

THE DESIGN OF PORTUGUESE POLITICAL POSTER: TWO POLITICS, TWO DISCOURSES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present a history of the Portuguese political poster in two key moments of twentieth century Portuguese politics, the moment of the establishment of the 'Estado Novo' (or New State) i.e., Salazar's authoritarian and quasi-fascist dictatorship which ran from 1933-1974, and the period of the Revolution of April 25 of 1974, which overthrew the previous regime. The two distinct ideologies give rise to two contrasting modes of visual discourse. This is particularly evident in posters made in the two revolutionary moments (1933-1938 and 1974-76). These reveal ruptures in relation to the visual

discourses of posters made in the periods before and after these dates.

The paper shows how the posters offer a particular kind of lens on the two contrasting revolutionary moments; a way of looking at how the two revolutions attempted to communicate to and connect with the Portuguese people in whose name and one whose behalf—ostensibly in the first case, substantively in the second—the revolutions were undertaken. In terms of the understanding of activism and revolutionary graphics a contribution is made to understanding how revolutions of left and right contrastingly

present themselves—and how, through the use of poster, they evoke or extol particular kinds of political subjects and political orders.

INTRODUCTION

When looking at the production of Portuguese political posters designed throughout the 20th century, it is possible to identify differences in terms of the visual language they deploy, due not only to technological changes but also ideological factors. This is particularly true of political posters.

The paper will concentrate on posters made in these two moments looking in particular at the distinct genres that characterize the posters of each moment—the Nationalist Poster, the Religious Poster and the “Providência” poster in the 1930s (the last are posters extolling how the Estado Novo was improving the quality of life in Portugal) and, for the period 1974-76—Artists Poster, the Symbol Poster, and the Popular Poster.

Although the paper will take into account the available technology for production and reproduction of posters, the focus will be on the messages of text and image; on the visual arguments selected and deployed and on the ways in which the poster artists and designers involved negotiated the briefs they were given and how they assessed and tried to articulate the political circumstances they were working within. The contrasting iconographies of left and right, and the ways in which the posters present and articulate the underlying political ideologies are examined through some key instances and

examples¹.

1. THE POSTERS OF THE ‘ESTADO NOVO’ (1933-38)

1.1 CHANGING POLITICS

The Portuguese constitution of 1933² brought profound ideological changes, which were reflected in the political propaganda posters produced during the period. One of the measures taken by the new regime (the “Estado Novo” or “New State”) was the publication of the “Decalogue of the Estado Novo”, a document that was similar in concept to the Biblical “Ten Commandments”³, in that it laid out a series of ‘laws’ presenting the intentions and objectives of the regime. Another was the creation of the Bureau for National Propaganda (SPN or Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional) (1933), led by António Ferro⁴ (1895-1956). His proximity to the modernists meant that he was able to encourage artists to serve the regime’s objectives. Consequently, some of the most highly-respected artists of the period were involved in the reformulation and divulgation of the image of this new Constitution. Thus, a unique language was created, which glorified folk traditions and national symbols, using a local aesthetic and

¹ Were used two archives of posters: the National Library of Portugal (BNP – Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal) and the collection of Madeira Luís existing at the University of Aveiro (CML/UA).

² Under the authoritarian political regime known as the ‘Estado Novo’.

³ The Estado Novo strongly promoted Catholicism in Portugal

⁴ Writer, journalist and politician, who became responsible for the promotion of the Portuguese image.

specific iconography. Clearly distinguishable from what was being produced outside the country, the whole force of Portuguese identity was brought to bear in the promotion of a “politics of the soul” (Barbosa, 2008).

1.2 CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

Before the Estado Novo, political posters tended to be produced by typography, and were monochrome, with large quantities of text. Although lithography had appeared in Portugal in 1823, introduced by the artist Domingos António de Sequeira (1768-1837) (Costa, 1925), it only began to be used for the printing of cultural and commercial posters at the end of the 19th century. For some reason, the technology was not generally adopted for the political poster until 1933, when the Estado Novo effectively discovered that it could be used to transmit political messages in large-scale format with various colours. Thus, the portentous printed texts that characterised the posters of the previous period were abandoned as a whole new style of communication took over.

