From Belém to Tarrafal: Dark Tourism as a vehicle for multiple (post) colonial narratives

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Abstract: After the initiatives to implement tourist activity in places related to the Portuguese colonial and post-colonial periods, this article emphasizes the need to serve multiple narratives of the events and circumstances that led to these places being tourist attractions. So, the article describes the process of going from a single narrative of Portugal as colonizer - Lusotropicalism - to the multiplicity of narratives that exist today, originating from Portugal and its former colonies. Afterwards, the article demonstrates the potential of dark tourism, particularly of its attractions, as privileged means for the transmission of multiple messages, as each attraction is open to several interpretations. Finally, it concludes with the need for the CPLP countries to make joint decisions about the narratives conveyed by the attractions and to undertake case studies focused on specific aspects of the attractions.

Keywords: Post-colonialism; multiple narratives; Dark Tourism; mediating death.

Introduction

"Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity."
— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Recent initiatives by Lusophone countries seeking the implementation of tourism projects that explore the common colonial history have emerged. The Route of Prisons in the Lusophone World project is an example of such initiatives, and aims to create:

A new formal space for reflection and knowledge of our shared history, possibly within the CPLP, about the nature of the dictatorship that lasted for years, in Portuguese speaking countries and the promotion and deepening of the scientific study of the movements and processes of resistance by the Portuguese and African peoples for their freedom and self-determination (Saial, 2013a).

There is also a UNESCO project for the creation of the Slave Route, which aims to understand slavery and its consequences and to foster intercultural dialogue on the topic (UNESCO, n.d.). This initiative, which came from several African countries, includes (or will include) CPLP countries like Brazil and Cape Verde (UNESCO, 2012; Saial, 2013b).

At the same time, there are already several tourist attractions

related to colonialism that reflect moments and circumstances of death and suffering in Portugal and in Lusophone countries: the Aljube and Peniche prisions in Portugal, Tarrafal concentration camp in Cape Verde, the Museum of East Timorese Resistance, the Slavery Museum and the Museum of the Armed Forces in Angola (among others).

In all these places, the narratives of Portuguese colonialism and post-colonialism are marked by sometimes diametrically opposed perspectives.

On the one hand, there is the narrative of Portugal as an exceptional colonizer - as it was, at the same time, colonizer and colonized – that colonized underdeveloped peoples primarily through language, culture, integration, development (Santos, 2003). On the other hand, there is another narrative, fraught with violence, repression, racism, discrimination, wherein Portugal appears as invader, exploiter of resources, under the mask of an ideal of unity that never materialized (Almeida M. V., 2008b, Castelo, 2013).

And, amid these black and white views of the same reality, there are endless shades of gray that must be brought to the debate; not only - or not as a priority - within the academy, but also in society, with individuals, whether political deciders or ordinary citizens.

The question that arises is: how to do it? How to encourage individual discussion and reflection on these multiple views of the same object? Other questions stem from that: How can these narratives coexist peacefully? Where can they be available to individuals in ways that everyone can consume, process, discuss and debate?

The thesis proposed here is that tourism, particularly dark tourism, can be one answer to these questions.

Dark tourism can be defined as a type of tourism that takes place in locations with a concrete and identifiable connection to death and suffering. Within this scope are included, for example, cemeteries and catacombs, but also prisons, battlefields, museums and temporary exhibitions (among other things). But, moreover, dark tourism places are social spaces susceptible to multiple meanings and reconfigurations – being, at the same time, places that do not jeopardize the individuals' sense of security.

So, the first section of this text addresses the various narratives concerning the Portuguese colonialism and post-colonialism, from the narrative with hegemonic tendencies of Lusotropicalism to the multiple and contrasting narratives that exist today. The article then discusses how dark tourism can be a medium where all these narratives can coexist and be presented for public discussion and appropriation.

The last section of the article points out ways in which this possibility can be achieved.

