illustrated magazines – here we add the newspapers – refer to the upper and middle strata of the population and the spaces frequented by them (Oliveira, 2010, pp. 185-186).

In all the arguments portrayed by the articles in the series, there is a concern on the part of journalists to highlight the technical and impersonal dimension of their attack against these cinemas, in line with modern rationality. The universalist claim of their demand is presented from a horizon of arguments that stress the danger to the lives of spectators, triggering fear of contact with new technologies and resentment aimed at the negligence of public agents and the greed of businessmen.

3. GOING TO THE CINEMA IN RIO DE JANEIRO AFTER THE 1905 URBAN REFORM AND THE LIMITS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESS, BUREAUCRACY, AND CITIZENS

It is interesting to observe that the analyzed journalistic series is inserted in a basic contradiction of the modernity intended by the ideologues of First Republic: at the same time that the possibilities of aesthetic and perceptive experiments were expanded by the mass media in the public scene, this was structured from a very authoritarian political culture, which discouraged the participation of many social groups in administrative, technical and political decisions.

This contradiction permeated the diffusion of the series. The fear of the modern technologies was a feature of modernity, but the classist dimension of the demand in the specific case tended to appear due to the cinematographers chosen as targets of the complaint and, therefore, to which type of public the

claim was exposed. Although the cinema public was heterogeneous, it does not take much good will to infer that the cinemas in the central areas had the middle sectors and the elite of Rio de Janeiro as the most frequent public, considering the more expensive tickets⁹, the precarity of public transport, a dress code that demanded expensive accessories for the consumption patterns of the lower classes (Needell, 1993), and the effort to keep the lower classes away from these more valued regions.

This does not mean to say that the popular classes did not see cinema as a way of leisure. It is only necessary to reinforce that their income did not allow them to transform this activity into a consumption habit guided by regularity, frequency and proportion (in terms of total audience) in the occupation of cinematographers, especially those in prime areas. Thereby, because they have little income for leisure activities, because of a structural unemployment scenario (Chalhoub, 2012), of being repelled from the noble areas of the newly renovated city by the police and administrative authorities, and, also, despite not being well regarded by cinematograph owners as part of their audience, the access by these popular classes to the cinema took place irregularly and, on several occasions, mediated by members of the middle and upper classes.

Besides, reading newspapers was seen as a distinguishing factor if we consider the high illiteracy rates of the period and the social appreciation of the act of reading newspapers as a way of inserting oneself in the political and social debates of the time. Evidently, we do not claim that lower classes people did not read newspapers, but only that it is possible to infer that the style and content of the texts in a considerable part of the newspapers – in which we include *A Noite* – were preferably directed at the middle and upper classes. Even if there was an effort to include readers with a lower level of literacy to expand its audience, as detected by Carvalho (2012, p. 27), this initiative by the newspaper's editor found limits in the structural issues exposed here.

Süssekind (2006) even pointed out in the relationship between visual and written culture a vestige of the tension between levels of literacy, which we can understand as an attempt by an intellectual elite to preserve its hegemony in terms of cultural creation. According to the author, the periodicals were marked by an “obsession for a rich vocabulary, for emphatic, ornamental writing, for the rhetorical dramatization of the narration. As a kind of resistance through emphasis, over-ornamentation, and verbal preciousness in the face of the growing privilege of illustration” (Süssekind, 2006, p. 37).

The use of technical arguments to obliterate a classist dimension in the

claims around the fruition of urban space was not exactly a new phenomenon. By analyzing the bureaucracy of the second half of the 19th century dedicated to public health in Rio de Janeiro, Chalhoub (1996, pp. 15-59) considered that the technical dimension of the discussion on the theme of tropical diseases and their spread erased the choice of certain diseases in detriment of others and naturalized the persecution against the “dangerous classes”, a kind of prologue that would be radicalized at the beginning of the following century.

Appropriating this discussion, we can affirm that the contours of the moral crusade of *A Noite*'s journalists begin to become clearer in terms of social classes in action. To a better understanding of this aspect, we need to focus on the agents to whom the demand was directed, that is, who would be responsible for inspecting and fulfilling the rules.

Since the first article in the series, there have been constant complaints against the police, who, according to the journalists, should be institution responsible for authorizing the opening and for supervising the operation of cinemas according to the rules that were not followed. All articles pointed out the police as negligent and incompetent in doing their job, and the tone against them is quite acid, to the point of being affirmed, in several of these articles, that the police would be the main responsible in the case of a tragedy.

