

Heritage, sacredness and power: on different categories of historical and cultural patrimony in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the concept of heritage present in the public policies of cultural, artistic and historical heritage preservation, aiming to widen the apprehension of the concept. Bringing examples from my fieldwork in Venezianos Lane, in Porto Alegre, my purpose in this article is to analyse the attribution of values to specific buildings, objects or processes as a way to produce new meanings within the different contexts in which it occurs, observing specially the construction of signification from the point of view of familiar heritage, heritage objects seen as sacred properties and the dimension of power involved in such process. Considering the resignifications which resulted from the heritage acknowledgement, I analyse the different categories perceived by the city inhabitants who are involved with the heritage, not in a passive way, but owning the capacity to construct new significances and to give meaning to the world around them. I try to underline the symbolic dimension present in this process in which the property acquires a meaning and comes to be considered heritage.

Keywords: cultural heritage, heritage, historical heritage, resignification.

Cultural patrimony, understood as a people's heritage and a group of goods and values that represent a nation isn't a new theme, but has been carving out more and more space within research produced by Anthropologists, Sociologists, Historians, Architects and professionals from different areas, being thus established as an interdisciplinary theme.

Recent public policies of recognizing non-material patrimony implemented by the Brazilian Government, recognizing property as well as activities and cultural processes as passable of being

registered in the book of declared patrimony, besides traditional actions of restoration and preservation of properties, has lead researchers to reflect on implementing and maintaining these policies.

Gonçalves (2003, p. 22), deals with the antiquity of the theme of patrimony as a category of thought, sustaining that it's not just a modern invention, but present in the classic world as well as the Middle Ages. The modern Western world only imposes specific semantic contours that, once assumed, may be referred to by the category "patrimony", yet which is also present in tribal societies.

Given its origin, which goes back to the beginnings of the discipline, we may start from a definition of the notion of patrimony that can situate this concept in the ambit of Anthropology. Thus, the concept of patrimony, parting from a simple definition, can be understood as a group of goods, material or not, rights, acts, possessions and anything else that might belong to someone and be susceptible to economic appreciation.

Put forth like this, patrimony is directly related to the idea of property. One could say that property is one of the universals of human culture, since all known peoples have some sort of property, whether it be individual or collective.

The place where a determined social group lives, whatever its way of sustaining itself might be, is a property, which includes trees, fruits, animals or the harvest obtained by toiling the land. Animals created and maintained by a group or individual are considered property, as well as the houses people construct, the clothes they wear, the objects they utilize in their daily tasks, music they sing and play, their dances. All material objects that can be found in people's daily lives are considered property.

Thus we may say that property is a kind of social creation, since an object in and of itself is not sufficient enough to be relevant to the social group, but is relevant to attributing value, which is socially constructed, and the existence of a group of norms which regulate its circulation and permanence within the group, establishing a network of relationships between people.

This article aims at analyzing how value is attributed to certain goods, objects and processes producing new meanings within the different contexts in which this happens, focusing especially on the construction of meanings from the point of view of heritage, the sacredness of patrimony and the power dimension involved in the process. Considering that giving new meanings is a result of patrimonial recognition, I will analyze the different categories perceived by urban dwellers involved with patrimony, not in a passive way, but pausing on their capacity to construct new meanings and to give meaning to the world around them.

Patrimony as heritage

The term patrimony, *heritage* in English, *herencia* in Spanish, carries a strong relationship (even in Portuguese) with the idea of being heir to: something to be left or transmitted to future generations.

The continuity of a social group, or even a family or tradition demands that property considered as patrimony of this group or family be transmitted, as well as the status of this property, from

one generation to the next. This passage is accomplished through inheriting goods and social practices.

