Panel tourism , ethnography and the patromonialisation of culture

Tourist patrimonalisation: ethnography and power in a Portuguese village

Key words: p; ethnography; bourgeoisie; tourism

Alte: a tourist village

In Alte, a village in the hinterland of the Algarve region with around 2000 inhabitants, the future, present and past are connected through heritage. And the heritage is connected to the local institutions of the village.

This paper presents a case study of 'localised heritage'[1], with the village of Alte taken as a regional example of a place with ethnographic authenticity. Its regional identification is consolidated through dominant discourses which distinguish it as a 'traditional', 'rural', typical' place. In particular, the official discourses[2] highlight a 'village with rural characteristics', where tourist activities should be encouraged as a means to stopping the rural exodus, the ageing of the population and the absence of any real rural activity. This apparent paradox has diverse causes.

On the one hand, in the regional sphere Alte represents an inland rural/rustic nucleus in contrast to the urban/sophisticated nuclei of the coast, a duality which is sometimes complementary, sometimes in opposition, and in which the identity of the place was formed (Bastos,1993; Magalhães,1988). However, since the 1960s, these interdependencies have been

[1] For Llorenç Ptrats and Agustin Santana (2005) there is a difference between 'local heritage' and 'localised heritage'. The former is merely to do with the local community without any appeal to tourism, whilst the latter is necessarily associated with tourist consumption of the local heritage. Alte can be considered to be an example of the latter case as it has been involved in a long process of objectivisation of the past that antecipates the most recent discoveries of heritage in Poruguese rural environments (Peixoto : 2002)

[2] This discourse has been institutionalised through diverse Territorial Planning programmes, which are the regulatory documents of regional development.

affected by the explosion of the tourism industry along the coast: the inland areas have thus lost their relative importance.

Consequently, the inland areas of the Algarve, which had been forgotten, have, since the 1980s, become a sort of 'reserve' (Urry, 1997). Both local residents and tourism have reinvested in these parts of the region a sense of the 'authentic', 'rustic' side of the Algarve, in a new complementary relationship. Alte has been rediscovered as a tourist destination. Rediscovered, because its tourism vocation had in fact already been apparent before this movement towards the 'backstage' of the region (Goffman, 1993).

Tourist practices in Alte are mostly excursionist practices. The village is visited on a daily basis by tourists who are brought there by guides or by guidebooks, who seek it out as a place where the cultural roots of the region – as an ancient rural landscape – are preserved. Although there are specific tourism-related events (festivals, folkloric dances etc) as well as a 'gastronomic' branch of tourism, it is through the practices of the excursionists that the visual consumption of the village as an ethnographic object is best revealed.

One day I asked the driver of a tourist transport service that provides excursions why he stopped in Alte. He replied that the tourists loved to go there just to "wander about". And indeed they do just that - they wander about, alone or in groups, clicking their cameras, in the oldest part of the village, looking at the houses, the streets, the squares and the village 'Springs' (a public garden area of the village along the banks of the small river that runs through the village). They wander into the craft shops and sit outside the most typical-looking cafés (Sousa, 1999). These activities show two complementary sides of tourist practices: the visual consumption that the tourists engage in and the supply of a landscape for this very act of consumption (Urry, 1990).

At the entrance to the village, the tourist is informed by signs that he or she is entering a 'cultural village'. One sign shows the image of a local poet who paid homage to his birthplace; another shows a local folklore group.

The village has the cohesive appearance of a settlement built at the foot of the four hills that surround it. Built on a slope, with white, compact houses on the banks of a small river, it is almost stereotypical of southern, Mediterranean villages (Ribeiro, 1987). The two entrances to the village lead the visitor straight to the important places. One goes to the Church Square, the social centre of the village, surrounded by cafés and handicraft shops, whilst the other goes to the '*Fontes'* or 'Springs', the 'visiting room' of Alte (local opinion), the recreation and leisure space

which has also been made into a heritage site on the banks of the river. Here, all the rustic decoration is apparent under the shade of leafy trees that are not in fact very common in the region but reflect the epic poems written by the poet Cândido Guerreiro in homage to his birthplace. Between these two places runs a main access street, and off that street are other narrower, criss-crossing streets which are paved with the traditional cobbles. The houses are painted white, with flowers in the doorways and windows, giving an overall traditional, cheerful, bucolic look. A bucolic harmony in tranquil streets which is not common in the neighbouring villages where the buildings are more spread out or there is an absence at least of such a 'traditional' spectacle. The signs appear to the visitor as symbols of authenticity and remembrances of the trip (MacCanell, 1976). Alte is, in the greater landscape of its surroundings, an ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1998) which affirms itself as such from the tourist's very first contact with the place.

