

Santiago in Brazil: Experiencing the Way of the Sun

Luiz Armando Capra Filho¹, Judite Sanson de Bem²

(1. University Center of Serra Gaúcha, Brazil; 2. La Salle University, Brazil)

Abstract: The Way of Saint James refers to the journey made by pilgrims who flock to Santiago de Compostela (Spain), since the 9th century, to venerate the relics of the apostle Santiago. In Brazil, in the early 2000s, the Way of the Sun — Caminho do Sol — was created in the countryside of the state of São Paulo, which is, according to its creators, a route that resembles the Way of Saint James. This study aims to understand the idea of invented tradition (Hobsbawm, 1984) in the constitution of the Way of the Sun (Brazil), having the Way of Saint James (Spain) as a reference. Methodologically, it is a qualitative exploratory/descriptive research. Similarities are found between the Way of Saint James and the Way of the Sun, and there is also a search, in the experience of the former, through traditions and symbols, for the constitution and mode of operation of the Way of the Sun.

Key words: invented tradition, Pilgrimage, way of Saint James, way of the sun

1. Introduction

The notion of “framed memory” points to the notion that a memory can be ‘inherited’ or reinvented regardless of where the facts occurred. This means, among other things, that experiences lived by a group did not necessarily occur in that space, that is, they are being incorporated or “experienced indirectly” (Pollack, 1989).

In this regard, Pollak (1992, p. 5) adds: “[...] when it comes to inherited memory, it can be said that there is a close relationship between memory and the feeling of identity”, understood here as the image built and presented to oneself and to others, the way one wants to be perceived.

Thus, memory is an element that makes up the very idea of identity, be it individual or collective, insofar as it is also a factor in the feeling of continuity and coherence of a person or group in their reconstruction of themselves (Pollak, 1992).

For Hobsbawm, Ranger (1984), the idea of invented tradition shows that practices of a ritual or symbolic nature would aim to incorporate certain values and behaviors defined through repetition, in a process, in order to continue the past. This would not necessarily have an ancestral origin in relation to its execution.

The Way of the Sun is a 241 kilometer route that extends from Santana da Parnaíba to Águas de São Pedro, in the state of São Paulo, whose founder, José Palma (2017), attributes its birth to “[...] the greater objective of offering hiking lovers a pleasant environment, almost entirely through rural areas, seeking introspection and material deprivation”. However, it is a fact that this route references the Way of Saint James.

Luiz Armando Capra Filho, Master in Social Memory and Cultural Property; Professor, University Center of Serra Gaúcha; research areas: social memory and cultural property and history. E-mail: luiz.capra@fsg.edu.br.

Judite Sanson de Bem, PhD in History, Professor, La Salle University; research areas: social memory and cultural property, history and economy. E-mail: judite.bem@unilasalle.edu.br.

Thus, the objective of this article is to answer the following question: how does the Way of the Sun, located in the countryside of São Paulo, constitute itself as a route, having as reference the Cultural Route of the Way of Saint James?

The work is supported by a descriptive methodology based on documents and bibliographical references on the subject.

The article was divided into sessions in addition to this introduction: first, a presentation of the differences between pilgrimages and processions, then the description of the methodology, the presentation of the case study, specifically the “Way of the Sun”, then the Final Considerations and References.

2. Santiago de Compostela: A Path of Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a devotee of a given religion to a place considered sacred by them. Pilgrimages and processions have been part of human history, since the most remote times.

Today, the pilgrimage with the largest number of participants per year is that of the Camino de Santiago, in Spain. At the end of the 20th century, it was given the nickname ‘European Cultural Itinerary’, responsible for moving more than 250,000 people on pilgrimage every year.

Way of Saint James refer to the routes taken by pilgrims who flock to Santiago de Compostela since the 9th century to venerate the relics of the apostle Saint James, whose supposed tomb is believed to be in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Gomes, 2012). The pilgrimage to Compostela was one of the three major routes in medieval Europe, in addition to Via Romea Francigena (bound for Rome) and Jerusalem. Full indulgence was granted to those who undertook them.

The term ‘pilgrim’ dates back to the first half of the 13th century, used to describe Christians who traveled to Rome or the Holy Land (where the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories are currently located) to visit the holy places. These pilgrims sought to walk the paths as a form of self-imposed punishment in order to atone for sins and, at other times, to fulfill canonical penalties. Vidotte & Rui (2011), when outlining the pilgrims’ motivation, point out that “[...] the journey they take in earthly, ephemeral life, aims at the full realization of heavenly, eternal life” (Vidotte & Rui, 2011, p. 144) At the same time, as Bastista Netto (1988, p. 1) points out, in the Middle Ages traveling meant, above all, suffering.

