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La Tirana. Marian Cult in the Atacama Desert of the Large Northern Zone of Chile

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KEYWORDS

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The subject of this article is to reveal the relationship between the Atacama desert in the Great North of Chile and its occupation every July 16 by more than 200 thousand people who attend the veneration of the Virgin of Carmen. Religious brotherhoods accompanied by bands of musicians, who carry the image of the Virgin, in addition to her banner, occupy this small town for about 10 days. It is a colorful party with a sound produced by brass instruments, as well as percussion, which transforms the arid landscape into a kind of garden. What is thought of the desert as a non-place, is transformed through this Marian pilgrimage into a sacred place, full of meanings.

The perception that one has of the desert as something inhospitable, where life is not possible, among other expressions, in this case that concerns us, is transformed into a place that has history and memory. A memory that is transmitted orally and whose center is the Virgin of La Tirana.

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OBJECTIVES

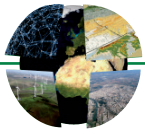
To account for the relationships between the uses of the territory and religious practices, in this case Marian pilgrimages, have not been studied from the social sciences.

Deliver from the point of view of the pilgrims, through their social and ritual practices, the vision they have of this territory where a small church was built and that today more than two hundred thousand people concentrate every year.

To understand from the point of view of the pilgrims the vision that they have of that territory.

METHODOLOGY

The festival of La Tirana, for the purpose of our analysis, we understand it as a complex text that must be interpreted. This is a first methodological challenge, since it implies understanding its internal dynamics and its relationships with the society that surrounds it. We also start from the fact that the feast, like any



socio-cultural phenomenon, is changing and integrating new elements that are resignified, for example, adapting a fashionable song to the rhythm of each religious dance. It is a feast open to the world, and therefore, and permanently adapts those influences to its interests.

In methodological terms, we have made prolonged trips to this festival for more than a decade, within the framework of various research projects. This has helped us to create friendly relations with the pilgrims, which are translated into long conversations about the history of their religious brotherhoods, their projects and problems to maintain these structures and the importance for them, attending the party. A question that this year could not be done due to Covid 19. Even if they managed to update their beliefs through social networks. Strategic informants, both men and women, with ritual functions, such as the foreman and partners who do not dance, but who strongly support these activities, have been useful to us.

We have collected and analyzed their song books, understanding that these pieces provide information about the relationship they have with the Virgin and the sacrifice they must make to attend each year. We have reviewed documentary videos about the festival, the oldest, from 1944, to have images of that landscape. We also collected plans of the town in which it is possible to see how the small town grows during festive times.

We move between that fine line that exists between description and interpretation, separating one from the other. The first has to do with an objective look at the territory, for example, devoid of life and the second conceiving it as something that makes life, happiness, miracles and pain possible.

The pilgrim who stops dancing, whether due to health or age, experiences pain that is not always easy to describe.

In the field work we have equipped ourselves with technological devices such as television cameras, tape recorders and photographic machines that have allowed us to record the landscape and its dynamics during festivals. The same as with the filmed interviews that allow us, in their reading, to capture a break in the voice, body expressions, among other manifestations.

The experience of living the festival from the point of view of the pilgrims gives us knowledge that is not always easy to translate into scientific language: emotions, affections, dance, humor among other aspects that can be noticed through long stays with these groups. of dances.

MAIN RESULTS

The religious occupation of this part of the desert takes place from the discovery of two crosses by Fray Antonio Rendon Sarmiento, in the year 1551, thus giving rise to the legend that founds this festival. Beyond the veracity or not of it, the truth is that the pilgrims invoke it as the origin. The function of the legend for our work is that it acts as a narrative of origin.

In relation to the above, the small town of La Tirana, source of water and firewood both for silver activities in the 16th and 18th centuries, and for saltpeter at the end of the 19th century and until the 50s of the last century, was Transforms into a center of the world, sacred land, meeting place. From a simple village it becomes a small population center with urban furniture and public spaces that make it possible to meet thousands of pilgrims.

The Marian pilgrimage marks the territory and defines it. In religious songs, collectively interpreted themes such as sacrifice that signifies the long road, they must travel to meet the Mother, is quite present. Walking or in wagons, then by rail, they must cross the desert, enduring the cold at night and the heat during the day.



WORK CONCLUSIONS

One of the main conclusions of the work has to do with the fact that the Marian pilgrimage that manifests itself in the La Tirana festival every July 16, is an occupation that fills a place with meaning, in the middle of the Atacama Desert, that it was perceived as a no-place.

The pilgrimage, from its beginnings, conceived this town, based on the legend that inspires it, in the holy land, the center of the world, which is accessed through a long road.

The inhabitants of the Great North of Chile, translated the word desert by pampa. And through this, they defined themselves. They define themselves as pampinos and a great majority of them are pilgrims. The occupation of this space, through the mediation of the nitrate company, was the basis on which a rich sociability, social struggles, formation of workers' theaters, sports clubs were expressed, but once that mining activity was concluded, the pilgrimage continues to exist overflowing the boundaries on which it arose.