Fractional visions of the ethnographic village

This singular differentiation of the village can be traced to a continuous policy of investments in its re-construction, which converted it into a symbolic rural space, an 'imagined space' (Anderson, 1991), driven by historic, economic and political contexts as well as networks of institutionalised elites who converted and are still converting the ethnography, via the village heritage, into 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1999).

A combination of three events led to the re-conversion of the village into an imagined ethnographic space. In all three the same thing is happening as in other places in Portugal, which according to Anico and Peralta leads to a 'heritage fixing of places' when "the places are submitted to economic transformations, which are often rapid and traumatic, and which derive from the abandonment of traditional work patterns, especially in agriculture, and when these places are also subject to large decreases in population associated with the exodus of people and activity from the inland areas of the country" (2005:31).

The first event was the result of the break in the market agriculture economy, particularly for the export of fruit, and a domestic industry of artisan products. The crisis provoked by the 1929 crash, along with the national economic crisis, seriously affected the biggest producers of

Alte, who became decapitalised. Unable to restore the economic power which they had enjoyed up till then, many opted to leave the village. With them went the certain amount of economic and cultural splendour that this Republican bourgeoisie had lent the village[3]. The 1930s were marked by economic recession for the bourgeoisie and poverty for the workers. In 1938, the village entered the 'Most Portuguese Village' competition, an ethnographic competition launched by the New State. The aim of the competition was to find, in each region, a 'model' rural village which would reflect the values of the Regime (Brito, 1982) and create an 'imaginary rural nation' that besides having hegemonic national objectives would also create models for supporting the development of tourism. The competition was an initiative of the National Service of Information, where tourism and State political propaganda overlapped.

Alte was selected to represent the Algarve. The choice of the village was associated with the lyric poetry of Cândido Guerreiro, a member of the regional elite who was personally involved in the event. The competition, which is still widely remembered today, took the role of a founding event, "inventing tradition" (Hobsbawn, 1984). Due to this event alone, the village became the object of a long process of typification as a rural, rustic, poetic façade, whose spaces became moulded by the dominant representations of popular or ethnographic culture. A new bourgeoisie who had appropriated the local institutions substituted the scholarly and salon culture created by the Republican bourgeoisie for a popular culture fixed by the ethnography of the Regime.

The second event resulted from the mass emigration of the population to 'flee poverty' between the 1950s and the 1970s. This led to the collapse of the long-term rural structure (Braudel, 1985) which had been based on a plentiful labour force and a lack of mechanicalisation. In this climate of economic and demographic decline, the reification of the village as an ethnographic object started to become cemented. The competition village had gained fame in the region as a traditional space, reflected also in the new look which the various works undertaken around the village had given it. At the end of this period Alte was consolidated as a tourist destination and became a symbolic space.

However, with the 1974 revolution and the subsequent democratisation of the country, Alte went from being a good model of traditionalisation to a bad one, in particular through the

[3] The Republican elites in power in Alte between 1910 and 1930 represented the erudite culture adhered to by Cândido Guerreiro, the poet, lawyer and President of the Municipal Council (Sousa, 2005)

folklore group which had been formed. What had been an authentic ethnographic example was now a false one. Although this issue had in fact arisen from external forces, it became a source of confrontation among local institutional powers in the process of succession of new groups of village ‘governors’.

The social morphology of the village recomposed itself as did its ways of life. The agricultural activity began to diversify and took on a business structure. The old ties to the land diminished and became more individualised. Centres of services and leisure now appeared to be the coordinating forces of local life. A new technical bourgeoisie established itself and began to recuperate the ‘authentic traditions’; an urban bourgeoisie marked by a ‘nostalgia for the past’ which tried to regenerate the received ethnographic inheritance. The ‘research’ into the ‘authentic’ led to crystallised memories which in turn sustained the new ‘heritage activations’ (Anico, 1995) marked by new aesthetic and museological appreciations.

Heritage Management: Local Ethnographers

When I began my field work in 1998, the issues of preservation and relativisation of the village of Alte were the target of vehement clashes between its governors. In question was the ‘Revitalisation of Alte’ programme which, following local protests had been established by the central administrative body of the local district, the Loulé Municipal Council. The village was characterised by the programme as follows:

“The village of Alte has very particular characteristics and a very particular identity in the context of inland villages; it is one of the most typical villages and as such it is important to highlight and give value to it as a whole, including the preservation of its traditional architecture and the beauty of its natural landscape” (Loulé Municipal Council, 1997)

The extensive ‘Plan for the Revitalisation of Alte’ aimed to convert the village essentially into a leisure space through three main projects: the appropriation of natural spaces of scenic value, the monumentalisation of the village and the museologisation of its memories, and the opening up to the outside world with the development of its tourism and hospitality

infrastructures for hospitality. The debate amongst the old and the new village governors focused on these aspects, but whilst apparently uniting efforts in face of the outside world as local opinion leaders, internally there was conflict on many fronts.

