


Chapter 9

António Ferro's Cultural Diplomacy: Mediating Iberian Relations Between Portugal and Spain (1920s–1940s)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how António Ferro acted as a mediator and cultural diplomat between Portugal and Spain from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. Despite a long-standing history of cultural and political estrangement – marked by Portuguese resistance to Iberianism and anti-Castilian sentiment – moments of rapprochement emerged, often driven by intellectual and political initiatives. As director of Portugal's National Propaganda Secretariat, Ferro played a central role in these efforts, working to foster cultural exchange between the two countries. The chapter focuses on his initiatives to promote Portuguese culture in Spain, while also examining the broader context of cultural relations during this period. It highlights how Ferro's actions contributed to a brief period of cultural alignment. The analysis concludes that Ferro's departure in 1949 marked a significant decline in these relations, coinciding with a resurgence of historical Portuguese reservations and anti-Spanish sentiment.

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INTRODUCTION¹

This chapter investigates the role of António Ferro as a cultural agent and mediator between Portugal and Spain from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. The analysis focuses particularly on Ferro's efforts after 1933, when he became director of the *Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* [National Propaganda Secretariat, later renamed the National Secretariat of Information in 1944], under the Portuguese *Estado Novo* [New State]. During the 1930s and 1940s—a period that, despite historical reservations, saw a degree of openness to cultural cooperation—Ferro sought to promote a rapprochement between the two Iberian nations. The main objective of this chapter is to provide a detailed analysis of his initiatives, examining how they were shaped by the political and ideological tensions of the time, as well as by the broader historical context of the dynamics within Iberia. It also considers the impact of these efforts on cultural relations and their role in mitigating the long-standing estrangement between Portugal and Spain.

Indeed, the historical backdrop of Iberian relations was characterized by mutual distrust, and a climate of suspicion and estrangement, rooted in the historical legacy of Iberianism—the notion of a unified Iberian Peninsula—fostered by Spain.² In Portugal, as António Pedro Vicente (2003) points out, “Iberism almost always encountered strong resistance”, supported by a nationalistic vision that emphasized the distinct cultural and political identity of the Portuguese people, and “never transcended, in terms of social influence, beyond a small nucleus of intellectuals and politicians” (p. 47). This (occasional) intellectual support can be observed, for example, in the early 19th century. Following the French invasions, the transfer of the Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro, and the independence of Brazil, Iberianism, as Pereira (2018) notes, “took on new contours and supporters”, and “some argued that the country’s survival depended on a close alliance with Spain” (p. 955). Nonetheless, Portuguese nationalism resorted to the theory of the irreducibility of the two peoples, evoking the “antiquity of the Portuguese State, with defined borders”, which was “embodied in a people that was culturally, mentally, and ethnographically different from the other inhabitants of the Peninsula” (Pereira, 2000, p. 102) and a history that proved the uniqueness of the Lusitanians. In this sense, the Peninsular union was identified in Portugal with “the death of the homeland, the annihilation of nationality, and a future of oppression and tyranny” (Pereira, 2018, p. 956).

As the 20th century progressed, tensions between Portugal and Spain continued to shape their relationship, particularly in the wake of the establishment of the Portuguese Republic in 1910. The *Spanish danger* was revived, fueled by events such as the exile of Portuguese monarchists in Galicia and the annexationist policies of King Alfonso XIII. In the 1930s, with the rise of the Popular Front under Manuel Azaña and later, with the extreme-right *Falange*, these fears of Spanish

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