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Abstract

Memories as well as cultural patrimony are multifaceted fields and they are exposed to social construction processes, especially from people's and group's interests. Seeking to understand them from a historical point of view that recognizes them as a space for selection and disputes of what should be remembered or forgotten, we expose and analyze the case of the Prestes Column Memorial; located in Santo Angelo district in the Northwest region of Rio Grande do Sul, where important events happened in the 1920's decade that gave origin to the Prestes Column march. After more than 70 years a Memorial was implanted, generating disputes and production of representations for the legitimacy of the past, which resulted in a construction process of the memory and of the created memory place.

Keywords: Memory, Heritage, Disputes, Prestes Column

This paper is based on the author's Doctoral research in History at the Federal University of Santa Maria, Brazil.

1 Introduction

Memory as well as heritage, the latter one understood by François Hartog (2015, p.193) as its alter ego, are above all processes of social construction that evidence how much the past is turned not only into history, but also into memories and created memory places that can be recognized as expressions of the cultural heritage.

In this context, we understand the fields of memory and heritage as an universe of ideological, political and symbolical disputes and of social representations of the past; attempting to comprehend how memory and heritage are socially constructed from interests and of the present that bring into scene social groups that have different interpretations in concern to events and characters of the past. Thus, memory is also a field of litigation capable of producing clashes for legitimacy, aiming to remind and ratify or to make silent and deny it.

This way, we treat these matters analyzing the case of the Memorial Prestes Column, launched at the district of Santo Angelo, in the northwest region of Rio Grande do Sul in 1966, based on the events of Prestes Column in the 1920's decade, that had important outcomes in this city and region. The Prestes Column was a march throughout the countryside in opposition to the leading of the presidents Artur Bernardes e Washington Luís, moving for about twenty five thousand kilometers in two years and three months, in between October 1924 and February 1927.

The idealization and implantation of the Prestes Column Memorial was a process that involved disputes among local political groups. These, at the same time recognized and denied the importance of Prestes Column in Santo Angelo, especially influenced by their ideological basis that understood the past of Prestes Column or of Luiz Carlos Prestes militancy, his main leadership, in distinct ways.

That being so, these groups represented the past of both Luiz Carlos Prestes Column and of the Prestes Column Memorial according to their interests, legitimizing the Memorial as a space of memory and heritage or denying its importance for the city. Through means of representation, especially local means of communication, there was a past to be remembered and at the same time to be forgotten.

Thus, we verified that the Prestes Column Memorial was a socially constructed place of memory, based in facts from the past that ended up promoting disputes for legitimacy, being it of the past itself or of the Memorial's as a place of memory and heritage, evidencing how much the Memory constitutes itself in social construction.

2 The Prestes Column in Northwestern Rio Grande do Sul and the implantation of the Prestes Column Memorial

The Prestes Column was an important rebel movement in the 1920s during the destabilization process of the political system of the First Republic (1889 - 1930). In the Northwestern region of the Rio Grande do Sul state, especially in the district of Santo Angelo, the rebel movement which gave origin to the Prestes Column was articulated and organized by Luiz Carlos Prestes. Prestes, who was then a captain engineer of the Army, had been moved to the city after the military riots that occurred in July of 1922 in Rio de Janeiro, during the Tenent Movement. Such movement is historically known as Tenentism, since its participants were mostly Army Tenants and Captains (PRESTES, 1997, p. 69).

In Santo Angelo, Luiz Carlos Prestes took the leadership of the rebel actions in October of 1924, as of other uprisings against the government that began in July of the same year, especially in São Paulo. In 1925, rebels from Rio Grande do Sul and from São Paulo got together in Parana and from then on a movement against president Artur Bernardes was formed. It had as its main objective to dismiss him from power and promote what they so called the moralization of the Brazilian politics. The movement started out a march through the countryside of Brazil, which lasted for two years and three months, in between October of 1924 to February of 1927 - wandering through twenty five thousand kilometers and going through all regions of the country until it went into exile in Bolivia (Prestes, 1997).

After more than seventy years from the end of Prestes Column, it was launched in December of 1996, by the initiative of the public administration of the major of Santo Angelo, Adroaldo Loureiro, who belonged to the Democratic Workers Party (PDT in Brazil) and counting with the collaboration of the family of Luiz Carlos Prestes second marriage to Maria do Carmo Ribeiro Prestes, the Prestes Column Memorial (Fig. 1); a space dedicated to reminding, representing and demarcating the city from where the Prestes Column had left in 1924.



