

NORTHEAST BEYOND STEREOTYPES: THE POTENTIAL OF REGIONAL DIVERSITY IN GEOGRAPHY TEACHING

Nordeste Para Além Dos Estereótipos: O Potencial Da Diversidade Regional No Ensino Da Geografia

El Nordeste Más Allá de los Estereotipos: El Potencial de la Diversidad Regional en la Enseñanza de la Geografía



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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the historical-social and imagetive-discursive construction of Brazil's Northeast region, examining the representational processes that have contributed to the consolidation of stereotypes about this region and its inhabitants. Grounded primarily in Albuquerque Júnior's (2011) perspective, which understands the Northeast as a historical and discursive construction, and drawing on the contributions of Hall (2003), Bauman (2005), Carvalho (2012; 2014), Cavalcanti (2002), and Freire (1989; 1996), the study aims to examine how historical, scientific, political, media, and cultural discourses have contributed to the homogenization of the region's image and to discuss the contributions of Geography teaching to the critical examination of these representations. Methodologically, this is a qualitative bibliographic study based on the critical interpretation of selected works, seeking to identify how different authors explain the symbolic constitution of the Northeast, the historical interests underlying the dissemination of regional imaginaries, and the possibilities for their reinterpretation within the school context. The findings indicate that the reduction of the Northeast to images associated with drought, backwardness, and poverty results from historical and discursive processes that obscure its natural, social, economic, and cultural diversity. The study concludes that Geography teaching, grounded in a critical and contextualized educational perspective, is an important tool for deconstructing stereotypes, confronting regional prejudice, and fostering the development of learners capable of critically interpreting the region and the power relations that shape such representations.

Keywords: Northeast; Geography Education; Regionalization; Representations; Identity.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo analisa a construção histórico-social e imagético-discursiva da região Nordeste brasileira, problematizando os processos de representação que contribuíram para a consolidação de estereótipos acerca dessa região e de seus habitantes. Fundamentado, principalmente, na perspectiva de Albuquerque Júnior (2011), que compreende o Nordeste como uma produção histórica e discursiva, e dialogando com as contribuições de Hall (2003), Bauman (2005), Carvalho (2012; 2014), Cavalcanti (2002) e Freire (1989; 1996), o estudo tem como objetivo analisar como discursos históricos, científicos, políticos, midiáticos e culturais participaram da homogeneização da imagem da região e discutir as contribuições do ensino de Geografia para a problematização dessas representações. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica de abordagem qualitativa, cuja análise consistiu na interpretação crítica das obras selecionadas, buscando identificar como diferentes autores explicam a constituição simbólica do Nordeste, os interesses históricos envolvidos na difusão de determinados imaginários regionais e as possibilidades de sua ressignificação no contexto escolar. Os resultados evidenciam que a redução do Nordeste a imagens associadas à seca, ao atraso e à pobreza decorre de processos históricos e discursivos que invisibilizam sua diversidade natural, social, econômica e cultural. Conclui-se que o ensino de Geografia, fundamentado em uma perspectiva crítica e contextualizada, constitui importante instrumento para a desconstrução de estereótipos, o enfrentamento de preconceitos regionais e a formação de sujeitos capazes de realizar uma leitura crítica do território e das relações de poder que produzem tais representações.

Palavras-chave: Nordeste; Ensino de Geografia; Regionalização; Representações; Identidade.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza la construcción histórico-social e imagético-discursiva de la región Nordeste de Brasil, problematizando los procesos de representación que contribuyeron a la consolidación de estereotipos sobre esta región y sus habitantes. Fundamentado principalmente en la perspectiva de Albuquerque Júnior (2011), quien comprende el Nordeste como una producción histórica y discursiva, y en diálogo con las contribuciones de Hall (2003), Bauman (2005), Carvalho (2012; 2014), Cavalcanti (2002) y Freire (1989; 1996), el estudio tiene como objetivo analizar cómo los discursos históricos, científicos, políticos, mediáticos y culturales participaron en la homogeneización de la imagen de la región y discutir las contribuciones de la enseñanza de la Geografía para la problematización de dichas representaciones. Metodológicamente, se trata de una investigación bibliográfica de enfoque cualitativo, cuyo análisis consistió en la interpretación crítica de las obras seleccionadas, buscando identificar cómo diferentes autores explican la constitución simbólica del Nordeste, los intereses históricos implicados en la difusión de determinados imaginarios regionales y las posibilidades de su resignificación en el contexto escolar. Los resultados evidencian que la reducción del Nordeste a imágenes asociadas con la sequía, el atraso y la pobreza es resultado de procesos históricos y discursivos que invisibilizan su diversidad natural, social, económica y cultural. Se concluye que la enseñanza de la Geografía, fundamentada en una perspectiva crítica y contextualizada, constituye un importante instrumento para la desconstrucción de estereotipos, el enfrentamiento de prejuicios regionales y la formación de sujetos capaces de realizar una lectura crítica de la **región** y de las relaciones de poder que producen dichas representaciones.