The use of lithography certainly served to promote the political regime, changing the discourse of the poster not only ideologically but also visually. Literacy rates were of course very low in Portugal at the time, and therefore images were more effective than words as a means of mass communication. Poster size also played an important part, and for the first time, political posters adopted large format (up to 116 cm in length, compared to the 50 cm or so maximum in

the previous regime), enabling them to compete with cultural and commercial posters in the public space.

1.3 CHANGING VISUAL COMMUNICATION

As I have already pointed out, the low literacy levels in Portugal meant that the regime needed to create a visual discourse that was simple, sober and austere, with simplified illustrations, in keeping with the principles divulged in their campaigns. Consequently, during this period and the next, posters (commercial and cultural, as well as political) became quite rigid in formal terms. Despite this, there continued to exist posters with more detailed descriptive representations. The three categories described below reflect this situation.

Nationalist Poster

The Estado Novo made intensive use of nationalist iconography, not only in posters but also in other artefacts, drawing upon references from Portuguese history and culture. In fact, such iconography became so common that it became an aesthetic model, described in the “Decalogue of the Estado Novo” in the following terms:

“(…) traditionalism is a salutary exaltation of the collective memory (...). Tradition is a legacy that we should conserve and add to, a lesson that has been passed down to us by those generations whose sacrifice gave us our Fatherland. It undoubtedly constitutes ‘the categorical imperative of History!’” (SPN, 193-).

The ideology of fatherland and nation was powerfully evoked through motifs taken from the national flag, whose design dated from around the time of King Manuel I (1495-1521); this consisted of blue escutcheons with bezants and gold castles on a red background, which are also included in the present flag) (Figs. 1 and 2). In that period of King Manuel, another flag was also used with a green background and the Cross of Christ in the centre (a symbol much used on Portuguese ships during the era of the Discoveries), and this too began to appear on posters of the Estado Novo, thereby glorifying one of the most important periods of Portuguese history (Fig. 2). The image of the female figure known as “The Republic” (created in 1910 with the overthrow of the constitutional monarchy that gave rise to the Republican regime) was also used to reinforce the sense of patriotism and emphasise the nationalist ideal (Fig. 2 and 3).



Fig. 1. João Ferreira. 1934. “Portuguese citizens, Vote!”. (74.4 cm X 99.5 cm). Poster printed with lithography at the Lith. de Portugal using four colours. BNP.



Fig. 2. Anonymous. 1934. “Patriots, Vote”. (99. cm X 74.2 cm). Poster printed with lithography at the Lith. de Portugal using four colours. BNP.



Fig. 3. Jorge Barradas. 1933. “Vote for the New Constitution”. (89.8 cm X 116 cm). Poster printed with lithography at the Lith. de Portugal using three colours. BNP.

The religious poster

As the Estado Novo strongly supported and promoted the Catholic faith, and had a powerful ally in the Church, Catholic icons were also used both explicitly and implicitly. The social importance of the family was emphasised with the famous “trilogy of national education – God,

Fatherland, Family –”⁵. An illustration of this can be found in a poster by Almada Negreiros (1893-1970) (Fig. 4) in which a female figure with her head covered holds a naked child, evoking the idea of the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus, and therefore appealing to the people’s religious and maternal sentiments. This image seems to subliminally translate the basic concept of the Estado Novo (“God, Fatherland, Family”), while at the same time reinforcing nationalist iconography with the use of the escutcheons from the Portuguese flag, arranged in a discrete design suggestive of a cross. As for the text, which reads “We want a strong State”, conceptually reflects part of Point 2 of the Decalogue – “Today, all can see how our circumstances have changed. Portugal is a Strong State” (SPN, 1930-).



Fig. 4. Almada Negreiros. 1933. “Vote for the New Constitution”. (90 cm X 116 cm). Poster printed with lithography at the Lith. de Portugal using three colours. BNP.

⁵ Phrase later included in “Salazar’s Lesson”, referring to a series of posters published in 1938, described below.