In the report on August 12, 1912, there is an analysis of the police's inefficiency that is noteworthy:

The criminal permission granted by the police for the functioning of cinematographs that constitute a threat to the life of those who frequent them, only finds an explanation in the anarchy that is spreading throughout all public services. Nepotism prevails in all public offices, disorganizing, anarchizing everything.

In the case of trap cinemas, the existence of these criminal installations is due exclusively to the protection given by those who can do anything for their protégés. The police do not maintain permanently an organized technical service to supervise entertainment establishments. There appears, for example, in the Headquarters, a request asking the police for the operation of a new cinema. Two experts are appointed, who can be either engineers, pharmacists, or unemployed people. The owner of the cinema to be inspected must disburse the amount of 10\$000 for each one, so that there is a real harassment around the auxiliary delegate who must make the designation. The most protected are the most nominated.

It is true that, from time to time, these surveys are carried out by engineers. Most cinemas have been inspected by the protégés.

The ineptitude of the police reaches the point of praising installations that are far from offering the public the necessary security in case of danger (De como se demonstra a cegueira da polícia, 1912, p. 1).

It is important to mention that, during First Republic, there were no universal access selection to fill positions in the public service, such as those that began to be held after the creation of the Departamento Administrativo do Serviço Público (DASP) by Getúlio Vargas, in 1938, except for some specific positions¹⁰. This made the appointment to bureaucratic positions very dependent on the interests of local politicians and administrators (and those who had more access to these people in their networks)¹¹.

In this way, the demagogic and patrimonial relationships described in the report pervaded the social life of employees as much as of the citizens who needed to use public services. Consequently, we can state that the fear triggered in journalistic narratives about fires in cinematographs refers directly to another fear that was widespread among Carioca citizens in the early 20th Century: that of being a victim of some kind of arbitrariness due to the action or omission of a public agent.

A technical inspection of motion picture theaters was requested as a way of dealing with the fear that public agents misapplied abstract rules. That is, in the journalists' arguments, it was evident that the rational-bureaucratic source of legitimacy should prevail over the traditional-patrimonial one (Weber, 2000, pp. 141-158) in justifying the actions of public employees.

In a story published later due to the repercussion of the series, a violation of a duty considered fundamental by the State is highlighted: the custody of documents. With the title *Uma pretoria sobre um cinematographo!*, *A Noite* describes the bizarre situation:

The criminal operation of cinematographs, which are nothing more than traps against the life of the public, has very scandalous aspects. [...]

But the thing got to the point of installing even official offices over cinematographic projection rooms! The 4th civil court works in the loft of Cinema Excelsior, Rua do Cattete, on the corner of Dois de Dezembro Street.

It is an absurd! In a notary office, important papers are piled up next to the files. The destruction of these papers represents an incalculable loss, not only for individuals, but also for the government. It is natural, therefore, that all precautions should be used in the custody of the records. And no one will say that you care, that you use a precaution, keeping important papers from a file in a room that

has an electrical focus projected onto a layer of celluloid underneath, an explosive par excellence, a constant threat of fire (Os Cinemas-arapucas. Uma Pretoria..., 1912, p. 1).

There is the presentation of the value of the documents from their probative aspect and, consequently, as a guarantee of goods and rights. In this specific case, the location of a notary office in a second floor of a building that hosts a cinema is a threat to the right of ownership guaranteed by these documents. Thus, in addition to the fear of a tragic and sudden death, there is still the possibility of a “social death”, presented by the loss of ownership of goods and legal guarantees, which, at a time of great social and political changes, could generate an intense feeling of insecurity in moviegoers and newspaper readers, and it is also another vestige of the newspaper’s audience.

In another part of the article, the justification for the moral crusade is highlighted: the existence of fatal victims due to fires in cinematographs. And the fire at Cinema Brasileiro, on December 9, 1912, gave more impetus to the attack on cinemas promoted by the newspaper: “better late than never, because if the *campaign* carried out by *A Noite* had been taken into account, it certainly would not have been registered the fire on Rua Marechal Floriano and the death of Dr. Sá Rego and that of the unfortunate operator Antonio Campos”¹² [emphasis added].

During the publication of the series, the journalists of *A Noite* presented themselves as legitimate spokespersons for the demands of readers and spectators to the public authorities and cinema owners, using terms such as “series” and “campaign” to define their work, which reveals both the overall dimension of their intervention and the belief in the legitimacy of their own profession.

At many times, journalists place themselves as substitutes for the police in inspections, even adopting a pedagogical attitude towards them: “while the police, with their characteristic softness, reflect on the need to act in this serious case of trap cinemas, we continue our inspection of these entertainment venues, showing the authorities those that do not offer the necessary security for the public [...]”.