Palabras clave: Nordeste; Enseñanza de la Geografía; Regionalización; Representaciones; Identidad.



1 INTRODUCTION

The comprehension of Brazilian spatial dynamics demands attention to categories and concepts of geography, and the notion of regions is highlighted as one of the most complex among them. In a country marked by strong socio-spatial inequalities, different historical processes and intense symbolic constructions, the study of regionalization gains relevance as it allows the understanding of the ways the territory is organized, administrated, and interpreted.

The process of regionalization might occur by different criteria and goals. Although the region constitutes a spatial reality, it must be comprehended beyond its immediate appearance, as it is the result of processes of analysis and delimitation of the geographical space (Nóbrega, 2015). In this sense, regionalization is based on defining criteria that may identify cohesive elements between certain areas, producing spacial delimitations that help to understand the reality.

In this context, coming from the understanding that regionalization is a historical, social, and political construct, the present article aims to comprehend how the historical and symbolical construct of the Northeast Region occurred from stereotypes and the role of geography teaching to deconstruct such stigmas. As stated by Ribeiro (1995), the Northeast played a fundamental part in Brazil's historical formation. According to the author, the expansion of the sugar economy on the seaside was articulated to the livestock farming developed on the countryside, which contributed to the occupation of the sertão (Brazilian outback) and to the constitution of what is known as the Sertanejo Brazil. This historical formation, however, does not explain by itself the constitution of the contemporary idea of Northeast, later also produced by discourse, images, and representations.

So, despite all the physical, historical, social and cultural richness that characterize the region, its image has been frequently reduced by discourse based on misconceptions, generalizations and prejudice that associate it exclusively to the sertão or elements like the drought, cangaço, and poverty, disregarding the diversity that marks its territorial constitution.

Although investigations of historical nature on the northeastern territory were already being made since the decade of 1930, with particular reference to the topographic maps elaborated by Aziz Ab'Saber (AB'SÁBER, 1969) and to the Project RADAMBRASIL, developed in the 1980s and coordinated by the Mines and Energy Ministry (MME) and the National Department of Mineral Production (DNPM) (RADAMBRASIL, 1983), the Northeast



and the Brazilian semiarid continue to be one of the most researched and, at the same time, least comprehended regions of the country.

Therefore, considering that school geography works directly with categories such as region, territory, landscape and identity, this subject has a fundamental role in the problematization of the representations built around the Northeast (Cavalcanti, 2013). By allowing the critical comprehension of regionalizations, geography teaching contributes to the questioning of stereotypes historically consolidated and to the appreciation of the diversity found in the region.

The works of Albuquerque Júnior (2011), Andrade (2007), Garcia (2017), Tamanini e Silva (2019) and Carvalho (2012; 2014) demonstrate that the image of the Northeast has been historically constructed through discourses, representations, and social practices that reinforced stereotypes related to the drought, backwardness and poverty. In contrast, these studies demonstrate the regional diversity and point to geography teaching as a privileged space to problematize such representations.

This way, the present paper aims to analyze how the Brazilian Northeast has been historically constructed and represented, discussing how such representations have contributed to its homogenization, as well as the role of geography teaching in the problematization of such narratives. From a theoretical point of view, the study is mainly based on the contributions of Albuquerque Júnior (2011) and Albuquerque (2014), adopting the comprehension of the Northeast as a historical-social and visual-discursive construct, produced by different discourses over time. In the educational field, it dialogues with the Freirean perspective of critical and contextualized education (Freire, 1996), which understands the teaching process as an instrument of critical reading of the reality.

The present paper comes from discussions conducted in the post-graduation space, especially from theoretical debates around regionalization, identity, and contextualized teaching. Furthermore, from reflections built on the daily practice in the classroom, which allowed the observation of how the stereotypes of the Northeast region are still present in the school context, reinforcing the relevance of a critical approach to geography teaching, aimed at the problematize such representations.