According to Radcliffe-Brown (1989), inheriting means transferring status based on an existing relationship between two members of a social group, between those who transmit and those who receive. Such a relationship has a personal character, and generally occurs between relatives, with the passage between father and son being the most traditional. In a study on patrilineal and matrilineal succession in primitive societies, the author considers transmitting property to be the same as transmitting social status. For Radcliffe-Brown (1989, p. 62), "two people are relatives when one descends from the other, like, for example, a grandson from a grandfather, or when both descend from a common ancestor".

In contemporary society as well, one may observe that the idea of patrimony is connected to transferring property from father to son. In research conducted among homeowners in the houses legally protected as a national heritage in the Travessa dos Venezianos (Sapiezinskas, 2004), in the city of Porto Alegre, one of the recurring categories in interviews on historical and cultural patrimony was associated to this notion of succession: "This here is patrimony that will stay on in the next generation, for my sons, grandsons..." (Carla, talking about her house).

Ethnographical data makes clear that distributing inheritances between members of the family varies according to the prescribed social roles for each of its members, in a given context in society.

In the case of the Travessa dos Venezianos, this becomes evident with the story of Francisco Cândido Lopes, who owned the Sociedade Territorial Riograndense as well as all the rest of the land in the region. When he died, around 1920, houses had already been constructed on the east side of the street, but not on the west side, whose registers go back to 1932. This gentleman left behind his wife, Antonina, and two children, Ernani e Haydéa. After having inventoried their goods, the wife kept the house in which the family lived, in a well-to-do neighborhood of the city, the son inherited the land and the daughter kept the houses that had already been constructed in the Travessa dos Venezianos. The distribution of goods among the heirs reveals a lot about the social organization of our society, as far as social roles are concerned and the status attributed to each member of the family. The wife kept the house in which she already was living, and probably enough money to guarantee what she needed for the upkeep of her home and comfort in old age. The son received his part of the land, to use as he wished and gain his living, probably not cultivating the land, but negotiating it and constructing houses, since that region didn't have rural activities at the time. Finally, the female child received her share in small houses to rent, which would support her and guarantee certain income, should she need it. Therefore, even if the daughter weren't to marry, she could guarantee her future with income coming from rents.

This distribution of goods among members of the family demonstrates that each has his own social role or script on what is expected to happen in each one's future and what functions are to be played out. It could be that the daughter, who inherited the houses to rent, be better at negotiating than the son, who actually inherited the land. However, what was taken into account wasn't each person's capacities, but a certain social prescription of activities considered as an adequate way of life or income for each sex.

Thus, with the transmission of property, social functions are also transmitted, depending on the nature of the property in question. The houses themselves, as brick and clay constructions, constitute a category of patrimonial property to be preserved and transmitted to heirs. Another

category would be a group of objects that constitutes a collection: "I made this collection and I hope that it will continue in the future. This here is the start, but it will increase. My friends already know that I collect antiques so they give them to me as presents." (Luís, on his antique collection).

Luís possesses a collection of antiques, which he started accumulating many years ago. This collection includes a wall clock, a sewing machine, a gas lamp, an iron, a telephone and many other objects. The collector says that he started collecting objects because he likes old things, the same reason for him buying the house in which he lives. He hopes that someone else will keep his collection going in the future, maybe one of the kids from his wife's previous marriage.

In this ethnographic example, what constitutes an inheritance is a collection of objects highly valued by their owner, but the path of inheritance doesn't follow the same trail as the direct line of kinship, as Radcliffe-Brown has theorized. In this case, relationships of affinity are taken into account, and kinship rearranged in order to give continuity to a collection of objects, maintaining their importance within the family. It's thus clear that the possibility of rearranging family relationships in order to adapt to the concrete situation of each family member – in this case, the man and his wife's kids (stepchildren) – take precedence over the predictable social roles: father and son.

The way that concrete situations adapt to models of kinship was observed by Leach (1996) among the Kachin in Birma. For this author, kinship is a language that orders social relationships. Leach's theory of kinship really is quite recognizably innovative. Its importance is in the weight this author gives to relationships of affinity and the social construction of kinship relationships, as well as the role of the family in general.