1. The spectrum of narratives of the Portuguese (post) colonialism

Narratives of Portugal as colonizer suffered various changes and evolved over the years. If, from the 60s to the Revolution of 1974, Lusotropicalism was the dominant official narrative, the fall of the dictatorial regime and the collapse of the empire gave rise to the emergence of many different perspectives (Almeida M. V., 2008a, 2008b).

The concept of Lusotropicalism originated in *The Masters and the Slaves,* a 1933 book by author Gilberto Freyre, although the term would only be used in later works (Almeida M. V., 2008b). According to this conception, the Portuguese have a natural inclination towards life in the tropics and the easy relationship with native peoples, inclination that is a consequence of the fact that the Portuguese are already a hybrid and miscegenated people (Freyre, 2003).

Although not initially accepted by the dictatorial regime, Lusotropicalism became a useful tool for

the regime from the time when, in the post-World War II period, the newly formed UN organization advocated self-determination as a fundamental human right and began to exert pressure on the countries that held territories under occupation for the disengagement from such territories (Castelo, 2013, Almeida, 2008b).

Lusotropicalism gained acceptance in the academic and scientific community just as it was assimilated as the official discourse of the regime. Adriano Moreira, who played a pivotal role in this assimilation, introduced the study of Lusotropicalism in higher education in the mid 1950s (Castelo, 2013).

In the 60s, with the outbreak of war in Angola, criticism to positioning of Portugal in relation to the colonies first appeared (Ribeiro, 2005), despite the covert criticism that, according to Castelo (2013), already existed, especially in academia.

Since then, a succession of views that contradict the regime's narrative have emerged, for example through literary texts (Ribeiro, 2005). There is, at this time, a decentralization of narrative: instead of traveling exclusively from the center (metropolis), narrative from ex-centric positions (the colonies) begin to circulate (Ribeiro, 2005).

Despite all efforts by the Estado Novo, the "overseas provinces" became independent countries, while the Portuguese authoritarian regime itself gave rise to a democracy, integrated in a community of European countries. The nation needed to be redefined, but could not do so by ignoring or discarding everything that caused the fall of the Empire.

According to Almeida (2008b, pp.7-8):

> Three major events took place since 1974 that are important for assessing this change – or lack thereof. The first one was the dislocation from a country that saw itself as based in the discoveries, the expansion and colonization, to a country reduced to its ex-metropolitan territory and part of the supranational European Union; the second was the flux of migrants from the ex-colonies; and the third was the emergence of a new rhetoric (and reality), namely that of Lusophony and the Portuguese-speaking community, including the new notion of the Portuguese Diaspora.

After the 1974 revolution, Portugal reconfigures itself as a country that is integrated in a European space, and, simultaneously, as a bridge between Europe and the former colonies, forming a community connected by historical and cultural ties and economic interests (Ribeiro, 2005, Almeida M. V., 2002, 2008b, Santos, 2003).

According to some authors (Castelo, 2013, Almeida, 2002, 2008a, 2008b, Cunha, 2010), this narrative, albeit long lasting, has several shortcomings. These authors' perspective of Portugal as colonizer is of violence and repression, of resource exploitation, racism and discrimination – characteristics that persist in the post-colonial period and that the country cannot escape in the context of Lusophony and CPLP, where it is faced with the development strategies and political decisions of the other member states.

According to other authors, represented here in Boaventura Sousa Santos' perspective, Portugal was an exceptional colonizer, assuming, at the same time, a position of dominance towards its colonies and of subaltern to England's power; moreover, it was a colonizer that integrated the identity of colonized, thus being hybrid, indecisive, unable to construct a true definition of itself (Santos, 2003).

There are also other authors, with other perspectives, such as Martins (2004). This author (Martins, 2004, p. 91) came to regard Lusotropicalism as "multiculturalism with the common denominator of a language as homeland", and Lusophony as a practical classification or "symbolical order of the world" (Martins, 2004, p. 91), governed by practical functions aimed towards social effects, and composed by distinct nations, culturally solidary.