Methodologically, it is bibliographical research of qualitative approach. The texts were analyzed with a critical-analytical interpretation of the region, identity, representation, and geography teaching categories. The article is organized in a theoretical framework section subdivided into two analytical axes. The first one addresses the historical and symbolical construct of the Northeast and its natural, social, and cultural diversity; the



second one discusses the contributions of geography teaching for the deconstruction of stereotypes and the appreciation of regional plurality.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before describing the characteristics of Northeast, it is necessary to problematize the very own notion of Northeast as a region. In this study, we take the perspective of Albuquerque Júnior (2011), to whom the Northeast must not be understood only as a territorial delimitation or a physical-natural reality, but also as a historical and discursive construct produced by different social agents over time. According to the author,

Regionalist discourse does not mask the truth of the region; it institutes the truth. [...] The Northeast is a visual-discursive production formed by an increasingly specific sensibility, historically conceived, in relation to a certain area of the country. And so consistent is this discursive and visual formulation that it makes difficult, even today, the production of a new configuration of "truths" about this space (Albuquerque, 2011, p. 62).

In this line, Albuquerque Júnior (2011) demonstrates that the invention of the Northeast is associated with the construction of a field of utterances and visibilities that establishes which discourses may be enunciated and which images may be recognized as legitimate about the region. Throughout this process, certain signs, like the drought, the sertão and the image of the sertanejo, were continuously mobilized until they became almost natural references of the Northeast. At the same time, other experiences, landscapes, subjects, and ways of life were obscured, producing a partial and homogenized reading of the region. Thus, more than reflecting a pre-existing reality, these representations contributed to socially institute the Northeast itself as an object of knowledge and regional identity.

According to Garcia (2017), this region is not even a single region, there are many northeasts of distinct climatic, human, and cultural characteristics. However, the misguided imagery construction of the region and of the people that live in it, many times reinforced by media devices and modern art, has reverberated in the establishment of the Northeast solely as the sertão and its symbols. As Garcia observes (2017), when one thinks about the Northeast, certain images are immediately evoked.



When one speaks of the Northeast, immediately comes to mind the image of a region of extreme misery, subject to periodic droughts, which decimate herds and thwart farming, provoking exodus and death by hunger and thirst. Or else the truculence of "colonels" landowners, ordering to kill or to beat the workers and trying to prevent them from organizing [...] (Garcia, 2017, p. 5)

This image built of the Northeast is heavily tied to the climatic and social characteristics of one of the most important northeastern subdivisions, the sertão. This region is almost completely covered by the semiarid climate, marked by strong cycles of drought that usually hit the area and collaborate to dismantle life conditions of the local population (Marengo et al, 2011).

Beyond the climatic characteristics, the strong sociocultural establishment of the sertanejo people is another factor that marks the stereotypical construct of the northeasterner. According to Darcy Ribeiro (1995), the expansion of livestock farming across the northeastern countryside contributed to the formation of what is known as Brazil Sertanejo, marked by specific lifestyles and cultural practices. Although this inheritance is fundamental to comprehending the sertanejo identity and the region's historical formation, its characteristics started to, many times, be taken as representatives of the entire Northeast.

Thus, different media and cultural productions began to diffuse a Northeast representation strongly associated to the sertão and the sertanejo, contributing to the erasure of other aspects that demonstrate the region's diversity and richness. According to Garcia (2017) there are studies on this richness, however, despite the studies, the misunderstanding of them is a factor that contributes to the non-utilization of their potentialities. As said by the author:

It is common to see the Northeast as the most studied and the least comprehended region of Brazil. It is true, but only in part. The Northeast truly is the area of Brazil that was the most studied and the most written in history and sociology books. However, there is little about the region's technical and scientific aspects to allow an exact understanding of its potentialities and resources. (Garcia, 2017, p. 8)

Thus, the region's numerous resources, richness and multiplicity are lost among a historic construct of reductionistic representations. Regarding these representations, Albuquerque (2014) emphasizes that modern art has provided material for this naturalization and that the Northeast appeared as a region untouched by modernity and immigration, reinforcing the image that São Paulo carried the progress. Moreover, the construction of the imagery of the Northeast as the sertão is a historical fact, which



consisted in the differentiation of what jarred with Europe at the time. According to Albuquerque (2014),

Since the big metropolis were much like the big European centers, the need to find nationality comes from the need to differentiate one space from another. The similarities are abandoned to give place to the differences, to give place to what it could not be found there, in Europe: The Sertão (Albuquerque, 2014, p. 05).