As we may observe, the author employs ethnographical categories as a kind of symbolic language from which one may understand social organization. He isn't directly interested in understanding Kachin kinship, but in how this kinship figures among the observable social categories which speak of "schemes of Kachin values, especially regarding property, social status and religious beliefs." (Leach, 1996, p. 162). Approximating this concept of kinship to the notion of transmitting patrimony would result in new possibilities of transmitting inheritances, which may at times be defined by convenience.

The inhabitants of the Travessa dos Venezianos, in Porto Alegre, had their houses declared as national patrimony 20 years ago. During this time, the significance of patrimony folded out into different categories of perceiving its economic and symbolic value. After officially giving protection to the houses, one may observe a flux of incorporating the modern into the traditional in this locality, expressed in the meaning of the street, the houses, individual collections of furniture and objects, in trades inherited in childhood or youth and in ways of combining these two characteristics.

Sacredness and patrimony

The process of attributing value and the meanings in operation under an external public organ, which define the destiny of a group of houses, which then become object of public policies, may be understood as attributing a sense of sacredness and a certain charisma to these goods. Analyzing the ramifications of charismatic sensibility, Shils (1974, p. 392) observed that "there is

a generalized disposition in society to attribute charismatic properties and functions, institutions, symbols and extracts aggregated to vulgar and secular people ".

This author seeks to observe the charismatic phenomenon in a more global perspective than Weber (2002), seeing it function in non-ecclesiastic institutions, operating in secularized societies. From this proposal, one may extend the use of the concept charisma to States constructing patrimony, through public policies.

Public State policies, in general, may be understood within the context which Shils calls centrality. For this author, "centrality is constituted by its educative power to initiate, create, govern, transform, maintain, or destroy that which is vital in a man's life " (Shils, 1974, p. 395).

This central power that Shils speaks of (1974) has been conceived as a transcendent divine power or of any other sort that controls or influences human life and the cosmos within which this life exists. Yet, for him, this is only one of the possibilities of being charismatic, among others. Charisma may be manifested in individual personalities, as Weber (2002) has underscored, "but may come to reside, in varying degrees of intensity, in institutions – in qualities, norms and beliefs that their members should supposedly embrace or possess" (Shils, 1974, p. 396).

"Charismatic qualities may be evidenced in primordial things (in blood or locality) and in functions defined by primordial properties (kinship functions or those associated to a territorial community)." (Shils, 1974, p. 397).

The secularized State, with central power, acts by congregating its people, uniting them around feelings of common belonging, similar to the "primary binds" that Geertz has described (1979). According to Geertz (1979), these "primary ties" are vital to a man's life and may be mobilized through State practices. This is how one may reveal how the State operates in its charismatic attribution, by constructing meaning intending to engender peoples' feelings.

In this process of feeding sentiments of identifying with the Nation State emerge policies of constituting historical and national-cultural patrimony in Brazil. Using Shils' terms (1974), we can say that public policies aim in constituting historical and cultural patrimony share the center's charisma, from where such policies originate, being made know to society in its sacred character.

Patrimony and power

Given the still current character of maintaining primary ties and the relevant role of symbols to enforce feelings of belonging and identifying a people to a State, it's worth examining legislation on patrimony in Brazil, as well, through which State power operates.

During the Getúlio Vargas government, in 1936, writer Mário de Andrade created a project of law, in response to Education Minister Gustavo Capanema's request, in which he defined patrimony as "all works of pure or applied art, whether they be popular or erudite, national or foreign, belonging to public forces and social organisms, private nationals or foreigners who reside in Brazil".

Mário de Andrade's project, by trying to cover everything related to Brazilian cultural and artistic production, includes events that interest Social Anthropology, and mark the beginning of a series of debates on preserving Brazilian cultural and artistic patrimony.