At the same time, the colonial and post-colonial narratives that emerge from the former Portuguese colonies offer new perspectives and possibilities of (re)configuration for Portugal and for Portugal in relation to the countries it once dominated.

Some of these narratives emphasize, of course, the peoples' resistance to repression by the occupiers; others are manifests against the Lusophone identity that is imposed with some difficulty to some countries, stressing the need for them to define their identities in relation to Portugal in some way other than language (Varela, 2012).

All of these narratives, and many others that are not included here, constitute a broad spectrum of perspectives for the analysis of Portuguese (post)colonialism – that should be thought and debated in the public sphere. The thesis presented here is that tourist activity can contribute to this debate.

2. Dark tourism: mediator and reconfigurer of spaces

Dark tourism can be defined as the tourist activity in places that, accidentally or intentionally, have become tourist attractions, and that have a concrete and identifiable connection with death and suffering (Coutinho, 2012). This definition encloses a broad variety of attractions, able to appeal to different target audiences. But, underlying this variety of supply is the common characteristic of a possibility for visitors to contact/establish a relationship with death and suffering.

According to authors such as Ariès (1988), Giddens (1991), and Stone (2009), cotemporary society has removed direct contact with death from daily life; it takes place only in exceptional places and circumstances – such as medical and funerary institutions. At the same time, there was a devalorization of religion and of the traditional mechanisms for dealing with death, in relation to multiculturalism, diasporas, and even to the emergence of science, which, however, cannot create new truths to replace religious ones (Giddens, 1991). Thus, death has lost much of its public meaning, now belonging to the individual sphere – and each individual must, alone, create his own mechanisms for dealing with death and suffering (Giddens, 1991).

In contemporary western society, Tourism is a privileged means through which individuals can have contact with death and suffering (Walter, 2009, Stone, 2009b) in a way that does not threaten their ontological security (Giddens, 1991). In other words, contacting death and suffering through Tourism – dark tourism, that is – does not cause individuals to feel that what they are, in its entirety, is some way at risk. On the contrary, dark tourism provides a safe and sometimes socially sanctioned environment where individuals can construct their concepts of mortality (Stone 2006, 2008). In the words of Tarlow: "it is in dark tourism that the person's inner space becomes defined by the outer experience" (2005, p.52).

In fact, this kind of Tourism can be seen as symbolic (Tarlow, 2005), which relates to Stone 's (2013) statement that places of dark tourism can be considered heterotopias. According to Foucault (1967), heterotopias are places that:

> have the curious property of being related to every other place, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize or invert the set of relationships that are, in themselves, designated, reflected or thought. These places, of any kind, [...] are connected with all other places, [...] and, nevertheless, contradict them. (Foucault, 1967)

Stone (2013) argues that places of dark tourism are, at the same time, physical and social spaces, that reflect the culture of the places but go beyond that, often being representative of past crisis of supra-national significance, where visitors can also reflect on past and future crisis. Thus, these places represent more than a single moment in the past, rather a juxtaposition of time (Stone, 2013).

Therefore, dark tourism places are physical and social places where normality is interrupted and where meanings are projected that are related to the place, what it represents, and the individual/ visitor (Stone, 2013, Foucault, 1967).

In order to understand dark tourism's true power, one must relate it to nostalgia (Tarlow, 2005). According to Boym (2001, p.8), modern nostalgia is the "mourning for the impossibility of a mythical return", i.e. the return to a world with defined frontiers and values, but imagined. Tourism nostalgia, however, supposes a restorative possibility as well as a reflexive one – the tourist seeks to heal past hurts travelling to the past (Tarlow, 2005). The author states that dark tourism "may be a form of virtual nostalgia in which the traveler vicariously visits the tragedy's scene, experiencing the tragedy's place" (Tarlow, 2005, p.52).

However, dark tourism places are still tourist attractions and, as such, are part of a commercial enterprise. It is necessary that they be presented as an attraction, a product able to appeal to visitors and answer their needs.