Thus, the Northeast region emerges as the place of the different. Idea that is reaffirmed by some social classes, by the media, by modern art. Therefore, it must be highlighted that, although the sertão and all its multiple and rich elements, are fundamental and important parts to the construction of the Northeast, the reduction of the region to only these elements is prejudiced.

To comprehend the riches of the Northeast it is necessary to recognize that the region has been through deep economical and territorial transformations that happened in the last decades. In accordance with Garcia (2017), Araújo (2000) reinforces that there is not one single Northeast, but multiple "Northeasts", marked by distinct dynamics of urbanization, industrialization, expansion of the service sector and productive modernization. As highlighted by the author,

Overall, in the decades of 60s, 70s and 80s, the Northeast was the region the presented the highest GDP average growth rate in the country. From 1960 to 1988, Northeastern economy superseded the average growth rate in the country of about 10%; and between 1965 and 1985, Northeast's GDP grew (average of 6,3% per annum) more than Japan's in the same period (5,5% per annum). (Araújo, 2020, p. 4).

Currently, the region presents important industrial centers, a robust growth in tourism, expansion of renewable energy and a large diversity of economical activities, elements that contrast with the representations that associate it exclusively to backwardness and poverty. Still according to Araújo (2020),

"In recent years, important movements in the Brazilian economy had strong repercussions in the Northeast region. Tendencies of private accumulation reinforced by state action, when not commanded by the Brazilian Army, led to the rise and development in the Northeast of a number of subspaces equipped with modern and active economical structures, hubs of dynamism in great part responsible for the relatively positive performance presented by the economic activities in the region. (Araújo, 2020, p. 12).

This process of selective modernization of the northeastern space demonstrates that regional development does not occur in a homogeneous manner, but in a fragmented way and concentrated in specific areas. While some territories begin to integrate more dynamic productive circuits, strongly associated with the national and international capital, other regions remain at the sidelines of these investments, reproducing historical inequalities.

It is not possible, then, to comprehend the Northeast as an economically homogeneous region, once that, throughout its historical formation, different socioeconomic subgroups were consolidated, a result of distinct processes of occupation and development. In this sense, the author identifies three great socioeconomic delimitations in the Northeast: the first one, from Rio Grande do Norte to Alagoas, marked by the sugar economy and livestock farming, with a strong presence of oligarchs; the second one, embracing Bahia and Sergipe, articulated with Salvador as a commercial and port center, with sugar cane and cocoa as highlights; and the third one, formed by Piauí and Maranhão, historically characterizes as the transition and expansion area of the farming frontier (Araújo, 2020).

From this comprehension, the theoretical discussion of this work was subdivided into two main axes. The first one approaches the natural, social, and cultural diversity of the region. The second axis discusses the contributions of geography teaching to the problematization of these representations, emphasizing the potential of teaching practices aimed at the valorization of northeastern plurality and to the formation of a critical reading of the territory.

2.1 Natural, social, and cultural diversity

Despite the constitution of an imagery that reinforces the conception of the Northeast as the sertão only, the region is divided in four important regions with different and singular characteristics, them being the Zona da Mata, the Agreste, the Meio Norte and the Sertão. All these regions that compose the Northeast bring along particularities that vary from physical to cultural characteristics and that date back to the history of appropriation of said spaces.

According to Garcia (2017) and Andrade (2007), the Northeast may be divided into four subregions. The Zona da Mata, of humid tropical climate, concentrates the first areas occupation and development of the sugar economy; the Agreste constitutes of a transition strip between the Zona da Mata and the Sertão, historically associated with livestock



farming; the Meio-Norte, covering Maranhão and part of Piauí, presents transition characteristics between the northeastern semiarid and the Amazon rainforest; and the Sertão, the largest of these subregions, which has as a main characteristic the semiarid climate. About the latter one, Marengo et al (2011) emphasizes that

The semi-arid climate in the countryside Northeast presents, on average, an accumulated precipitation lower than 600 mm. In the north of the region, area that covers the largest part of the semiarid, the rainy season runs from the months of February to May. This sector stands out due to having the greatest droughts. The drought season runs, in most parts of the region, from August to October. Using as a criterion to evaluate the region's climatic vulnerability the percentage of days with water deficit (the relation between the number of days with water deficit and the total number of days) for the period of 1970-1990 suggests that the semiarid presents water deficit in at least 70% of the year (Marengo et al, 2011, p. 386).