Fig. 1. Santo Angelo's former train station building which holds nowadays the collection of the Prestes Column Memorial. Source: Amilcar Guidolim Vitor, 2016.

The Memorial and its collection were implanted in the old building of Santo Angelo's train station launched in 1921. The initiative of choosing the building to hold the Memorial was linked to the idea that the space already represented a cultural importance to the district due to its heritage-listing by a district law in 1984. As there wouldn't be any resources for the construction of a proper building for the Memorial, the old station was restructured to receive the Prestes Column and Luiz Carlos Prestes collection.

A monument was also inaugurated in the entrance of the city (Fig. 2) in honor to Luiz Carlos Prestes, designed by the architect Oscar Niemeyer. Inspired by a meeting with the major of Santo Angelo, Adroaldo Loureiro, in Rio de Janeiro, Niemeyer committed himself to the project. The fact that one of the greatest architects of Brazil's history was the author of that work was one of the arguments used by the idealizers of the project to reinforce the importance of the Prestes Column Memorial for the city of Santo Angelo.



Fig. 2. Monument honoring the Prestes Column at the Santo Angelo district entrance, designed by the architect Oscar Niemeyer. Source: Amilcar Guidolim Vitor, 2018.

The idealization and creation of the Prestes Column Memorial, had as its objectives according to its idealizers, to remind and to honor the rebel events of 1924 in Santo Angelo that gave origin to the Prestes Column and the political importance of Luiz Carlos Prestes as a political figure. As it was divulged at that time:

this historical and cultural space has as its objective to honor and to rescue one of the most striking facts in the history of Brazil, serving as a reference for its knowledge and promotion (Tavares, 1996, p. 04, our translation).

Also with the creation of the new place of memory in the district, there were economic objectives by means of tourism believing it would project Santo Angelo nationally. Predicting the cultural advantages of the Prestes Column Memorial, the press from Santo Angelo made a projection of how the location would be useful.

Formed by the two works of art and a complete museum, Santo Angelo's Memorial will become a compulsory visit for a great number of people who wish to know more and more about Prestes history (Jornal das missões, 1996, p. 02, our translation).

Especially the newspaper 'Jornal das Missões', owned by Mayor Adroaldo Loureiro's family, celebrated the benefits the Prestes Column Memorial would bring to the city of Santo Angelo. These benefits were not only related to the city's cultural development through the valorization of the past in a new place of memory, but, essentially, it was about economic advantages and interests due to the development of tourism in the city, adding new points of touristic references to the district.

The city of Santo Angelo is also known by its past of Jesuit-Guarani missions from the XVIII century, with the foundation of the San Angel Custodio Reduction in 1707. Despite the fact that there are no architectural remainings of the Reduction in the city, great part of tourism rotates around this past.

At first, the Jesuit-Guarani events from Santo Angelo's past were the ones that could bring benefits, especially economic ones, through tourism. However, there was the perception that the histories linked to the Prestes Column and to the image of Luiz Carlos Prestes, at his passings through the district, could also be represented and reminded, especially with the establishment of a patrimonial expression attached to this history. An example of this fact is given by Gládis Pippi Tavares, coordinator of the district Museum of Santo Angelo at the time of the PrestesColumn Memorial implementation and one of the people involved in the project.

The Monument architectural design at the city's entrance, for those who still don't know it, was a donation of the architect Oscar Niemeyer, the only work in the south of this country from someone who is considered by whoever understands about it a genius of architecture in the XX century. A reason that for itself, without considering the historical fact that motivated its realization, is already an architectural landmark for the Rio Grande do Sul and for sure it is going to multiply, in a medium and long term, the touristic flow (whoever thinks that our tourism will survive just from the references of the Jesuit period is totally mistaken [...]) (Tavares, 1997, p. 8, our translation).

In her article, Gladis highlights that the monument projected by Niemeyer would add in terms of touristic points to the city, increasing the flow of tourists and consequently adding up new expressions to Santo Angelo's cultural heritage, due to the fact that only the histories and the heritage attached to the reduction's missionary past wouldn't be able to boost tourism in the district. This was a fundamental point in the perspective of those people who were idealizing and implementing Prestes Column Memorial.

The Memorial as well as the monument of Niemeyer ended up constituting themselves as instruments that would promote not only a commitment to the past and to the memory but also to the economic development through tourism. The monuments and the historical heritage acquire a double function – works that promote knowledge and pleasure and are made available to everyone; as well as cultural products, fabricated, packed and distributed to be consumed. The metamorphosis of its usage value in economic value occurs due to the "cultural engineering", a wide public and private enterprise, at the service of which a great number of cultural entertainers, communication professionals, development agents, engineers and cultural mediators work. Its task consists in exploring the monuments by all means in order to multiply indefinitely the visitors number (Choyá, 2006).