It's interesting to observe that the discussion on patrimony in Brazil was brought up by the same intellectuals involved in the Modernist Movement, characterized by a desire to renovate, disinterest in the past and by constructing a totally new, modern and typically Brazilian art, music and literature.

Besides Mário de Andrade, we may also mention Oswald de Andrade, Manoel Bandeira, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Cândido Portinari, Tarsila do Amaral and Lúcio Costa. Mário de Andrade's realizations may be characterized by duplicity of intents: on the one hand, renovation inspired in modernism and, on the other, maintenance, based on salvaging tradition.

The concern with preserving a heritage for future generations, initially delineated in Mário de Andrade's project, gave way to a series of laws, which, as a whole, complement each other. Law nº 25, from November 30, 1937, organized the Serviço de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (Sphan), institution that defines patrimony as: "the group of real estate and objects already existing in the country and whose conservation is of public interest, whether for being connected with memorable historical facts in Brazil, or for its exceptional archeological, ethnographical, bibliographical or artistic value".

Afterwards transformed into Iphan, this organ today shares the task of identifying and declaring as preserved all historical, cultural and artistic patrimony with state and municipal governments. Preserving real estate may be carried out by any of these instances of power, and each of them obeys the same legislation. According to Lemos (1987, p. 85), "official legal protection is an attribute of the cultural good chosen and separated from all others so that its perpetuation in memory be guaranteed". Conceptually, we may say that legal protection means officially recognizing a good before organs responsible for patrimonial registration.

Law nº 25, of November 30, 1937, regulates the protection of cultural goods in Brazil. According to this legislation, a good legally protected must be preserved and its original characteristics maintained by this property's owner. The ownership of the cultural values represented by this property are placed under State tutelage, so that the common good may be promoted, yet, on the other hand, cultural values always pertain to a particular social group. Thus, it's worth asking, in the specific case of each piece of property or monument preserved, what exactly are the values it represents, which attributes justify its existence as a culture's patrimony, and what its relationship is to each local inhabitant, the carriers of this culture, with the properties or monuments being legally protected.

An important mark in the course of preserving cultural patrimony was created by UNESCO, on November 16, 1945. Aiming at promoting peace and human rights with a basis in human intellectual and moral solidarity, this UN agency gives incentive to cooperation between Member States and develops an international program for preserving cultural patrimony in each country and defends the worldwide diversity of cultures. The result of the international meetings was the "Recommendations" to be followed by member countries, on the procedures for preserving goods of material and non-material nature.

In 1964, the Carta de Veneza was signed, publicizing worldwide the concept of patrimony and preservation practices associated to it. From this moment on, ideas on conservation were also

extended to cities and to the urban network as a whole, privileging, this time, the aesthetic value of the constructions. The central idea is appreciating goods for their aesthetic value as a human construction, capable of provoking memory and dialogue among men, as an object of communication, testimony of a given group of men in a determined historical moment marked by time, but directed towards all humanity.

Brazil joined the Convention of Worldwide Patrimony in 1977. Initially concentrated on goods of historical interest, the Brazilian list has been diversified and today reflects the country's efforts to constitute a balanced and all-encompassing representative of its noteworthy cultural and natural diversity. Among the Brazilian goods considered world patrimony are the Amazon and the Pantanal, the rich collection of Baroque art and urbanism from the Colonial period; Brasilia, the capital city, with its modernist architecture; a pre-historical site, the Serra da Capivara, the quaint city of Goiás, with its vernacular traditions and techniques, among others. Two governors' meetings also took place in the 1970's, in Brasilia and Salvador, whose importance was fundamental for decentralizing preservation policies and activities.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 amplifies the legislation relative to cultural patrimony, defining who is competent to promote, regulate and fiscally control preservation practices, attributing a more significant role to the municipal administration and popular participation in these processes. Community participation in preserving cultural patrimony is written in the law to occur in three possible ways: presenting law projects and fiscal control of the execution of public services in protecting goods, thus preserving them. As such, interested citizens may participate directly in preserving cultural patrimony, whether alone or together with other interested parties or through association with some kind of institution.