Another example is the poster by Martins Barata (1899-1970) (Fig. 5), where it is clear that the artist was working to a brief. This shows a happy family scene, with the father returning home after a day’s work, the mother cooking at the fireplace and the children playing. In addition to the large Cross of Christ that occupies a prominent position in the composition, we can also see that the son is dressed in the uniform of the Portuguese Youth, and that there are a number of artefacts scattered about the house that reflected traditionalist ideology. In the background, outside the house, we can catch a glimpse of a castle flying the Portuguese flag, symbolising the idea of the nation.



Fig. 5. Martins Barata. 1938. “Salazar’s lesson”. (111.5 cm X 78 cm). Poster printed with lithography at Bertrand (Irmãos) Ltd, using seven colours. BNP.

A reinterpreted version of the Cross of Christ also appeared in the posters used for the Campaign of National Assistance for Tuberculosis Sufferers (ANT – Assistência Nacional aos Tuberculosos) (Fig. 8). This poster evokes associations with the Church through a kneeling figure stretching its

arms heavenward, in an attitude of humility, veneration and supplication.



Fig. 6. Graça. 1934. “A.N.T.”. (89.9 cm X 120.2 cm). Poster printed with lithography at the Lith. de Portugal using two colours. BNP.

“Providence” poster

Point 4 of Part II of the Decalogue – “What is freedom” clearly illustrates this concept:

“With the declaration that man is born free, absurdity took over. For that is a lie, one that is simultaneously inhuman and grotesque. Inhuman, let us say. For is it not inhumane to abandon man to his fate under the pretext that he was born free, refuse him the bonds and benefits of social solidarity?! And it is also grotesque. For is it not grotesque to call a creature free who, from birth to adolescence, can only live with the protection, care and assistance provided first by his family, then by school, and always by the State?” (SPN, 193-).

The 1938 series of posters entitled “Salazar’s

Lesson”⁶ offers one of the best examples of how the Estado Novo depicted the significant change that was deemed to have occurred, not only in industry, with the idea of progress, but also in the quality of Portuguese social and cultural life with the welfare state. This was a State that claimed to defend the interests of the Portuguese people, or rather, to ‘take care’ of them in a protectionist manner (Fig. 7 to 9).



Fig. 7. Emmerico Nunes. 1938 . “Salazar’s lesson”. (111.5 cm X 78 cm). Poster printed with lithography at Bertrand (Irmãos) Ltd, using seven colours. BNP.



Fig. 8. Martins Barata. 1938 . “Salazar’s lesson”. (111.5 cm X 77.8 cm). Poster printed with lithography at the Lith. de Portugal using six colours. BNP.



Fig. 9. Martins Barata. 1938 . “Salazar’s lesson”. (111.5 cm X 78 cm). Poster printed with lithography at Bertrand (Irmãos) Ltd, using seven colours. BNP.

⁶ They were also affixed in primary schools in order to divulge the regime.

2. THE POSTERS OF THE REVOLUTION (1974-76)

2.1 CHANGING POLITICS

On 25th April 1974, a Revolution was launched by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA – Movimento das Forças Armadas), with the subsequent support of the general population, which succeeded in overturning the Estado Novo. Amidst the political and social turmoil of that period, the Committee for National Salvation (Junta de Salvação Nacional) was created to reorganise the country. After a series of demonstrations and confrontations, the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic was finally approved on 2nd April:

“The Constituent Assembly affirms the decision of the Portuguese people to defend national independence, guarantee the fundamental rights of citizens, establish the basic principles of democracy, ensure the rule of law in a democratic society, and open up the way for a socialist society, in respect of the will of the Portuguese people, with a view to constructing a freer, juster and more fraternal country” (Assembly of the Republic, 1976).

Finally – though only on 25th April 1976 - the first democratic elections were held, with the Socialist Party (PS) winning the most mandates, followed by the Democratic Popular Party (PPD – Partido Popular Democrático), the Democratic and Social Centre (CDS – Centro Democrático e Social) and finally the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP – Partido Comunista Português).

The instability experienced between 1974 and 1976 and the new political ideologies of each of

the parties involved in the election brought visual ruptures with the posters of the Estado Novo. Despite the ideological differences between the parties (which covered the whole political range from left to right), there were links between them – liberty, equality and fraternity – which became the buzzwords of the period, appearing in politicians’ speeches and in the new posters. These messages from this period were so forceful that posters began to be seen inside houses, as people started to collect them.

