

The Portuguese identity through tourist representations during *Estado Novo*

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Resumo:

Acredita-se que as pessoas se tornam turistas na medida em que conhecem a cultura dos *Outros* e entram em contato com ela. A maior parte dos viajantes escolheria seus destinos baseada na promessa de visitarem paisagens exclusivas, em ambientes autênticos e inimitáveis, oriundos de importantes eventos históricos. As narrativas turísticas são proíficas em articular motivos culturais e nacionais para respaldar suas construções. Há um uso constante de conceitos como *typical*, *traditional* e *historic*, o que leva os turistas à crença de que entrarão em contato com uma realidade intocada – e que seria, de alguma maneira, endêmica. Isso posto, percebe-se a estreita relação entre as narrativas turísticas e as nacionalistas, já que ambas compartilham as mesmas estratégias de validação discursiva. Este estudo é parte de uma corrente pesquisa de doutorado, cujo objetivo é analisar como o *Estado Novo* fez uso de representações turísticas para disseminar e legitimar sua ideologia política. Com o artigo, gostaria de apresentar e discutir momentos-chave na indústria portuguesa do turismo, durante os anos 1930 e 1940. Abordarei o Primeiro Congresso Nacional de Turismo (1936) e a figura de António Ferro, assessor de Oliveira Salazar para assuntos turísticos.

Palavras Chave:

Representações turísticas, indústria portuguesa do turismo, Primeiro Congresso Nacional de Turismo, Estado Novo.

Abstract:

It is believed that people become tourists to meet and experience the different cultures of the *Others*. Most travellers would choose their destinations based on promises that invite them to visit unique features, displayed in essential and inimitable environments, which seem to result from definite historic events. Tourist narratives are very keen on using what they consider as cultural and national reasons to support their offers. There is a recurrent use of concepts like *typical*, *traditional* or *historic* which leads the visitors to believe they will contact a reality that has been like that for ages and is somehow endemic. Having said this, one can hardly avoid noticing the coincidence between tourist and nationalist narratives, as they both borrow these very same notions to validate themselves. This study is part of a current research for a PhD, whose aim is to analyse how *Estado Novo* made use of tourist representations to spread and justify its political ideology. With this article, I would like to show and discuss key moments in the Portuguese tourist industry during the 30s and 40s of the 20th century. I will focus on the First National Congress of Tourism, which happened in 1936, and on António Ferro, the agent of Oliveira Salazar in tourist related issues.

Keywords:

Tourist representations, Portuguese tourist industry, First National Congress of Tourism, Estado Novo.

History and culture are fundamental aspects of the fabric of everyday life. They help to give us our sense of identity, telling us who we are, where we are from and where we are going (JORDAN & WEEDON, 1997: 3).

The above elaboration of Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon on history and culture sounds particularly suitable when speaking about the industry of tourism. Past and current tourists are attracted to destinations, based on invitations and narratives that promise to show them the most essential characteristics of a man-built or of a natural region, in which *history* and *culture* validate representations as accurate and authentic. Most tourists will look for *historic* and *cultural* experiences, as *the* way of meeting the fundamental core of the host community. Regional or national museums and exhibitions, theme parks and gastronomic events are some of their preferred tourist products, since they are considered as true representations of *the historic* heritage belonging to a given region or nation.

As stated by Jim McGuigan, "heritage is an international phenomenon promoted by governments concerned with national identity and tourist revenue and, also, by the commercial exploitation of ubiquitous and popular fascination with the past in diverse forms of entertainment" (McGUIGAN, 1996: 118).

Tourist products are commonly seen as genuine and legitimate representations of the cultural and historic essence of a destination, due to their displaying and supplying of *typical* and *traditional* artefacts, whose validity relies on frozen and clichéd narratives that are told over and over again, usually without giving room to any change.

Tourist narratives and activities seem to live and survive on the emphasis of an endless difference between us and them, which has been like this for generations. And so do the "nationalist idioms" (GELLNER, 1998: 74), as there is in both a somehow extreme highlighting of a "cultural identity as an unfolding essence, moving apparently, without change, from past to future" (HALL, 1999: 38). In fact, for regimes which praise nationalist-oriented representations and for those working in tourism, nations and nationalities are essential, universal, eternal and obvious realities, which are there for you to see and easily accept. History and its memories are the major subjects of those political and tourist narratives: they are shown as something that unites and makes one feel proud of a common past that is reflected in the present. "What is remembered is defined by the assumed identity" (GILIS, 1996: 3) and, as a result, history and its institutionally selected memories, as well as induced amnesias, will allow this living inside a bubble, either the political bubble or the tourist one, as Jens Jacobsen calls the artificial spots prepared for tourists (vd. JACOBSEN, 2003: 72). In fact, most tourists believe that "because something is *historical*, it is authentic. On the other hand, if it is modern, it is predominantly inauthentic" (URRY, 2003: 208).

Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone also elaborated on this subject, when they wrote that "the past changes due to changing needs" (HODGKIN & RADSTONE, 2007: 23). Tourist and nationalist-oriented "idioms" survive in these sterile spots, where everything is unquestionable and taken for granted, from here to eternity, making use of patrimony as a tool to historically support their narratives. Quoted by Jordan and Weedon, Jean Chesneaux states that "history is one of the tools the ruling class used to maintain its power. The state apparatus tries to *control the past* at the level of both political action and ideology. The state and the power structure organize the past and build its image in terms of their own political and ideological interests" (Jordan & Weedon, 1997: 117).

More authoritative political regimes and tour operators seem to make use of something which reminds us of Raymond Williams' *structure of feeling*. As per Williams, this structure of feeling is basically the culture of a period, which can be felt only by those living then and there. Therefore, whatever we recover from the past and/or from a distant culture is but an abstraction (WILLIAMS, 2001: 63-64). In the nationalist-oriented and tourist arenas, the absence of this "structure of feeling" will help the agents conveying the narratives they like, as they are mostly based on either ancient or exotic distant mementos, which are hard to verify.

Several minor and less important meetings about tourism had already taken place in Portugal before the First National Congress of Tourism, in 1936. They were mainly suggested and organized by regional tourist boards or by *Automóvel Club de Portugal*, an organization which was mostly dedicated to tourist activities due to its connections with other international automobile institutions. Yet, in 1934 the Society for the Propaganda of Portugal suggested the organization of a national congress dedicated to tourist issues so that the industry would be properly discussed, improved and adapted, considering the particular political period the country was going through. The congress was held in January, in Lisbon, and its five sessions were attended by one hundred and eighty delegates, who also participated in the suggested leisure activities that included a one-day guided excursion to Costa do Sol and Sintra, visits to several museums and a farewell dinner party at the sophisticated Palácio Hotel, in Estoril. There were two committees composed by several ministers and by the heads of different institutions, such as the Society for the Propaganda of Portugal or the Official Board for the National Propaganda, that would start being in charge of the tourist industry from 1939 on. These different members would only meet the delegates to the congress at the final dinner and the reason for these nominations can only be justified as a means to the government to be officially represented in the event.

The opening session took place in the City Hall of Lisbon and was headed by the President of the Republic, Marechal Carmona. Two key-speakers took their time to refer the importance of this major meeting, considering not only the economic importance of the industry for Portugal, but also what tourist activities represented for the regime as a means of ideological propaganda. They believed that the country would become a preferred tourist destination for foreign visitors, who would be surprised by the “social tranquility and order” catered for by *Estado Novo* and Salazar. Antunes Guimarães, who had been a minister and was a member of the National Assembly in the thirties, wouldn’t avoid either mentioning the uniqueness of the Portuguese race and the patrimony built to honor the nation’s glorious past. Guimarães went on, saying that

the Nation will profit from tourism, but Portugal will always continue the policy that brought us back to order and tranquility, that restored the Portuguese finances and the national monuments, the same policy that is making it up for the time we lost and is rebuilding the noble castle of the Portuguese race. (...) It is very emotional for me to preview the visits of foreign tourists, but, more than that, I can already see the pilgrimages of all the Portuguese descendent peoples, who will visit the sacred places of Motherland, the monuments that recall the deeds of our ancestors, the museums that keep the relics of our glorious History! (GUIMARÃIS, 1936: 48-49).

It was repeated several times that the conclusions of the congress would be given to the most suitable addressees – the *Estado Novo* and Salazar –, so these discussions would result in a valuable tool for the industry, according to the wills of the government.

The five sessions happened in Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (Lisbon Geography Society) and the papers presented discussed general issues such as the need for better skilled employees and tour guides, higher quality hotels, or new and better roads. Delegates believed in the need for a national board that should run the industry, under the close monitoring of Salazar. Most of the communications presented stressed the ideological and nationalist statements done by Guimarães. There was an enormous difference between Portugal and the rest of the world, due to the action of a present hero: the president of the council, Oliveira Salazar, who was following the trends of past heroes of the Age of the Discoveries. It would be important to quote Ernest Gellner and Peter Howard, when they state that "the sense of a shared past or of a collective memory functions as a social cement. A community becomes like an individual, whose accumulated experience and memory make her what she is. In order for history to serve as identity-building material, continuity between events in the past and in the present state of affairs must be postulated or agreed" (GELLNER, 2001: 44). And that "totalitarian governments produce identity as a deliberate policy, and the maintenance of selected parts of the cultural and natural heritage is integral to such a policy. (...) The cult of personality is a part of heritage creation" (HOWARD, 2003: 169).

Ever since the initial rumors about the First National Congress of Tourism, newspapers were very active in reporting about it. From June 1935 on, one would find almost every day articles and interviews about the congress, and their publication lasted until May 1936. *O Século* was the official newspaper covering the event and it even issued a special edition and organized an exhibition with photographs for that purpose. Other congresses and meetings happened in Portugal at the time, but none was that covered. Everyone who could read would virtually attend the congress and would therewith be invited and educated to participate actively in the tourist arena, as Salazar wanted.