In fact, Prestes Column Memorial nowadays constitutes itself in one of the most visited cultural and touristic locations of Santo Angelo, receiving annually about 15 to 17 thousand people, mainly students of all educational levels and tourists of all regions of Brazil. However, even after having passed by over 20 years of its inauguration and especially for the moment of political polarization that Brazil is going through, there are still many disputes for the memory of Prestes Column and of Luiz Carlos Prestes political actions, bringing up a series of distinct interpretations and representations about the Memorial legitimacy.

3 Disputes concerning the Prestes Column Memorial

Since the 1980s, there were many disputes concerning the past and the memories related to Prestes Column what turns evident how much these issues of relation between past and present are significant, so that we can understand the impacts that these have in the speeches, in the imaginaries and in the creation of spaces dedicated to the construction and representation of memories.

The collective memory is widely regulated by the oral speech as well as by the writing and has its relevance concerning the understanding that people have about the past. According to the idea of Halbwachs (2006, p.32): "It's common that images of this kind, imposed by the environment we live in, modify the impression we keep of an old fact, of a person once known in the past." The attempt of influencing the collective memory is part of a process that has as its purpose to act in the imaginary through the representations produced by different groups of society. These aspects are often felt in relations that belong to the clashes for power, especially the political ones.

[...] to represent is to make things known immediately by the 'picture of an object', 'by the words and by the gestures', by some figures, by some features - such as the puzzles, the badges, the fables, the allegories.

For the author, the social representations can be conceived as some of the answers that the collectivities give to their conflicts, divisions and opinions expressed distinctively, constituting a regulating force of daily and collective life; as it is in the center of representations and the imaginaries that the problem of power legitimization and affirmation of groups is found. Those groups that can define the representation networks, including the interpretation assigned to the past, also detain the power of imposing the vision and the division of the social world that better suits them (Pommer, 2009).

The past of the Prestes Column as well as Luiz Carlos Prestes political trajectory throughout the 20th century and Prestes Column Memorial itself were represented especially through the printed means of communication of Santo Angelo, making evident the clashes for the construction of memory.

Despite the fact that in the 1990s decade the democracy was reestablished, there was still the opposing manifestation of political groups on the matters related to the Prestes Column and to Luiz Carlos Prestes; especially by the fact that Prestes had been one of the main political figures of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB in Brazil) for almost fifty years

In 1984, Prestes was in Santo Angelo for an event in recall of the sixty years of Prestes Column, event which became marked by a strong dispute among political sectors that at one moment supported the political figure of Prestes and at the other rejected him for his attachment to communism.

The arrival of Prestes to Santo Angelo happened in a period marked by the transition process from the military system to the political redemocratization in Brazil. This way, the disputes among divergent sectors were fierced in the whole national territory. The initiative of inviting Prestes for an encounter in Santo Angelo was idealized initially by the Engineers and Architects Society of Santo Angelo (SENASA in Brazil). However, taking into consideration the social context of the time and the political importance of Luiz Carlos Prestes, the event ended up gaining greater proportions and started counting on the support of the

Missionary Foundation of Higher Education (FUNDAMES in Brazil), involving also intellectuals and progressive sectors in general (Meihy; Biazo, 2002).

The event had as its objective to remind the rebel happenings of 1924 which gave origin to the Prestes Column. Such event was spread as " Prestes Column - sixty years after". At this moment we can verify the initiative of political groups of Santo Angelo's society in using the representativeness of Prestes, as:

[...] that was a moment in which the presence of Prestes was demanded by many places in Brazil, by many institutions, by press and intellectuals worried about the political unfolding of the country [...] (Meihy; Biazo, 2002, p. 14, our translation).

Thus, the representations concerning Luiz Carlos Prestes political actions started to be produced. However:

[...] it was still an uncomfortable period for the implementation of proposals that intended to face the conservative sectors of society that supported the permanence of the dictatorial regime (Meihy; Biazo, 2002, p. 14, our translation).