Essentially I can point here to two groups: the ‘generation in power’ which appeared after the Revolution and the ‘generation in decline’ (Lison-Tolosana, 1982) which had been present since the New State.

The ‘generation in power’ – university-educated – installed themselves in the formal institutions from which they began to play an active role in the folklorisation of the village and the defence of its heritage. Their recognition as ethnographic authorities became consolidated through this role, in the re-configuration of traditions (folklore, festivals and other cultural events) above all through a new sense of aesthetics, adapting traditions to new stageings marked by ‘civility’ and ‘good taste’ (Silverman, 1975). The legitimisation of their power, beyond their professional status and functions, was evident in their abilities to lead the processes of re-traditionalisation. As a consequence they gained the statute of ‘devotees’ (those who work for the good of the community without personal gain).

The creation of the village as a symbolic arena via the local institutions, led by its governors and its social networks, was always presented as a disinterested action of investment for the common good. But as Bourdieu (196) demonstrates, disinterested acts are illusionary as the investment necessary for these acts implies the notion of ‘interest’, motivation and intention on the part of the investors. The ‘interest’ in fact confers divine grace and the protagonism in the reconstruction of the ethnographic local heritage can be seen as a ‘mask’ of this same power (Cohen, 1993).

There is a collective conscience of the privileges conceded by the control of the ethnographic village. It is thus that the ‘generation in decline’ is now openly criticised: “Mr Vieira was very clever […] he knew how to govern, the money that he controlled […] do you think it all went to the Springs?” Nevertheless, he was also a man who presented himself as someone who worked all his life for the ‘good of Alte’, that is, as a ‘devotee’.

In truth, the profits and the benefits of José Vieira, the ‘leader’ during the period of the New State, were above all of a symbolic and political nature. His social practices as local architect, interlocutor of the regime and central figure of the bourgeois networks meant that he was not only a ‘man of the regime’, but also a ‘guardian of tradition’ (Giddens, 2000), and as

such became a symbol of the village itself. On the other hand, although 'power and knowledge' (Foucault, 2000) had legitimised his intervention in the village, these very attributes also shaped him as a social subject who was possessed by the logic of the game that he gave himself over to. The utilitarian reading clashes with the fact that the "agents who are well-adjusted to the game are possessed by the game and without a doubt even more so the better they control it […] one of the privileges of having been born inside a game is that of being spared of cynicism, for in its place is the spirit of the game" (Bourdieu, 1997:108).

José Vieira, now more than 90 years old, had the statute of consultant and was as such the venerable elder whom the youngest villagers asked for help, particularly regarding memories of the past. Son of a Republican, he nonetheless delineates his own attitudes: "The Republicans like my father were very ardent. I am a moderate man". It was thanks to this moderation and to the social and cultural capital that he had acquired from his contacts with the highest bourgeoisie that his father served, that he was called upon to participate in the local 'Junta' (parish council) and from this position to prepare for the 'Most Portuguese Village' competition. It was up to him to discover the traditions "that were lost and forgotten, since the Republicans didn't want to know about those things". A few years later, when he became President of the Junta, he began a long process of transformation of the village with two main objectives: the 'improvement' and the 'embellishment' of Alte. In other words, a process of aestheticisation and modernisation of the village behind a traditional façade. The 'embellishment' presupposed a traditionalist approach based on the 'gathering' of ethnographic 'information' from which he transformed the village into an aesthetic amalgam of diverse urbanistic features which became emblematic. This ethnographic information came to him via the support of the National Service of Information, which was maintained beyond the organisation of the competition or the support of local institutions. The improvements (repairing the streets, the façades of the houses, the creation of Squares, flights of steps, niches, walls, green spaces) created a new spatial and social cleavage in the village.

> "Paving of Church Street from the bottom where the Crédito Agrícola bank is to the old house of Mr Ramos; paving of Pisadoiros Street from the house of Mr Joaquim Simões Moço to the house of the widow of Manuel Palma Vieira; paving of Serra Lane from the Martins Canhoto house to the house of the widow of Manuel da Palma Vieira. Repairing of the macadam surface of João de Deus Street, from the house of

> Mr João Dias de Sousa to the house of Mr António Lúcio Sousa, at the Bridge […] Paving of the Square in Barroca Street" (JFA (Alte Parish Council), Minutes of 31 December 1943).