As we can notice above, the Northeast presents a diversity of natural regions with their own characteristics. However, so many considered "typical" characteristics have been attributed to the region that its identity ended up tied to these representations. Among them, the drought, striking characteristic of the semiarid Sertão, is pointed as one of the factors that the Northeast is reduced to and identified as this regional component. According to Albuquerque (2014),

The drought becomes a social process, a product of human relations, no longer a geographical-climatic situation. It is instituted in the imagery as social representation. The Northeast will always be seen in a drought, even the coastline; the Agreste; the swamps, all of it is only sertão (Albuquerque, 2014, p. 07)

This discursive construction not only produced a regional identity marked by the drought and deprivation, but also oriented institutional practices, public policies and teaching approaches that began to reproduce this image as a naturalized truth. Although the drought is a climatic occurrence characteristic of the semiarid, its transformation into a social problem cannot be exclusively comprehended through natural factors (Albuquerque Jr., 2011).

In this sense, historically, the dry seasons were used by regional political groups as a mechanism to receive public resources and to maintain power relations, a process frequently associated with what is called as "drought industry". Thus, the drought must not only be understood as a climatic phenomenon, but also as a social and political, historically constructed issue. According to Carvalho (2012),



Once presented as a "catastrophe", the climatic fatality rhetoric around it began to direct the development projects and programs to the Semiarid. The resolution to know and dominate nature arises, when during each "great" drought appeared a new orientation for State interventions on this territory, rearranging it according to plans of regional development, with emphasis on the water correction actions of "drought relief" (Carvalho, 2012, p. 97)

Carvalho's (2012) reflection demonstrates that the drought, although a characteristic climatic phenomenon of the semiarid, was historically transformed into a central element of the state intervention policies and of the representations constructed about the area. As consequence, the consolidated vision of the Northeast was strongly associated with water scarcity and poverty. This reduction affects not only the comprehension of local natural characteristics but also contributes to erasing its diversity.

In accordance with this perspective, Silva (2007) shows that, historically, public policies directed to the Brazilian semiarid were marked by a paradigm centered on the "drought relief", which understood the climatic phenomenon as a problem to be eliminated through great waterworks and emergency interventions. According to the author,

The government's intervention in Brazilian semiarid, in great part, has been guided by three dimensions that combine in drought relief: the goal of economic exploitation; the fragmented and technicist vision of local reality; and the political advantage of the two previous elements in benefit to the political and regional economic elites (Silva, 2007, p. 471)

Therefore, in this mode, predominated a technicist and emergency vision of the region, which reinforced practices that do not consider the socio-environmental dynamics that are particular to the semiarid. Such logic contributed to the construction of the region's negative representation, associating it with deprivation and production infeasibility, which, in turn, directly influenced the formulation of public policies little integrated to local realities (Silva, 2007).

However, in the last decades, it is possible to see a paradigm transition, in which the perspective of "coexistence with the semiarid" gains traction. This shift represents an important inflection on how to comprehend and intervene in the area, promoting strategies for adapting to climate conditions, the sustainable use of natural resources and the empowerment of local populations, understanding that it is not possible to fight physical-natural characteristics. Still according to Silva (2007),

Articulated to the emergence of a new sustainability paradigm, there are changes in the conception and perspectives of intervention in the Brazilian



semiarid, as a space in which it is possible to construct or rescue coexistent relations based on the environmental sustainability, on the quality life of sertanejas families and on the incentive to appropriate economic activities" (Silva, 2007, p. 475).

In this new paradigm, policies such as the construction of cisterns, the incentive to agroecology and the appreciation of traditional knowledge indicate a reorientation of state actions, which begin to recognize the region as a space of potentiality. It is a change that not only is technical, but also political and symbolical, as it redefines the very way of comprehending the semiarid Northeast in the context of Brazilian public policies (Silva, 2007).

