

Abstract

THE PROPAGANDA OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY AND THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY DURING THE COLD WAR THROUGH DOCUMENTARY FILM

The research examines the cinematic propaganda films commissioned by the Christian Democrat party and the Italian Communist Party in the period between the Second World War and the Sixties. These films, made from propaganda sections of party in order to use the power of cinema to effectively achieve their potential voters and activists, have played a central role in the Communist and Catholic imagery. This production, which increases during the election campaign, is continued until the Seventies, peaking in the phase between the first general elections of 1948 and the second half of the Sixties. This is a very diverse group of works, consisting of both fiction and documentary films, but also sketches and animated films¹, all short-or medium-length.

These materials have been forgotten for years. In more recent times they have been recovered, cataloged and digitized to make them available to scholars and to prevent their total disappearance. The majority of Christian Democrat movies today is owned by the Istituto Luigi Sturzo of Rome, that only since 2005 has made possible the consultation. Instead, most of the movies due to PCI is currently in the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico, based in Rome, which houses audio-visual materials for the trade unions and the left. The digitization of these movies and the ability to search online as well to preserve them has offered a great help to the research, because through it the movies, hardly available on traditional media, can be seen more easily.

Based on the recent availability of this rich audiovisual material, the research analyzes the complex of the propaganda films of the Christian Democrat party and the Italian Communist Party made during the period between 1948 and 1964, in the light of their remarkable ability to provide valuable information on era in which they were made and the parties themselves. The DC and PCI were the protagonists of the Italian political history of postwar, embodying value systems, ideas and worldviews completely antithetical. Their opposition, which has reached high points in special circumstances, has had as its background the Cold War. The all-Italian clash between the two parties represented in many cases a reflection of the international war between the giants USA and USSR, which they, each for their part, were bound. It then becomes interesting to trace through a source unused until now the languages and characters of political propaganda in which this struggle took the form and read into them the materialization of identity shown by each party. Beyond what is explicitly stated, these audiovisual materials allow to obtain much information about the Catholic and Communist universe not directly stated.

¹ The term "documentary propaganda" usually used to indicate that corpus of works is, in that sense, misleading and not entirely relevant. In fact, by convention, are named "documentary" the non-fiction films, or those characterized by a more direct relationship with reality, unfiltered by narrative mechanisms. However, here is sometimes utilized the term "documentary propaganda" because it is often used to indicate the propaganda films.

Rather than focusing on a limited sample, the research considers all the propaganda films of the two parties now available² in a given period of time, relatively large. In fact, the aim is analyze this production in the long run, in order to highlight the changes in the themes and attitudes that underlie them, and the evolution of languages. In the period selected there is the maximum production of films and it is included, as mentioned, from 1948 to 1964. In '48 takes place the first elections after the war, during which the fierce propaganda between the two parties explodes vigorously. A few months later there is the attack on the secretary of the PCI Togliatti which throws the country to the brink of a possible civil war. In this climate agitated the propaganda machine of the two sides becomes active and there is the first large production of propaganda films. The 1964 is chosen as the destination for several reasons. Against the background of a gradual thaw, Italy has recently entered a new political phase, characterized by the centre-left coalition, with the entrance of Socialists into government alongside the Democrats. The 1964 is the year of the death of Togliatti, the leader of the PCI, which marks the end of an era for the party. Finally, the 1964 is the last year survival of Italian documentary in cinemas before its final disappearance with the entry into force of Law n° 1213 of 1965. The Italians, until then accustomed to seeing to the cinema non-fiction films before movies, for the purposes of this rule see them gradually disappear from the screen. The documentary, well, gone forever from the cultural consumption of Italian public.

The journey through the Christian Democrat and Communist propaganda films is based on the methodological approach of the New History. Since the Eighties of the Twentieth Century this new orientation in historical research has shed light on the usefulness of the use of fiction and nonfiction films for the study of the past, in particular for the analysis of public attitudes. All the mass media, as noted by Marc Ferro³, besides being a source and an instrument of telling the history, are agents of history, for the ability to influence behaviors and attitudes of the public, to structure identities, to direct action. Think how much more can this theorem be valid for propaganda films, specifically designed to spread their political ideologies and to orient public towards given assessments and conducts. Through these works, certainly, than the reality you can very well understand the different ways to perceive and tell the facts by each party and, at the same time, identify the mechanisms of propaganda used to leverage public opinion. In short, the political propaganda films, despite, or rather, because of their partisanship, are unique documents to focus the identity performed and the scale of values, ideological references, the imagery and aesthetic codes of each party, the better than does any written source.

The discourse on the New History, the use of mass media, and cinema in particular, as sources and related methodological issues are addressed in the first chapter. In the second, on the other hand, is drawn the life of the Italian documentary, in order to reconstruct the cinematic context in which the Christian Democrat and Communist propaganda films have come. The third chapter focuses on the opposing identities of the Communist Party and the Christian Democrat party, two very different parties in the ideological foundations and cultural roots of belonging. He also analyzes the

² More precisely, they were considered the only films directly commissioned by the two parties and made from its offices. Furthermore, in the case of the DC, were included movies produced by Civic Committees. Conversely, were not considered works made by private production companies ideologically close, if you prefer, complacent with each party. In addition, we analyzed the complete movies only, leaving out the rich and not least interesting part of raw materials, ever mounted in a complete documentary.

³ Marc Ferro, *Cinema e storia. Linee per una ricerca*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1980.

relationship with the culture, because the cultural discourse is closely linked to propaganda. Democrat and Communist films come on the screens in the years of mass society and consumption affirmation. The new dynamics that cross the Italian society inevitably reflect on them, as well as the political strategies of the two parties. In parallel, at this stage, it reinforces the spread of mass media, in particular cinema, pushing each party to develop specific tactical designs to assert its control over it. These aspects are treated in the fourth chapter. The fifth, on the other hand, approaches the specific issue of propaganda, the characters which it presents within each side and the bodies appointed to its practice. Moreover, in this context we can't disregard the influences on propaganda messages carried by the American myth and the Soviet myth, both very popular in postwar and powerful ideological beacon, not without contradictions, respectively of the DC and the PCI. The sixth chapter analyzes in detail the films of Christian Democrat party and the Communist Party made from '48 to '64, dividing them into themes. This type of distribution allows an easier comparison between different points of view and propaganda strategies about the same themes put in places by the two parties. The comparison shows the sharp contrast between the parties, antithetical ideologies, conflicting visions of the same reality. In short, he recreates the sense of the fierce struggle which divided Italy in those years through separate memberships, born from the militant accession to the two parties and the relative values and symbolic universes. Through the narration of these ideologies displayed, Communist and Christian Democrat movies also show, as against the light, some unspoken, or attitudes and beliefs of each party not directly explained, which however is possible to focus through the images that flow fast on the screen.