On the other hand, political groups related to the Social Democratic Party (PDS) were the majority in the Chamber of Councilors of the district in 1984. Being so, "[...] the return of Prestes to Santo Angelo was yet a locally polemic event as it had been marked by the resistance of the most conservative sides of the city [...]" (Meihy; Biazo, 2002, p. 14). This groups' rejection became explicit when, "[...] a District Chamber of Councilors denied the title of Santo Angelo's citizen to Prestes during his visit to that city" (Meihy; Biazo, 2002, p. 15, our translation).

At that Prestes visit to Santo Angelo, it became clear how much his political figure was interpreted in a controversial way and represented according to the identification or not of political groups to Prestes past in Prestes Column, his political militancy in PCB and with what he symbolized as a political figure in the situation that Brazil was going through in 1984.

After around ten years of Luiz Carlos Prestes last coming to Santo Angelo, a new phase of remembering and negotiation with Prestes Column past in the city got started. Adroaldo Loureiro, mayor of Santo Angelo in PDT headed this process. We should point that Loureiro had been a Councilor at the time Prestes passed by Santo Angelo in 1984 and one of the supporters to the concession of his honorary citizenship title, which was rejected in the Chamber. At the end of the 1980's, Prestes highlighted his support to Leonel Brizola, the party's historical leader, besides having been acknowledged as PDT's President of Honor.

Luiz Carlos Prestes had died in March of 1980 and this approximation he had not only with Santo Angelo but also with the major's party in 1996 on his last days made even more possible the concretization of Prestes Column Memorial. According to what was verified by the periodical 'Jornal das Missoes' in a report published in the year of 2002:

Despite its historical relevance, only from 1993 on in the administration of today's deputy Adroaldo Loureiro, was that Prestes rich history started to be rescued in the district that saw Prestes Column get born (Jornal das Missões, 2002, p. 11, our translation).

On the other hand, there were also resistances related to the Prestes Column Memorial in Santo Angelo which were remarked since the 1980s, as it was already made evident before, when Prestes came to Santo Angelo in 1984. In a testimony to the 'Jornal das Missoes' newspaper, professor Valmir Muraro, who was part of the organization of the event in 1984, reports the idea that people had about communism.

Communists were seen as people of high danger being even scary people. I remember that in schools after 1964, before the beginning of classes we used to pray for God for him to release us from communism threats. The teachers said that communism was going to take away animals and lands from farmers. Certainly, this anticommunist vision associated to the figure of Prestes turns him into a villain. (Meotti, 2009, p. 05, our translation).

The strongest argument used to represent Prestes Column Memorial as something unnecessary for Santo Angelo was the idea it would be an act of throwing away public money to honor a communist. Even today, Prestes Column Memorial is not a unanimity in Santo Angelo. Such examples are expressed in the writings of a newspaper columnist "A Tribuna Regional", owned by Valdir Andres' family, former major of Santo Angelo and political opponent of Adroaldo Loureiro, where he expresses all his displeasure in relation to the political figure of Luiz Carlos Prestes and the Prestes Column Memorial.

For Nation's shame and disapproval, the name of Luiz Carlos Prestes, a coward murderer, merchant of his Homeland, is given to public places, which suggests executive authorities or frivolous politicians and opportunists with not even the least patriotism feeling who do not know the true history or yet support bloody and dictatorial philosophies. In our dearest Missionary Capital, we use and worship the name and figure of Prestes for touristic ends, using the argument that when the Column started, today known as 'Prestes Column', he was not yet a militant of the international communism and defended, let's say, more "patriotic" ideals (Muller, 2009, p. 06, our translation).

Even though the Prestes Column Memorial is recognized in the city of Santo Angelo as a space of memory reframing the past, for cultural, economic and political uses, it is still a space of debate, which generates and can generate representations in favor or against the location.

4 Memory as a field for construction and litigation

The Prestes Column Memorial situation in Santo Angelo turns evident how much memory is a field of litigation, of disputes and of battles for its construction that can promote either memory or oblivion. At the same time, that memory of the past of Prestes Column was activated and a place of memory was constructed, everything was also denied.

Thus, the memory that is constructed concerning events or characters of the past ends up assuming a fundamental position in the process of establishment and representations of happenings, characters or expressions of cultural heritage. Being widely harassed through speeches of different groups or institutions, the memory can state, modify or create conceptions concerning events from the past remembered in the present, establishing, in this way, a relation between past and present. (Le Goff, 1996).

According to Le Goff (1996, p. 426), the collective memory was put as an important instrument in the fight of social forces for power. Becoming lords of memory and oblivion is one of the worries of the social groups and the activations or forgetfulness are mechanisms of collective memory. More than speaking of individual or collective memory, it is also important to reflect about the idea that we speak of past appropriations and its social uses in the present (Ferreira, 2012).