Concerning the press in Rio de Janeiro, the expansion of printing techniques at the end of the 19th Century (Süssekind, 2006, p. 24), the increase in the state structure, which some public bodies became part of due to the demands of the republican regime, and the increase in the population that arrived at the then Federal Capital – fundamental for the formation of a reader-

ship – were some of the factors that led to a greater circulation of newspapers and magazines at the turn of the 19th to the 20th Centuries.

Barbosa (2007) assessed that these periodicals played a central role in the public life of the city, disseminating mostly liberal and republican ideas, but there was also room for more conservative platforms. Complementing this panorama, Carvalho (1997) emphasized the role of workers' newspapers of different lines (anarchists, socialists) and politically dissident movements from the directions of the republic.

Therefore, the public space in which the moral crusade of *A Noite* journalists against the trap-cinemas projected itself was marked by a great legitimacy by the newspapers and the debates proposed by them. To this, we can add that the number of reports made throughout the series and the subsequent resumption of the theme in several editions in the following year reveal an interest of readers on the theme, insofar as many of them were probably also moviegoers, and the series assumed that point of view since the beginning.

Thus, the *pensée bourgeoise* (Sahlins, 2004, p. 191) combined some variations around consumption related to both the printed medium and the cinema to try to impose its values and practices on the social world, transforming itself into social action directed against the negligence of bureaucracy and the greed of businessmen.

Invested by the legitimacy of the social position that they occupied and the prestige that the printed medium had at the time, since “moral crusades are generally dominated by those located at the upper levels of the social structure” (Becker, 2008, p. 155), the journalists were partially successful in instigating an engagement in the crusade: interviews with officials and cinematograph owners, who sought to defend themselves against the accusations, and letters from readers reporting their fears were released throughout the series and in the following months.

In the article published on August 20, 1912, there is an account of the reaction of the police authorities to the series:

After we denounced the existence of these traps, the police experts visited some of the cinematographers that we had pointed out.

From that visit, they had the impression of the visible danger to which the public that attends these traps is exposed. The police were already aware of this inspection, but as for the measures that were within their scope regarding public safety, until today, they are still unknown.

The exploitation continues with the same fuss as always, with the same degrading recklessness as before the inspection.

Religiously, the police continue to get bogged down in the defenses they are making against us “at the request” of their indefensible inabilities, inabilities that are alarmingly piling up day by day, as if to make ends meet, and they do not have time to take care of the simplest of duties, with which our administrative organization entrusted them (Os cinemas-arapucas. A polícia..., 1912, p. 1.).

The newspaper points out that police authorities tried to present some public action against the problem but were once again ineffective in suppressing it. Thus, the newspaper approaches another fear in its readers: that of being treated indifferently by the bureaucracy, considering what Herzfeld (1993, pp. 1-7) has already analyzed. As we have already discussed here, in addition to pointing out the personal choices by the bureaucratic body, now journalists also show it in the relationship between bureaucracy and citizens. In his analysis of this relationship, Herzfeld points out that the first is “a system demanding accountability, and accountability is a socially produced, culturally saturated amalgam of ideas about person, presence, and policy” (1993, p. 47).

This indifference takes a structuring aspect in the situation of spectators and of going to the cinema, which we can observe in the conclusion reached by the chronicler: “as for the measures that were within their scope regarding public safety, until today, they are still unknown”. At this point, it is translated into the inertia and lack of publicity of bureaucratic decisions to which spectators are subjected, with which journalists identify themselves throughout the series.

At a later moment, an interview with a police chief is published concerning these inspections and the criteria for authorization to operate a cinema. The police chief interviewed only alluded to the technical aspects of evaluating motion picture theaters and gave evasive answers to the reporter about concrete cases, in a clearly defensive behavior. On this occasion, the appeal to the technical dimension detached from the appreciation of the lives of spectators was shown by the indifference, through the language used, of the public agent towards them (Os cinemas-arapucas talvez não consigam..., 1913, p. 2).

However, a few weeks later, there was a response from the police with the intention of condemning the trap-cinemas, revealing a partial success of the moral crusade. In the news published on January 24, 1913, there is a mention on the appointment of an expert commission that condemned Cinema Popular and Cinema Ouvridor, considered that the location of Cinema 11 de

Junho was inadequate – in a townhouse (cinemas classified in the series as “traps”) – in addition to requesting measures in relation to other seven cinemas (Os cinemas-arapucas estão no index, 1913, p. 2).