2.2 CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

For the revolutionary posters created between 1974 and 1976, photography and offset printing stood out as the production technologies of choice. Posters that were printed in offset were not only better quality, but also enabled photography to be widely used, something that had been unusual till then. But just as the adoption of lithography was delayed in the political poster under the Estado Novo, so the Revolutionary poster seemed to retard the use of offset, despite the fact that the technology had existed prior to the 1970s (it seems to have been adopted for the printing of posters during the 1950s) (Barbosa, 2011). Hence, we might conclude that, irrespective of the political ideology being transmitted, the political poster was late to take up new printing technologies. On this level, it is clear that the political poster was always more resistant to technological change than the cultural and commercial poster.

While lithography had allowed the printing of large-format posters, offset also increased the number of copies that could be made, with print runs of up to 250,000 copies. Consequently, political posters became very visible in public places, often completely covering the available surfaces, and would be regularly replaced when new ones were pasted over the top. This random affixation transformed the appearance of towns and cities, creating a certain visual chaos that was revelatory of the changing times where the rules of affixation were not respected.

2.3 CHANGING VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The political change also brought profound alterations in the content of the messages and in the way in which these were visually communicated. Now, the various political parties and organizations seemed to be concerned with glorifying freedom. In this period priority was given to a free discourse, in both written message and visual representations, where a synthetic-symbolic rhetoric and the presence of human figures were particularly valued. The different political classes were interested in communicating the importance of the public sphere and valuing it, and indeed, the posters revealed equality of circumstance with the interests of the People.

Art Poster

In the revolutionary period, artists felt compelled to design posters, not wanting to miss out on this important historical moment. Two of the best examples come from the painter Vieira da Silva

(1908-1992), whose posters are still considered icons of the revolutionary poster today; indeed, the poster shown in Fig. 11 was republished in 1994 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Revolution. Thus, artists were clearly attracted to the poster form, as a way of supporting and manifesting their appreciation for the political change that the country was going through.

The visual language used by Vieira da Silva in her posters (Fig. 10 and 11) is practically a direct transposition of her formal language in painting. In fact, like the language usually used in political posters, these examples steer clear of traditionalism, and moving closer to the kind of visual language used in the cultural poster. Artists also acquired a new interest in poster production in the wake of another dynamic that had been lost in the previous regime. The departure of António Ferro from the National Bureau for Information in 1949, and the policies practised by the Estado Novo around that time had discouraged many respected artists from producing posters, particularly after the 1950s and '60s, when there began to be less freedom of expression. Indeed, some (particularly left-wing sympathisers) were obliged to leave their country to avoid political persecution.



Fig. 10. Vieira da Silva. 1974 . "Poetry is in the street". (80 cm X 105 cm). Poster printed in offset by Neogravura. BNP.



Fig. 11. Vieira da Silva. 1974 . "25th April". (75 cm X 124 cm). Poster printed in offset by Neogravura. BNP.

Symbol Poster

The use of symbols on revolutionary posters marked a kind of modernity in terms of visual rhetoric, avoiding the traditional iconography of the previous regime. In fact, this was used right across the political spectrum by parties from left to right.

For the first time, iconicity began to appear in Portuguese political posters. Examples include: the hand making the "V" for victory sign (Fig. 12); the carnation – undoubtedly the most important symbol of 25th April (Fig. 13); the hammer, sickle, and star representing the Portuguese Communist Party (Fig. 14); the clenched left of the Socialist Party (Fig. 15). Visual communication was simple,

and there was a predominance of plain backgrounds, with the use of nationalist colours for the Armed Forces Movement, and warmer colours such as yellow, orange and, particularly, red for the Communists and Socialists.



Fig. 12. Anonymous. 1974 . "MFA". (38 cm X 111.5 cm). Poster printed in offset at the Casa da Moeda National Press using three colours. BNP.



Fig. 13. Marcelino Vespeira. 1974 . "MFA". (48 cm X 69 cm). Poster printed in offset. BNP.



Fig. 14. Anonymous. 1974 . "Portuguese Communist Party". (48 cm X 68 cm). Poster printed in offset. CML/UA.