Thus, dark tourism may be presented and consumed in different configurations, depending on how each product is contextualized and thematized in order to be consumed by the visiting public (Tarlow, 2005). Tarlow (2005, p.54) has identified seven forms in which dark tourism can be presented/consumed:

- "*A pretext to understand our own age with visits to places of tragedy used as the pretext to explain the current political situation*"[1]. This way, the visitor not only picks up the message, but is expected to integrate it in his current cultural understanding and pass it on.
- "*Romanticism, which is often found at battlefields or in places of torture*". Here, visitors can imagine themselves as heroes in the event portrayed by the attraction.
- "*Barbarism, where the visitor is made to feel superior to the perpetrators of the crime.*" This modality shows the cruelty of human beings at the same time that it instills a sense of compassion towards the victims.
- "*Part of national identity, producing the message that 'although we suffered we have prevailed'*". The author emphasizes the fact that the distinction between "we" and "they" is very present in this modality.
- "*A sign of decadence*", as in moral/ethic degradation of those who unjustly harmed or mistreated the current ruling group.
- "*A mystical experience*", born out of tragedy and related to the visitors' connection to the place. Tarlow (2005) gives as example the descendants of slaves that visit old slave quarters.
- "*A spiritual experience*" that is different from the mystical one because it is *"based more on a common sense of humanity than on commonality of race, ethnicity or nationality or religion"*.

From here, it can be concluded that the same dark tourism attraction can be interpreted by visitors in several ways, and can be narrated in several ways. And the way it is narrated/presented to visitors depends on the decisions of those in charge of the attraction and its content. According to Sternberg (1999, p.125):

> If composers of touristic experiences do choose multiple themes, they should do so through careful iconic assessment – they should select themes that are compatible, complementary, or purposely contrasting.

The author (Sternberg, 1999) points out that, when choosing multiple narratives for an attraction,

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1   All italics are the author's.

it is crucial to keep narrative coherence from beginning to end in the visitors' experience; coherence not between narratives, but in the structure in which they are told.

3. A dark tourism proposal for Lusophony

Following the initiatives of Lusophone countries to implement tourism projects that explore the common colonial history, it is important to find ways to serve the diverse views that exist about the events that connect all these countries. Dark tourism is presented here as a way to respond to this need, since it is open to multiple interpretations.

Portugal has gone from a system that allowed a single narrative of colonialism, to an era of multiple colonial and postcolonial narratives. Since the 1950s, and up to the revolution of 1974, Estado Novo's official discourse was that of Portugal as inclusive of peoples and cultures, hybrid, with a special aptitude for overseas colonization. With the fall of the dictatorship, the dismantling of the overseas empire and Portugal joining the European Union, perspectives on Portuguese colonialism and post-colonialism diversify. Some almost completely contradict the Lusotropicalist narrative, regarding Portugal as a repressive, violent, and racist colonizer with lingering neo-colonial illusions in a community formed with countries that it once colonized. Others continue to consider Portugal as a *sui generis* colonizer, since at the same time that it colonized, the country was subordinate to British power. Others yet recognize the importance of the cultural ties that were created between Portugal and its former colonies and regard them as a possibility of union with practical effects. The creation and dissemination of these narratives is now not a unique privilege of Portugal: narratives of resistance and courage and affirmation of national and cultural identities now reach us from the countries which were Portuguese colonies.

The fact is there are many ways to look at colonialism and post-colonialism in Portugal - and it is important to think of it in its complexity.

Tourism, especially dark tourism, can be a means to promote this reflection and thought. This type of tourism has to do with places of and related to death and suffering where tourist activity takes place. The events and circumstances of death and suffering behind the creation of these attractions are representative of the history and culture of the place, but at the same time, have global meanings and can be interpreted in multiple ways.