At the time of the Prestes Column Memorial implementation, between 1994 and 1996, Prestes Column's past was used as a reference for the construction of a memory place that would not only be able to constitute itself as a landmark, related to the fact that whatever would turn out to be the Prestes Column, from 1925 on, had its germ in Santo Angelo by the leadership of Luiz Carlos Prestes, but could also be a new touristic point for the city and region, exploring the field as an alternative to the local economic development. At that moment not only memory was constructed, but also heritage.

In the relationship constructed between memory and heritage, Guillaume apud Candau (2016, p. 158-159) argues that the heritage work as an ideological apparatus of memory, as the systematic conservation of the trace elements serves as a tank to feed the fictions of history which are built about the past. In the same line, Poulot apud Candau (2016, p. 159) states that the heritage's history is the construction history of a sense of identity and of the authenticity imaginaries that inspire the patrimonial politics. Thus, the reliquary of memory changes into a reliquary of identity that seeks itself in the past (Candau, 2016).

According to Dias (2006, p. 50), the cultural heritage symbolizes a community's cultural identity, being the most explicit expression of that; as when identified with a specific expression of heritage, the members of a social group become affiliated to the same cluster, sharing meanings and symbols and facilitating the production of collective identities. Memory is an identity constructor and solidifier instance, by the selection of what we remember of and what, consciously or unconsciously, we make silent (Catroga, 2015).

Even though, for decades, the past of Prestes Column was made silent in Santo Angelo, in the 1990s it was remembered; and more than this, with the construction of the Memorial, it was demarcated as a memory place. Pierre Nora comes to state that these places are created because there is no spontaneous memory. They are constructed, for what they defend is threatened and without celebrating vigilance. The history quickly would wash them out. For the author, if we really lived the memories that the places of memory involve, those places would be useless. And, also, if History hadn't appropriated of them for transformation, they would not become memory places (Nora, 1993).

It is the Historian duty to find the active places to reencounter the speeches for which these places were the support. What makes a memory place be is the factor of being a junction where different memory paths encounter, in a way that only the recalled, revisited and remodeled places are alive (Hartog, 2015).

According to Llorenç Prats (1997, p. 20), the heritage doesn't exist in nature, it's not something given and neither an universal phenomenon, but a device idealized by someone in place and moment for specific ends. Considering the construction of memory and heritage, Prats highlights that they are not antagonist and opposed processes but complementary phases. Overall, the invention refers to personal and conscient processes of manipulation, whereas the social construction associates itself to unconscious and impersonal legitimation processes.

In this case, the invention, to get rooted and perpetuated, needs to convert itself into social construction. That's where we can situate the very important role that the social representations perform, as Roger Chartier postulated; in the sense that they are capable of turning an absent object into present, mainly in what past is concerned, legitimating it as an essential part of a nation project of identity, or as Llorenç Prats states, of cultural heritage.

5 Final considerations

Memory and heritage fields are multifaceted and involve a series of elements that should be taken into consideration, considering the approach we take around these semantic fields. Our proposal was to seek to comprehend these fields from a historical perspective, that should make evident how much the past can be interpreted, reinterpreted and represented from specific interests, either from people, social groups or institutions, and how much this can turn the field of memory and heritage into targets of dispute for legitimization.

Thus, we understand that in the case of Prestes Column past and the Prestes Column Memorial, implemented more than seventy years after the happenings, the matters related to the historical memory of the Column and to Luiz Carlos Prestes political actions brought up different interpretations and representations concerning this past. Aiming to make it reminded or forgotten, all this was motivated by distinct ideologies and interests in memory and in heritage that could be socially constructed, having as a reference the 1920's past.

The memory and the heritage connected to Prestes Column in Santo Angelo constitutes itself in a litigious field, where the social representations assumed an important role in the sense of legitimating what should be remembered or forgotten and what could or not become heritage. These kind of situations are common if we consider that memory and heritage are constructed and selected from a negotiation with the past process; and in the same proportion in which there are memories and patrimonial expressions valued, dimensioned and glamorized, there are others that are made silent, hidden and forgotten.

Besides that, more important than putting memories and expressions of cultural heritage in an hierarchical order, it is necessary to understand how the selection process of these memories and patrimonies occurs, what lies behind it, who is behind it and which impacts it has in the construction of identities and in the way how societies view their past. Beyond romanticizing the patrimony and memory, it is critical to understand its complexity as the result of a construction, selection and dispute process.

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