Fig. 15. Anonymous. 1974 . “Socialist Party”. (45 cm X 68 cm). Poster printed in offset with two colours. BNP.



Fig. 16. Anonymous. 1976 . “Vote PPD”. (58.1 cm X 87.1 cm). Poster printed in offset by Mirandela & C.ª. CML/UA.

Curiously, the posters of parties located more to the right of the political spectrum tended to favour less iconic images. For example, the poster of the Popular Democratic Party bore an arrow (Fig. 16) while the Social and Democratic Centre had two arrows and a circle inscribed within a square, representing the symbol of the party (Fig. 17). These are interesting examples of visual communication, which go beyond the tendency for abstractionism. While the PPD used the colours of the national flag, the CDS (perhaps to attract more supporters) chose a version that was less clearly defined in terms of ‘political colour’, representing that pluralism through a rainbow. However, the fact that both parties used black in their posters would seem to indicate a degree of modernity in the visual discourse of the right (during the Estado Novo, that colour was more frequently used by left-wing parties).

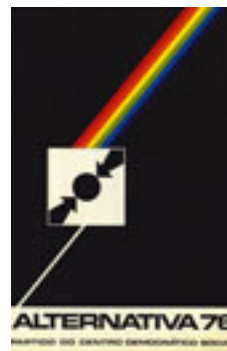


Fig. 17. Anonymous. 1976 . “Alternative 76”. (58 cm X 87.7 cm). Poster printed in offset by Lisgráfica. CML/UA.

Popular Poster

This type of poster shows not only the authorities’ proximity to the people, but also the concerns of the political parties for the more disadvantaged social classes, which had been most affected by the former regime. They show values such as companionship, sharing, equality, fraternity, happiness, peace and freedom, and depict objects from the visual lexis of revolutionary posters such as the hoe, hammer, carnation and gun (Fig. 18 to 22).



Fig. 18. João Abel Manta. [1975] . “MFA, people, people, MFA”. (42 cm X 72 cm). Poster printed in offset. BNP.



Fig. 19. João Abel Manta. [1975]. “The workers at the new bank open the door of the future to the people”. (47 cm X 60 cm). Poster printed in offset. BNP.



Fig. 20. Vieira da Silva. 1974 . “25th April”. (75 cm X 124 cm). Poster printed in offset by Neogravura. BNP.



Fig. 21. Anonymous. 1974 . “The people united will never be overcome”. (48 cm X 70 cm). Poster printed in offset. BNP.



Fig. 22. Sérgio Guimarães. 1974 . “Portugal 25th April 1974”. (78 cm X 116 cm). Poster printed in offset by Lisgráfica. BNP.

The posters depicted in Figures 21 and 22 stand out for two reasons. The first shows one of the most emblematic messages of the revolution “The people united will never be overcome”. The female figure is dressed in modern clothing and her apparent spontaneity suggests a greater degree of freedom than was evident in the sombre, static, pseudo-tranquil posters of the

previous regime. In the second example, a poor child in dirty ragged clothing is shown alone and defenceless, placing a carnation (symbol of the revolution) in the barrel of a gun. This is a powerful image, which deliberately plays upon the contrast between the weapon and the innocence of the child.

CONCLUSION

It would not be accurate to suggest that the Estado Novo created a unique visual communication to promote its image, for although there was unity in ideological terms, in practice, the images designed reveal a certain conceptual diversity, resulting from the artists' personal interpretations of the programme announced by the regime. This shows that, while the designers were clearly working to a brief, they nevertheless had a certain amount of freedom to express themselves, leading to a diversity of representations during this period.

However, despite this, the regime seems to have controlled the visual elements used (that is to say, the aspects necessary to establish communication). The opposite occurred during the revolutionary period. In those posters, the

content (brief) seems to have been chosen by the artists themselves, rather than by the various political parties that appeared at this time, with the exception, of course, of parties' symbols, which generally had important political roots. Despite the diversity of representations, there was clearly a tendency for simplification of form and communicational conciseness. The next step will be to study the interpretations and influences of individual authors in order to further our knowledge of the history of Portuguese poster design.

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