So, dark tourism is a privileged mediator of death and suffering, but it is also especially intended for consumption by individuals, in a commercial logic. Dark tourism attractions are not limited to conveying messages: they integrate them in a thematic strategy and process them so as to be easily assimilated by visitors.

This strategic definition of narratives may represent a single theming of dark tourism attractions, but, at the same time, therein lies their great potential as conveyers of multiple narratives: each attraction can be presented and consumed in various forms.

This position is illustrated by taking as an example the case of the Penal Colony of Tarrafal. The Penal Colony of Tarrafal, also called the Camp of Slow Death or Tarrafal Concentration Camp was established in April 23, 1936 by the Estado Novo on the island of Santiago (Cape Verde archipelago), in order to accommodate "those arrested for political and social crimes" (Câmara Municipal do Tarrafal, 2010) and was in operation until July 19, 1975 (Morais, 2011).

In 2000, the Penal Colony of Tarrafal was transformed into the Resistance Museum, with the support of the Portuguese Cooperation (Mendes, 2012). The museum works in "minimal conditions" (Mendes, 2012, p. 65), with essential tourist information, such as information panels about the field and the different rooms and sections where visitors can circulate. In addition to this information,

there are also panels with photographs and testimonies by former prisoners (Mendes, 2012), as well as lists with the names of all the inmates (Cabo Verde Contacta, 2011).

The Resistance Museum acts as a space of "symbolic compensation", seeking to reconstruct the memories of prisoners, regarded as victims of fascism (Mendes, 2012, p. 66). However, it lacks a narrative strategy that encourages discussion and debate in visitors: the Museum's effort on the reconstruction of memory is done in a disjointed manner with local people and with associations of camp survivors, and does not include narratives of resistance formed in Portugal and other Lusophone countries (Mendes, 2012).

Two key aspects to consider in a dark tourism policy for Lusophony can be inferred. One is that museums that explore aspects of the colonial past between Lusophone countries must contain a multiplicity of narratives produced in this context. The other is the need to involve individuals, universities and other organizations in the debate, in order to defining macro and micro strategies for dark tourism between and in Lusophone countries.

In 2009, an International Symposium commemorating the 35th anniversary of the closure of the camp and commemorative exhibitions were held at the Resistance Museum of Tarrafal (Mendes, 2012). These two initiatives represent two other important strategic elements in a dark tourism policy for Lusophony. International conferences can be privileged stages for the debate on colonialism and post-colonialism in Lusophony and the rest of the world, and on the means and ways to explore, configure and present the topic so as to stimulate discussion by individuals.

Traveling exhibitions, transiting between Lusophone countries and produced jointly by them, may also encourage reflection and multilateral debate.

However, the definition of a dark tourism policy for Lusophony is a challenge from the outset: first, it is necessary that the Portuguese-speaking countries understand that tourism in places of death and suffering (dark tourism) plays an important role for society and culture of the countries that make up Lusophony, by promoting discussion and debate on the events and contexts of death and suffering that originated the tourist attractions.

Nevertheless, it is up to those in charge of attractions and to policy makers to establish strategies that determine how dark tourism attractions are thematized and presented to the public. In the context of the countries that were part of the former Portuguese Overseas Empire, it is important to establish joint strategies, in order to give voice to a plurality of messages in such attractions.

Could it be possible to describe only the facts concerning an attraction, stripped of context, and let visitors integrate them in their own constructs? Is it better to set up thematic visits or interpretation packages for each attraction? Can the inclusion of individual testimonies about the places and events that led to dark tourism attractions be the solution for the purveyance of multiple narratives? The answer to these questions can only be obtained by conducting more research. For example, comparative and simple case studies will be required in order to identify best practices within and outside Lusophony and concretely realize how dark tourist attractions in Portuguese-speaking countries can be presented so as to stimulate discussion on every visitor. Indeed, it is intended, with dark tourism, to contribute to the construction of a common Lusophone memory and imaginary, on the basis of which the Other (all Others) may be recognized - an essential condition for constructing a real Lusophone community.

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