As we can see, the instructions for paving the streets are very precise, naming the houses of certain residents. The houses of the most prestigious families in the village, those who contributed economically to their repair, extended the social difference from the private space of their homes to the public space of the village.

Already in the 1950s there was work being done on the widening of the streets – "they are to be widened to the walls of the fronts of the houses" in "negotiation with the owners"[4]. This process, described as being 'for the good of the village' and with the agreement of the owners, was finally contested. "You see over there, the Moreira's house, well nothing was done there and that's why there's a bend in the street there; now *we* lost part of our land, which wasn't much in the first place. We don't even have a yard, and they didn't want to sell me a bit from next door" (Joana, worker, 58 years old). Joana believes the process was meant to benefit or protect "the rich". If the streets of the richest or most bourgeois houses - with two floors, and bordering ashlars around the windows and doors (these features of exterior decoration were very distinguishing) – were widened, landscaped with trees and hanging plant baskets, and embellished with cobblestone paving, others were ignored, such as the lane "round the back" where the most underprivileged lived in old sties and haylofts (these streets were only improved after the 1974 revolution). As the tourist promotion of the village began in that decade, local beauty was associated with the local bourgeoisie and the foreigners they wanted to attract, the tourists.

Ultimately, this ethnography of 'frontstages' and 'backstages' (Goffman, 1993), which was influenced by the official ethnographic propaganda[5] created, at the local level, a differentiation sustained by the authority of José Vieira, President of the body of local power. He in turn represented the power not only of the State, but also of the local elites with whom he

[4] Many of them lost a small porch-type structure at the front, between the street and the house, and the façades of the houses came right onto the street. This was a fashion which began in the Algarve in the 1930s ; the façade of the house was enriched as i twas exposed to the public space, whilst the collective spaces inside the house were withdrawn towards the back.

[5] The regime gave the rural villages corporative bodies called Casas do Povo. These bodies regularly received a publication (Mensário das Casas do Povo) in which ethnographic features about festivals, customs, architecture and so on disseminated ethnographic knowledge (Melo, 1997; Sousa, 2005)

established networks which legitimised his position and the long process of transformation to which the village was subjected.

In the following decades, returning emigrants who wanted to invest their savings in improving the family houses in the centre of the village brought new conflicts. Given the small size of each of the poorest houses, they opted to buy adjoining houses, transform former hay barns into residences and, in most cases, to build another floor. In the course of these transformations, not only were the old façades lost but also the houses were altered in size and in the use of building materials which put into question the traditionalist status of the village. New quarrels began. “Do you think this is right? The house belongs to my sister who was there in France working and why can’t she chane things as she likes? Who is this man…to tell us we can or can’t put the old roof on? If it was his house, maybe that would be alright! So now a person isn’t the owner of their own house?” (Laurinda, 49).

Several attempts to moderate these transformations were taken up by the local Junta, where some of the members adopted norms to prevent this type of modernisation, ‘attending to the tradition of Alte’. The son of José Vieira came back from Lisbon, having graduated in Fine Arts, with a passion for the traditions of his birthplace. However, the fact that he was his father’s son and the defence of his inheritance in the public arena gave him little credibility amongst the village population. Only the arrival of the new generation to power would permit the ethnographic order to be re-established. Between one generation and the next the alliances are based on mutual uses but also allow a contested collective identity to be rehabilitated.

From the 1980s onwards, the bourgeoisie gave their own example. They invested in the live stageing and sacralisation of memories. The stageings and folkloric festivals multiplied in the village, with ever-growing groups taking part. The collective memories were shaped in the name of tradition. The toponymy of the village became scattered with ‘old’ names which pointed to figures or activities from the past; the village history was re-written, creating a mythical time based on which tourist itineraries were set up (Raposo, 1994).

The local population, besides having become, among the clientele of the governors, actors in diverse celebrations of the community, have also participated in the process via the investment in tourism, which has appeared as a new factor in economic development. It is above all in commerce- restaurants, shops, cafés – that a decorative panoply (photographs and traditional artefacts) has made these meeting points an extension of the outside image of the village.

The chimney of Alte: from ethnographic object to museum object

The chimney of the Algarvian house is held up as a feature of the "richest decorative exuberance… some examples can be considered as authentic motifs of popular art" (AAP, 1988:230). The chimney, which is pointed to by geographers and historians as a regional emblem, has been used since the 1960s as a symbol by the Regional Tourist Board, who turned it into a logo. Its identification as an ethnographic object for the tourism marketing of the region had in fact already begun during the era of the New State. Its individualisation arrived in Alte, through the monthly publications of the *Casa do Povo* as well as through the regional press which disseminated the chimney as an object of tourist interest. In Alte the intervention was direct. At the end of the 1950s, when the Parish Council announced its plans to promote Alte as a tourist destination, a subsidy was given by the National Service of Information to build chimneys in Alte.