A feeling of indifference was also replicated in the exhibitors’ answer to the newspaper. While narrating the meeting with an inspector from the Companhia Cinematographica Internacional, responsible for Cinema Ouvidor (exposed two days before as one of the trap-cinemas and which, ironically, would be the target of a conviction a few months later), in the newspaper’s editorial office, the journalist points out that there was, on his part, an effort to dissuade the editorial staff of *A Noite* from publishing more criticisms about that cinema.

The reply letter sent by the supervisor focused only on one aspect of technical nature: the fact that the room was almost entirely clad in iron and not in wood, except for the chairs and the platform, which would make it more difficult for the fire to spread. He even attributed the denunciation made by the newspaper to a misunderstanding provoked “by someone who was envious or interested in depreciating one of the oldest and most frequented cinemas in this capital” (*A polícia chega a permitir...*, 1912, p. 1).

In the case of the other cinema that answered the newspaper, the indifference was even more explicit. After reporting a successful alarm test at the restored Cinema Rio Branco¹³, praised even by the police, the chronicler makes the following remark: “one of the owners of Cinema Rio Branco, in conversation with a companion of ours, let scape that when the alarm to which we refer started to sound several people threw themselves, taken in panic, from the galleries to the audience”.

From the two examples, we may infer that the companies’ responses were motivated merely by the fear of losing public and of having their commercial reputation tarnished – therefore, financial loss and, with it, the possibility of bankruptcy –, with no concern for the life and the well-being of their audience. This response was part of the cinemas’ publicity strategies as an attempt to minimize the impact of the journalistic series on their attendance.

Finally, through three published letters from readers, it was possible to verify minimally their engagement in the moral crusade proposed by the series. The apocryphal letter published on August 17, 1912, under the title *A Falta de policiamento nos cinemas* [“The lack of patrolling in the cinemas”], targets one of the denounced cinemas. The owners of Cinema Central are portrayed as unscrupulous people “that just want to sell tickets and do not care to whom”, and sloppy with cinema hall hygiene. Later, the reader described the

scene that forced him to leave the cinema with his family: “the manager let in some completely drunk women, who were accompanied by ‘chauffeurs’ no less vagabonds than them, who began to offend other spectators saying things against morality, making the families walk off the cinema” (*A Falta de policiamento nos cinemas*, 1912, p. 4).

This excerpt exposes the fear of contact with other social groups that did not behave with the same restraint expected by spectators of a cinema, and that subjected them to embarrassment, an indication of who was the cinema audience in the first decades of the 20th Century in Rio de Janeiro, and, once again, to which classes this entertainment was preferentially aimed – as we highlighted earlier, the middle sectors and the elite.

A very similar tone is that of another letter published on January 9, 1913. In it, there is a complaint against Cinema Bijou, in São Cristóvão. The reader appropriates the expression of the newspaper and designates the cinema as a “trap”, highlighting the risk of fire because it works in a narrow wooden shed, as well as because it has narrow entrances and box office hindering public circulation. In addition, he continues: “it has no water or sanitary equipment; it is real filthy, which can be considered a focus of infection” (*Os cinemas-arapucas. Uma carta...*, 1913, p. 2).

The fear of transmissible diseases due to poor hygiene conditions was also present among the city’s population, as Chalhoub (1996) has already evaluated. Indeed, this was one of the main justifications for Pereira Passos’ urban reform, which made the hierarchies of class, race, gender, and nationalities even more rigid in the urban space of central areas and near them in Rio de Janeiro.

The reader Guilherme Chelen, who presented himself as a witness to a cinema fire, wrote the third letter, published on December 13, 1912, and made a request to the authorities: that they designate a firefighter for each cinema in the city, who should be on standby during the show. His testimony continues: “I was a spectator of the fire on Rua Larga from the first scream, and if this measure had been in practice, it would certainly not have had such regrettable consequences, and the proof is that, by starting in the cabin that was at the entrance, several people came in and out saving rows of chairs under fire” (Chelen, 1912, p. 2) – alluding to the victim of the fire at the Brazilian Cinema, which had occurred four days earlier.

From the fears narrated – the one of the contact with members of the lower classes, of the risk of infections due to lack of hygiene, and of the indifferent treatment by the bureaucracy –, as well as the appeals to police authorities and

firefighters, the language used by the readers and the tone of proximity to the journalists of *A Noite*, we infer that the three letters come from the middle strata or the elite, although two of them are apocryphal.

4. CONCLUSION

Throughout our article, we could verify that the moral crusade proposed by the newspaper *A Noite* against the trap-cinemas was partially successful in arousing the engagement of those who were challenged, namely: police authorities, cinematograph owners and cinema readers/spectators.