In 2001, legislation on patrimony is amplified, taking into account a new category of goods, which had already been contemplated by Mário de Andrade in 1936, even though no previous legal determinations had been detailed. Declaration nº 3551, from August 4, 2000, institutes the registration of non-material cultural goods, creating a volume of books of patrimony. Anchored in this legislation, one should question: what is the procedure adopted by Iphan to identify and register those goods considered national patrimony? According to information provided by Iphan itself:

[...] Such declarations, as in any other federal, state, or municipal law, establishes limits to individual rights with the objective of protecting and guaranteeing the rights and interests of society as a whole. This is not authoritarian because its application is executed by representatives of civil society and public organs, whose powers are established in the legislation.

[...] The declaration is an administrative act of the Executive Powers, which starts from a request opening the process, by initiative of any citizen or public. This process, after a preliminary technical evaluation, is submitted to the deliberation of the responsible organs for its preservation. If the intention of protecting a cultural or natural good is approved, a Notification will be sent to its author. Starting from the date of this Notification, the good will be considered as legally protected from destruction or de-characterization, until a final decision is made. The process terminates with its inscription in the Book of Declarations of Patrimony and the formal communication of its authors.

(Adaptation of the publication *Tombamento e Participação Popular*, from the department of Historical Patrimony, in the city of Sao Paulo).

Throughout the course of this legislation, many different alterations took place in order to guarantee greater popular participation in the process of declaring goods as patrimony. However,

we may observe that the procedure actually guarantees that “technicians” evaluate the pertinence of the requests and decide by “deliberating” in the responsible institutional organs. Even if this procedure isn’t authoritarian, it involves the use of power to decide or deliberate a hierarchy, and rests in the hands of the competent instances.

In the end, the power to decide what will be declared or not as patrimony of humanity emanates from the center to the periphery, in Shils’ terms (1974), even with guarantees of spaces designated to popular, or peripheral manifestations occurring during the process. Those who hold the power to define what will be considered national patrimony are located in the center, and with this mundane power they attribute a certain sacred power to those goods which they touch, chosen to compose the list of national patrimony.

"This perception of that which is sacred and the seriousness of the spirit awakened is accompanied by attributing a sacred character to the powers, transcendent or mundane, which men consider as governing their lives " (Shils, 1974, p. 401).

Thus, once ascertained the sacred character of attributing patrimonial value to property or public monuments, one may observe a power relationship in this process of recognition and identification, which, obeying a hierarchy, establishes competences and defines which kinds of knowledge are part of the game.

This sacredness comes from the fact that a good has been declared representative of Brazilian popular culture. This fact makes it superior to other day-to-day practices, since representing Brazilian culture means figuring as a banner or emblem of the nation; illustrating this sacredness attributed to national symbols and usage rules and prohibitions associated to their usages. The torn flag on the pole must be immediately replaced and can’t simply be thrown away in the garbage can, but must disappear with dignity, being incinerated. Neither the national anthem or the coat of arms may have their integrity affected.

The participation of people involved in the processes of patrimonial recognition is of fundamental importance, since the cultural value of these references is given not only by specialized technicians, using criteria proper to their respective trades, but especially by the value of historical testimony and the concentration of meanings attributed by the social group to the good which has been officially declared as patrimony.

Investigating shared meanings and social representations and individuals recognizing goods as constituting their cultural heritage for future generations, taking into account the different categories in which patrimony is conceived, allows us to get closer to that which represents a determined social group.

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Recieved on 06/120/2004

Approved em 31/03/2005

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Translated by Michele Andrea Markowitz

Translation from **Horizontes Antropológicos**, Porto Alegre, v.11, n.23, p.163-175, Jan./June 2005.