At the end of the day, tourism seems to have provided the right excuse to organize a meeting that would give the opportunity to repeat over and over again the ideology of *Estado Novo* and to discuss and set the tools, so that the tourist industry could be used as a natural arena for promoting its beliefs and justifying its practices.

Throughout the 30's and the 40's there was a common name involved in all major tourist boards and events. António Ferro was a journalist and a writer, but mainly a loyal Salazar's follower. He was the head of SPN (Official Board for the National Propaganda), which, in 1939, took responsibility for the tourist activity in Portugal, as well as in the Portuguese colonies in Africa, since it was officially believed that being run by the Interior Ministry would not be enough for such a significant activity. Five years later, in 1944, the SPN was replaced by the SNI (National Board for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism), also headed by Ferro. During these two decades, he produced several documents and speeches, through which a Portuguese historic and national culture was promoted as a means to validate the ideology of *Estado Novo*, which resulted from this very unique way of ruling a country.

When opening the Regional Tourist Board in Vilar Formoso, in the late 30's, Ferro said that

even if Portugal, showing all its noble character, does not even try to benefit from this new war, we should not reject some of the advantages conveyed by our neutrality. One of the main benefits is the fact that the world looks at us as a shelter, a true oasis in a tormented and devastated Europe (...) If we manage to keep up that image, if we know how to host, we will be doing a good job, as far as tourism is concerned and definitely a very good national propaganda (FERRO, 1949: 27-28).

On February 13th, 1940, Ferro clearly stressed the link between *nationhood* and *tourism*, when addressing a group of chairs of several Regional Tourist Boards:

Tourism is so interesting, due to its essential and inevitable nationalism. The development of this industry can but benefit Portugal and the Portuguese people. (...) Tourism is no longer a small and frivolous industry. It performs instead the important role of director and decorator of the Nation. (...) The international reputation of a nation results, in several aspects, from the way it organizes the industry of tourism. Therefore, tourism is a lot more than just an industry providing wealth and civilization. It is also a perfect way to promote national propaganda, as well as political propaganda (FERRO, 1949: 33-35).

As with most delegates to the First National Congress of Tourism, one of Ferro's major concerns was with foreign tourists and he would therefore speak of Portugal as a calm place, "where other peoples could rest and relax from all the suffering happening elsewhere in Europe" (FERRO, 1949: 19). Actually, SPN and SNI would set a very dramatic difference between tourist activities for nationals and for foreigners. In the already mentioned congress, Álvaro Viana de Lemos spoke of a medium or popular type of tourism for the Portuguese, which would include one-day excursions and other forms of "popular visits", so the people would get a tourist education (LEMONS, 1936: 118). As for international guests, they would be introduced to a twofold nation: on the one hand, they would have the chance of observing rural and humble landscapes with modest and hardworking people; on the other, they would be dwelling in glamorous and sophisticated areas, like Cascais

and Estoril. Catching international positive opinions about the political regime through tourist narratives was for sure a favourite strategy of *Estado Novo*.

Another way to show the cultural identity of the nation and to justify its unquestionable legitimacy was the organization and the participation in more than twenty officially sponsored international exhibitions, happening in Portugal and abroad. Yet, the most famous fair was the *Exhibition of the Portuguese World*, that happened in Lisbon in 1940, whose purpose was that of commemorating the birth of the country, in 1140, as well as the independence from Spain, in 1640. This was *the* event for *Estado Novo*. António Ferro considered it to be “more than a national work; it was a nationalist project” (FERRO, 1943: 18).

Power generates knowledge and, in deploying censorship, defines what can and cannot be said as much as what can or cannot be done (McGUIGAN, 1996: 155).

Through the references to the First National Congress of Tourism and to António Ferro this article tried to show how the Portuguese political regime *Estado Novo* used tourist narratives to promote and justify the national cultural identity it had created to support itself. A past built of selected memories would allow Salazar to generate unquestionable nationalist-oriented and tourist “idioms” that could be used simultaneously. While looking for stereotyped and essential features, which were due to characterize this particular nation, tourists would be more than happy to acknowledge the *nationalist* narratives prepared for them. Therefore, tourist representations seem to be a useful and, at first sight, a naïve arena for easily promoting nationalist- and totalitarian-oriented ideologies, which reminds us of David Lowenthal when he states that “tourism seems indeed a privileged arena for celebrating great powers” (LOWENTHAL, 1996: 47).

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Notas:

This article results from a current research for a PhD thesis to be presented to the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon. With that study I would like to analyze how the Portuguese authoritative and totalitarian political regime *Estado Novo* made use of tourist representations, in the 30's and 40's, to promote and justify its ideology. My argument for this essay will focus mainly on the First National Congress of Tourism and on António Ferro, Oliveira Salazar's agent and representative in most tourist-related issues.

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