In Decree 9048, edited on August 18, 1911, which regulated the action of the Fire Department of Rio de Janeiro, there were some obligations imposed on theaters, such as: the express need to have a firefighter in each theater to act in case of a fire, prior inspection for its operation, a register of water for fires and the need for direct communication with the Fire Department. This last obligation was extended to any entertainment center “where a lot of people usually gather” (art. 185 of the decree).

There was no explicit mention for the cinematographers and, from this legal loophole, arose the debate on the need for them to comply with current legislation and the interpretation that the police (instead of the Fire Department) should be the agent of this type of inspection. This mention would only occur in Decree 16.274, of December 20, 1923, that gave new regulations to the Fire Department, with an express obligation on the part of movie theaters to carry out the same procedures reserved for theaters.

By triggering some fears due to the act of going to the cinema, the journalistic series gradually revealed the type of audience that it was aimed at, when relating to other fears, such as an arbitrary or indifferent treatment by members of the bureaucracy, something seen as humiliating for the middle and upper classes or, even, the fear of a social death arising from the loss of documents that prove properties and rights.

This classist position was also possible to be verified by which cinemas were targeted by the complaint, those located in the recently renovated central areas of Rio de Janeiro or near them; by the position of journalists as intellectuals, in their intention to intervene in the debate and in the course of action of the bureaucracy in relation to the cinemas; by the response of the readers, through the letters published in the newspaper; and, finally, by the legitimacy this act conferred to the fears that the readers reported. We may note that both cinema and journalism were part of the spectacle of the modern urban expe-

rience, and that the dissemination of fears through these means took place in a complementary and synchronic way.

At last, we should highlight that the analyzed series was inserted in a pedagogy of journalism related to its readers, in the same way that cinema was also used in its instructional dimension. In short: modern life needed to be taught to those who intended to enjoy it, the modern had a constitutive pedagogy that was conveyed and reaffirmed by the mass media. Certainly, fear was one of its most effective instruments.

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NOTES

¹ On another occasion (Lapera, 2019), we evaluated this issue in a secondary way.

² We also raised this hypothesis in a secondary way at another moment (Lapera, 2019). On the other hand, we make it central to our reflection now. In addition, we emphasize that we found some articles in other newspapers about the analyzed series. However, we will keep the focus on the newspaper *A Noite*, due to the limits imposed by the layout of the RBH.

³ We still need to point out that only opinionative texts were signed regularly, while the reports came apocryphal. The fact that the articles in the series were not signed does not refer to any embarrassment on the part of journalists in signing them, but to a common practice of journalism in the period.

⁴ The films' photographic material of the period had cellulose nitrate at the base of its composition, which is a highly flammable substance that could even cause spontaneous combustion if the film was poorly stored.

⁵ We evaluated these aspects at another time (Lapera, 2019, p. 67), and we consider it relevant to resume them due to the analysis of this source.

⁶ In the article published on August 10, there is a statement signed by Angelino Stamile's company, but the name was only mentioned due to the signature of the note, and not in the text of the article.

⁷ We need to point out that the back of the newspaper was a valued space due to its physical layout. The reader turned the newspaper over and read the ads without needing to see the rest of its content.

⁸ We name *middle classes* a set of the population that, although they did not correspond to the majority of it, were a significant minority of the workforce available in the period and held considerable capital, including civil and military public agents, merchants, commercial employees (including cashiers) and services such as banks, gaming houses, newspapers, liberal professionals, etc.

⁹ In 1907 and 1908, when the first cinematographs were installed on Avenida Central and in other prime areas, the average price of a movie ticket in central areas was 500 réis for second class and 1000 réis for first class. As a comparison, the cover price of an issue of the magazine *Fon-fon: semanário alegre, político, crítico e efusante* (illustrated, colored and with almost 30 pages per issue) was 400 réis in Rio de Janeiro and 500 réis in other states. These trends in movie ticket prices and the division of audiences into two classes remained stable throughout the first decade of cinematographers in Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁰ In the book on the police of Rio de Janeiro, Bretas (1997, p. 52) reported the great mobility in police positions – even with the existence of competitions –, highlighting the lack of rationality in the promotion of agents as the main reason.

¹¹ In the literary sphere, Lima Barreto developed this point in *Recordações do escrívão Isaías Caminha*, in which there is an account of the difficulties faced by a young man who recently migrated to Rio de Janeiro in obtaining an appointment to a public office. In order to survive, he gets a job at a newspaper.

¹² This source was extensively analyzed in Laperá, 2019, pp. 71-74.

¹³ The same cinema that caught fire on July 8, 1910, operating at that time in another building.