Sanchis (2006) corroborates this information and adds that the pilgrimage consists of an often difficult and even painful walk, in voluntarily precarious conditions; often long, but always full of charms.

Pilgrimage is characterized by being a journey made out of devotion to a sacred place, with three fundamental elements: the pilgrim, the sacred place and the path that leads to that place. However, according to Pereira (2003) it is relevant to emphasize that the reasons that motivate individuals to make the pilgrimage are quite diverse and are not limited to religious matters.

Sanchis (2006) attributes an important function to pilgrimages: to fill out the religious imaginary of populations, “[...] a singular, individual and/or collective experience, which, in many cases, offered a rhythm to the flow of the years, the stages of life (dating, marrying, and arrival of children, career, health problems and restoration)” (Sanchis, 2006, p. 86).

3. Research Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach. As for the way of approaching the object, this research is

exploratory and descriptive, insofar as it intends to give an overview of the subject, offer information and delimit what will be investigated. Descriptive research has the objective of knowing and interpreting real facts, verifying their characteristics, the way they were constituted, as well as establishing links between them (Gil, 2010).

Regarding technical procedures for data collection, the research is considered bibliographic, with a literature review based mainly on books and scientific articles (Gil, 2010).

4. Is the Way of the Sun an Invented Memory?

Valle (2006) states that walk, pilgrimages and processions are not new for the Brazilian Catholic people, since national, regional and local shrines have been spread throughout Brazil for centuries, and that this cultural element was imported from Portugal. The purpose of these crossings is to gain the influence and specific benefits that only God can bestow on the faithful, in exchange for their dedication. Practically, all religious institutions have pilgrimage as a special ingredient of their rituals.

In Brazil, the pilgrimages to Aparecida, in São Paulo, are famous. This is the city where a statue of a black-skinned Saint Mary was recovered, later called Our Lady of Aparecida. In addition to this, there is also the pilgrimage of Bom Jesus de Pirapora, also in São Paulo. In Bom Jesus da Lapa, in Bahia, on the other hand, the destination is a sanctuary located in a cave on the bank of the São Francisco River.

When analyzing the walking paths, specifically the new paths and their walkers, employing a contemporary outlook, Santos & Fagliari (2003, p. 39) point out that ‘the evolution of pilgrimage forms brought with it some changes to their meaning, resulting in discussions about their authenticity.’ The study focuses on these new possibilities in Brazil and needs a reference date for such a movement. ‘In Brazil, since the end of the 1990s, some ‘pilgrimage’ routes have appeared and they present very unusual characteristics, largely inspired by the Camino de Santiago de Compostela’ (Santos, Fagliari, 2003, p. 39). In this sense, they point out that the process of creating these new paths follows “human imagination and work”.

Regarding the final destinations of these journeys, for example, there was previously no special devotion that was a reason for human displacement. In other words, the final destinations for these “pilgrimages” were created, implanted (Santos & Fagliari, 2003, p. 47).

In this process, the path itself (the act of walking) becomes more important than the destination, and the social contact between the members becomes the main attraction. These new paths often cease to have an exclusive focus on institutionalized religion in favor of “features such as waterfalls, beaches, mountains, historical ruins, artistic monuments and gastronomy” (Santos & Fagliari, 2003, p. 47).

Routes inspired by the cultural itinerary of Santiago de Compostela multiply in Brazil, among which the following stand out: Caminho Gaúcho de Santiago (RS), Caminho das Missões (RS), Caminho da Fé (SP/MG), Caminho dos Anjos (MG), Caminho do Sol - Way of the sun - (SP). Others take advantage of the experience/model to draw itineraries inspired by literature, such as the Caminho de Cora Coralina (GO).

These “new ways” seek a model for implementation, more or less similar to the original idea of each one. The Way of the Sun is no different. Its founder, José Palma, is a pilgrim from Santiago and the idea, upon returning to the country, after going through the Camino de Santiago cultural itinerary in 1996, was to propose a route that could offer, in Brazil, similar experiences to those available in Spain.

The Way of the Sun is a 241 kilometer route from Santana da Parnaíba to Águas de São Pedro, in the state of São Paulo. It passes through the towns of Santana de Parnaíba, Pirapora do Bom Jesus, Cabreúva, Fazenda Cana

Verde, Salto, Elias Fausto, Capivari, Mombuca, Araongas, Monte Branco, Artemis and, finally, Águas de São Pedro.

José Palma, founder of the Way of the Sun, says that this route “[...] was born with the main objective of offering hiking lovers a pleasant environment, almost entirely in rural areas, seeking introspection and material deprivation”.