Besides the large natural and landscape diversity found in the different subregions of the Northeast, the region carries a large sociocultural diversity that reverberates in the construction of multiple identities. Different are the cultural representations that we find across the nine states in the region – typical parties, accents, culinary – all composing a vast multiculturalism that produces, consequently, a mosaic of identities. However, just as natural characteristics are, at times, reduced to the drought and the sertão, the region's cultural particularities are also neglected. In this sense, such simplifications also appear in classical interpretations of the sertão and its population, in which there is a strong distinction between countryside and seaside. According to Ribeiro (1995),

Actually, the sertaneja society of the countryside has not only been spatially distanced but also socially and culturally distanced from the coastal people, establishing a gap that opposes them as if they were two distinct peoples. The archaic sertanejo is characterized by their simple religiosity, which tends to fanatical messianism, by their excessive conservative habits, by their curtness and rusticity, by their predisposition to sacrifice and violence. And, still, by the moral qualities typical of pastoral formations in the entire world, such as the cult of personal honor, pride, and loyalty to their chiefdoms" (Ribeiro, 1995, p. 320)

When analyzing the construction of regional identities, it is possible to observe that such type of representation contributes to the fixation of stereotypes about Northeasterners, frequently associated with a homogeneous and immutable identity, marked by historical suffering. On this matter, Albuquerque (2014) points out that national cinema was one of the crucial factors to the constitution of a stereotypical vision of the Northeast people and of some symbols that compose the region:

The popular universe pervaded national cinema, its characters were, just as their makers, unaware of the capitalist market, will be the retirantes, the

beatos, the colonels and the cangaceiros. The Northeastern in cinema will always be marginal to the capitalist system, always will be misfit in society, and their response to oppression will be violence (Albuquerque, 2014, p. 6).

Thus, an identitarian vision of the Northeast subject is constituted, based on violence and aversion of modernity. This entire stereotypical construct that cinema and other media devices helped to create serves as reinforcement to reproduce the xenophobia¹ that for a long time has been practiced against the people from the region. Thus:

Violence begins to be the answers for all northeastern characters; the ones who revolt against the landowner's violence become cangaceiros, the ones who revolt against the church's violence become beatos, the ones who revolt against the morality and propriety's violence become prostitutes, bandits, wanderers; the ones who revolt against discipline's violence become ignorants. The image of Northeast will be molded on top of violence, the characters will be moved by violence, this irrational and wild feeling that moves all animals (Albuquerque, 2014, p. 6).

It is important to mention that the discussion around identity is historically a motivation of research. Some approaches on the theme, such as the ones by Zygmunt Bauman (2005) and Stuart Hall (2003), provide us with a theoretical framework to comprehend the multiple representation forms and the stigma constructed about the subjects that live on the Northeastern semiarid. The authors understand the identity as a historical, social, and cultural malleable construct, which transforms according to power relations, discourses, and sociocultural contexts in which the subject is inserted.

Bauman (2005) works with the concept of liquid modernity, in which identities become unstable and transitory, molded by contexts of constant change and by the search of belonging and self understanding. Identity is, therefore, fluid, a fact that contrasts with the historically crystallized stereotypes about the Northeastern individual. The visual/identitarian construct of north-easterners frequently represented as backward, poor, dependent on social policies or limited by adverse climate conditions and, before all, strong, as it was pointed by Euclides da Cunha (1902), – author criticized by the current conception of Northeast and for putting the north-easterner not only as strong, but also culturally regressed given the life conditions and arid climate –, are discourses that fix an immutable identity, that

¹ Xenophobia is described as aversion, hostility of prejudice against foreigners or individuals who belong to different cultural, regional or national groups, manifested by discriminatory acts of social exclusion (Ferreira, 2010).

was constructed by discourses from people that are not from the region and that silence the large plurality of local populations.

From the perspective of Hall (2003) we can notice how the northeastern subject's identity is a fruit of power relations and of these external discourses, especially from the South-Central, that are supported by a historically misguided construct. For Hall (2003), the identities are produced in cultural and political discourses that define who the subject is, and who he is not. Because of that, the identity is relational, built in opposition to an "other" and is subject to representation and power processes.

This way, the north-easterners image, especially the semiarid inhabitants, was historically constructed by external discourses – such as the ones from the media, politics, literature – that put them as "the other" in relation to the rest of Brazil, which is modern, urban and developed, and whose identity is, therefore, liquid.

Hall's (2003) reflections about identity as a discursive construct agrees with Albuquerque Júnior's (2011) perspective, as far as both demonstrate that identities and regions are historical products crossed by power relations. Moreover, Bauman's (2005) idea of identitarian fluidity reinforces the impossibility of fixating the northeasterner in a single immutable model.