A traditional chimney was placed atop a small cottage in order to re-inspire a taste for this decorative element. Thus a feature of 'popular' architecture was launched in the village, which in fact had until then only been seen on the wealthiest houses whose owners were able to bear the costs of a decorative feature that was hand-made to order by specialised craftsmen and which, due to the craftsmanship involved, certainly did not come cheap (Correia, 1989).

In Alte it was primarily in the most differentiated houses that the most intricately worked and exuberant chimneys were found. The workers cottages were small, normally of one floor only with just two rooms, and with plain exteriors with no decorative signs of wealth. With the return of the emigrants, who habitually transformed their houses, and with the arrival of electricity and gas, the chimneys started to lose their utilitarian functions – i.e. heating and cooking – and began instead to have a merely aesthetic, symbolic function in the sphere of tourism. Many of the original chimneys in fact were substituted by merely decorative cement chimneys which were now made in stereotypical moulds. In the 1970s there was a proliferation of handicraft shops which sold pre-fabricated cement chimneys which were eagerly bought up for decorating both residents' homes and tourist houses.

Yet the search for authenticity would still have to be divulged by the new bourgeoisie in power. In 1994, this bourgeoisie had a chimney put up on the roof of his restored home with the inscription «Replica of 1832 – Edmundo». Consequently the recreation of the 'authentic' chimney, with the identification of the original model and the craftsman, became an element of social distinction and made mimicry acceptable.

Nowadays, various initiatives of traditionalist 'development' are visible in the village. For example, the television aerials, evident signs of modernity, have been remade in fibre optics so as not to visually pollute the landscape; green spaces have been recuperated along the riverbanks to enlarge the leisure zones and a waterfall has been added; a nobleman's house ('House of the Counts of Alte') has been taken over as a museum project and the recuperation of its chimney is the most symbolic sign of the new transformation of the village.

The 'House of the Counts of Alte' was in fact a house which was the same as any other traditional house of the village, with a very plain exterior. Although it was somewhat bigger than most of the houses, oral tradition has it that it was used for many things and not just as a residence. Today it has been turned into a museum and library. It underwent some important building work, of which the recuperation of its chimney was the most symbolic. Contrary to many of the internal and external features, this was maintained in its original form. The architect opted to distinguish this preserved feature by encasing it in glass. Thus the most traditional element is fully highlighted. The architect justified this separation by claiming it is a new revitalisation which "separates the old… crystallised in space", without impeding the "introduction of contemporary elements" in the restoration process. Here we have a new 'revitalisation' which, according to the architect, opposes "fictitious Alte" made of "prostheses".

From the point of view of local acceptance, the work appears as something unique which is more like a montage brought in from the outside and, for the first time, which does not lend itself to ethnographic readings. In place of the symbol of popular culture, it has become merely a symbol of time.

Final note

From dissimulation to exhibition, the course of the Alte chimney represents the course of the transformations and dominant representations of the local identity, reconstructed in such a way as to turn the village into a tourist attraction. The role of ethnography has been, via the

direct intervention of local ethnographers and indirectly through the ethnography of the political regime, determining. Because of this, it became a capital of power, an imperative of the dominant elites.

The conflicts between the traditionalists and the modernisers (Briggs, 1996) are not only conflicts in time, but also reflect a process of transformation. In both cases, rural heritage has been reduced to urban heritage, evading the end of a broad, agrarian, social rural heritage in a broad sense (Chiva, 1995). It is a cultural objectification which recreates the place allowing the dominant elites to be recognised, internally and externally, through tourist consumption. Tourism thus becomes an instrument of the legitimisation of power which exalts a local identity, made into a landscape spectacle.

The heritage repertoire is always a social construction that tries to create an 'identificational fiction' (Peralta, 2006). Like any fiction, it is open to multiple identities. Heritage is in itself a plural resource. Symbolically it is subject to multiple interpretations and uses, but these are always framed by specific historic contexts which not only attribute new meanings, but also mark in each era the limits of its plasticity.

The last process of conversion of the chimney, taken as identifying heritage, shows the end of a long cycle of ethnographic masking transformed by the power of technical information from the monument specialist. Having crystallised the chimney, it is now being subjected to a monumentality which confines it to a static representation, in face of the many ethnographic re-appropriations which have taken place. Perhaps it is history which domesticates the monument (Fabre, 2000) and the social ethnographic imagination.

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