The Path was founded on July 25, 2010. This date is not a coincidence, as it is the day dedicated to the apostle James, better known by his Iberian name, Santiago. July 25 is also the emancipation date for the city of Águas de São Pedro, the final destination of the path that, according to its creator, ‘has the geography of Galicia.

It was in this city, at the end of the journey, that an image of Santiago, brought from Spain, was placed in the center of the City Garden in order to mark the end of the journey. This, among other references explored throughout the text, brings the perception that the Way of the Sun has the ancient Way of Saint James, in Spain as its reference point.

Dias (2003) describes the references to Santiago de Compostela when the Way of the Sun opened. It reinforces the idea that, for there to be a new ‘Way’, there must be reference to tradition (in this case represented by the image of the Saint):

For example, an image of Santiago, from Spain, was brought to the Way of the Sun, which was ‘enthroned’ in the city’s garden, the final place of the pilgrimage, donated by one of the hospitable [...] people, we could say that the objective was to build the idea of arriving at a sacred location, as would be the case with the pilgrimage to Santiago, whose goal is to arrive at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Dias, 2003, p. 115).

The “resignification” pointed out by Dias was also described by Cuter & Baptestone (2015), from the following:

The Way of the Sun is also considered a religious itinerary that begins in the historic center of Santana de Parnaíba. The pilgrim receives a document called ‘Passport of the Sun’ (a map of the route) from the Culture and Tourism Department. Considered the São Paulo version of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, it involves 12 cities in the countryside of São Paulo, covering 240 km, crossing trails and rural paths between Santana de Parnaíba and Águas de São Pedro. The end of the pilgrimage occurs next to the image of Santiago (Cuter; Baptestone, 2015, p. 109).

It is in this sense, as Steil & Carneiro reinforce, that the role of the organizers of the Way of the Sun is to mediate this new way of experiencing the relationship with the sacred, and it is up to them “[...] to ensure and guarantee the symbolic means and resources so that each one can make their own path” (Steil & Carneiro, 2008, p. 113).

For Hobsbawm, Ranger (1984), the idea of invented tradition shows that practices of a ritual or symbolic nature intend to incorporate, in a process, certain values and behaviors defined through repetition, in order to continue the past, which would not necessarily have an ancestral origin when it comes to execution.

According to Hobsbawm; Ranger (1984, p. 10), genuine traditions are those “[...] that emerged and have become difficult to locate in a limited period of time — sometimes just a few years — and established themselves with enormous speed”. Therefore, there is no possibility of pointing out, in fact, where a tradition began.

An invented tradition is characterized as a set of rules that are established through repetition, which can be of a ritual or symbolic nature, achieving, through this repetition, a continuity in relation to the past. This set of practices, of a ritual or symbolic nature, would aim to incorporate certain values and behaviors, defined through

repetition, in a process of “continuity in relation to the past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1984, p. 22). As a rule, in an appropriate historical past “[...] invented traditions are highly applicable in the case of a comparatively recent historical innovation [...]” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1984, p. 22).

The authors use the expression “invention of traditions” which, in a broad sense, includes both properly invented and institutionalized traditions and those that suddenly appear and, in the same way, establish themselves. The latter remain, like the others, as if their origin were remote, even though they last relatively a short time. In addition, the authors also point out that the process by which symbolic and ritual complexes are created is relatively unknown, considering that the invention of traditions is a means of formalization and ritualization, always referring to the past, imposing repetition.

5. Brief Final Considerations

In order to understand how the idealization of the Way of the Sun can be explained, two complementary situations are evident: the first, the relationship between the creator and the idea — the Way of the Sun was born from the idea of a pilgrim from Santiago who seeks to bring the experience of the journey to Brazil, after having gone through the experience in Europe; the second, which complements the first conclusion of the research, is that what gives cohesion to the group, and consequently the “way”, is the idealization of the project as the focus of the action.

At this point, there is a broad convergence with the concept of invented tradition: the search for elements of the Santiago pilgrimage, in constitutive elements — such as the presence of the lodgings — as a result of the hosts of the path itself, who seek geographical and symbolic similarities — the Ara Solis certificate — the Compostelana of the Way of Saint James —, the pilgrim passport, in order to register with stamps the conclusion of each point of the route — as in Santiago — or the yellow arrows, which seek to evoke the characteristics/propositions of Santiago.

However, this idea seems to be present more visibly in the speech of the creator and in the structure of the organization of the path than internally in the attitudes of its agents.

The idea presented by the “Camino de Santiago” is sort of a “how to” model. There are many other paths based on this experience, especially long-term walking routes. This means that these other paths add the Santiago model to their formation in a formal or informal way, nominal or not.

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