It is worth mentioning that figures such as the cangaceiro, the beato, the colonels and other symbols are indeed constituent and important parts of northeastern culture through time. However, the point is how these figures are generally represented in a prejudiced manner or with the intent of homogenizing the people of the region. According to Souza; Silva (2021), the many interests and the various identities of people cannot be represented by a sole discursive device. However, this is something that happens many times with northeasterners, who end up being represented and reduced to a single discursive apparatus – the accent, their customs, the drought, the crystallized identity – when, actually, to think of the Northeast is to think of plurality.

In this context, geography teaching takes on a strategical role, once that it is through this practice that these multiple Northeastern dimensions may be presented in a critical and contextualized manner to pupils. By working with the different regionalizations and all the region's landscape and cultural diversity, geography contributes to breaking away from the homogeneous vision that reduces the Northeast exclusively to the semiarid and the drought. Thus, it is possible to affirm that the approach to such characteristics, especially when articulated with the student's reality, constitutes an important path to



deconstruct simplifying representations and to amplify the comprehension of the regional complexity.

2.2 The role of geography teaching

Geography teaching has a leading role in the deconstruction of the stereotypes historically attributed to the Northeast region, since geographical thinking contributes significantly to the contextualization of the pupil as a citizen of the world (Cavalcanti, 2002). Geography, when working with concepts such as space, region, territory, identity and landscape, allows the student to understand that no region can be reduced to a single characteristic, and that all space representation is fruit of discursive disputes, political choices, and historical constructs.

This agrees with Freire's (1996) perspective of critical pedagogy, whereby the teaching must stem from the subject's concrete reality and promote a critical reading of the world, that is, the teaching-learning process must allow the students to comprehend and question the social structures that produce and reproduce such inequalities and stereotypes.

Still in this perspective, according to Carvalho (2014), geography teaching must encompass the local-global-local, stemming from the reality that the student lives as an instrument of knowledge construction. A fact that is proposed also by Freire (1996), when he defends a contextualized education, built with the daily experiences of the students. Carvalho (2014) highlights that, although in Brazilian classrooms the textbooks still present the drought phenomenon in the region as something atypical and ominous, it is geography's role to base the teaching-learning process on the daily experiences of the students in order to construct an emancipatory knowledge.

This way, the teacher, when presenting different forms of regionalization of the Northeast – such as the natural divisions (Zona da Mata, Agreste, Meio-Norte and Sertão), cultural divisions or economical divisions – demonstrates that the idea of "a single Northeast" is, above all else, a construct. This type of approach helps to break away from the notion of homogeneity, showing that plurality is a constitutive mark of the region.

Another fundamental aspect is the critical study of the media and art representations, such as the ones analyzed by Albuquerque Júnior (2011) and Tamini and Silva (2019). Geography teaching may propose activities that allow the students to comprehend how cinema, television, literature, and the drought iconography contributed to constructing a stereotypical imaginary of the Northeast.

The analysis of movies, news reports, advertisements, photographs and the very textbook as devices of representations of the Northeast demonstrates the role of visual discourses in the construction and legitimization of regional imaginaries historically stereotyped. In this sense, Tamanini and Silva (2019) highlight that

Most times, the textbooks represent the Northeast in a stereotyped, partial, and incomplete manner. Thus, moved by interests of ideologies that usurp what is real, the presence of the images in certain cases confuses and puts the editorial directions and the lawfulness of the verbal writing under suspicion. When there is no nexus between the narrative and the textuality of the images, it is possible to see a distance, a conflict, and unforgivable gaps, for feeding harmful and prejudiced stereotypes (Tamanini; Silva, 2019, p. 320).

The authors demonstrate that the drought iconography does not function as mere neutral illustration, but as an active element in the production of meanings about the region (Tamanini; Silva, 2019). Moreover, they highlight the pedagogical dimension of the image when they affirm that images can be used as a teaching resource, but that "the range of fixed images, photographs, cartoons must be well problematized by the teacher (Tamanini; Silva, 2019, p. 322). Thus, becoming a teaching instrument capable of promoting more complex and contextualized readings of the geographical space, tensing the relation between the "real" and the "imaginary" socially constructed about the region.

This process is close to the notion of world reading proposed by Paulo Freire (1989), in which the pupils learn to interpret critically the narratives and images that circulate on society, understanding that such representations are selected, edited, and linked to specific interests. Thus, a critical posture before the consumption of images and information is developed, allowing to identify prejudices and generalizations that still permeate Brazilian society. This type of analysis strengthens media literacy and contributes to fighting regional xenophobia, while using cultural industry and latest information technologies to produce knowledge (Carvalho, 2014).

In addition, geography teaching allows working the cultural multiplicity of Northeast and its relationship with identity formation. Based on the Bauman's (2005) and Hall's (2003) reflections, the teacher may discuss with the students that identities are fluid, mutable and historically constructed. This helps to dismantle the vision of a "typical northeasterner", presented as fixed and atemporal, that many times associates the northeastern subject with violence, backwardness, or suffering. By presenting the different northeastern cultural manifestations, their accents, culinary, parties, religious practices and varied lifestyles,



geography teaching shows that the northeastern identity is multiple and in constant transformation, reflecting the dynamic typical of any society.

The study of natural characteristics of the Northeast is also an important teaching instrument to break away from stereotypes. When approaching the region's climate, vegetation and hydrography from scientific data, such as the one of Marengo et al. (2011), the teacher demonstrates that the semiarid, although marked by irregular rains, presents a large environmental diversity and it cannot be reduced to the idea of backwardness historically propagated. Another relevant aspect to approach is the regional biodiversity, especially the caatinga, an exclusively Brazilian biome. According to Carvalho (2012),

Caatinga is a peculiar vegetation. Exclusively Brazilian, this biome covers an area of 734.478 km², granting a biological patrimony that is not found in any other place of the world, not even in other semiarid regions. The macro-landscapes of Caatinga are defined by the varied conditions of semi-aridness and denote an agroecological and agrosystemic diversity that counters the misguided idea that it is a monotonous vegetation. Even with the exclusive position of the Caatinga among the Brazilian biomes, some myths circulate about it, such as it being a sterile vegetation and poor on diversity. (Carvalho, 2012, p. 80)

The comprehension of such characteristics becomes fundamental in geography teaching. By showcasing the biological richness of the Caatinga and its diversity of landscapes that compose this biome, the work of the teacher contributes to breakaway from the reductionist vision of this space. In this sense, the critical study of the region's environmental potentialities favors the construction of more contextualized readings on the Northeast, promoting its natural resources and expanding the student's understanding of the Brazilian territorial complexity.

Moreover, including material on biodiversity, geodiversity, natural reserves and initiatives of coexistence with the semiarid in the lessons, helps to show that the Northeast is a space of innovation, resistance, and adaptation, and not only of deprivation.

[...] we advocate for geography to give its share of contribution, generating themes that are pertinent to the semiarid ecosystem, its human diversities and the possibilities of sustainable development with these plural contexts, not longer notably, presented and made visible only by the presence of the drought (Carvalho, 2014, p. 11)

In practical terms, the teacher may propose comparative analyses between different representations of the Northeast in media, work with thematic maps that highlight the environmental diversity of the region or promote debates about the multiple cultural identities

present in northeastern states. Likewise, they must present the Northeast in its entirety, articulating natural, historical, cultural, and identitarian aspects in a critical and contextualized manner.

Thus, geography teaching approximates the Freirean's conception of education (Freire, 1996), in which the knowledge is not only transmitted, but also critically constructed from the student's reality, allowing the formation of subjects capable of interpreting and transforming the world, promoting the acknowledgment of the complexity of the Northeast, the valorization of its diversity and the combat against discriminatory and prejudicial practices.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis performed throughout this study allows us to understand that the Northeast and the northeasterner are still seen and represented in a reductionistic manner. However, it is prominent that the region is one of the richest in the country, in all natural, social, identitarian, and historical aspects. It is important, therefore, that this richness be presented and explored correctly, to remedy some of the prejudices and the archaic image that many have of the region.

When aiming to comprehend how the historical and symbolical construct of the region from reductionist stereotypes occurred and what is the role of geography teaching in deconstructing such representations, it becomes evident, based on the reading of the analyzed authors, that the Northeast is not an assigned reality, but a historical, political and discursive construct, as it was highlighted by Albuquerque Júnior (2011), and that the role of geography, through a critical teaching contextualized with the pupil's reality, is to show such perspective.

Albuquerque Júnior's (2011) and Albuquerque's (2014) contributions demonstrate that the idea of "Northeast" was forged by narratives that associate the region to backwardness, drought, and marginality, while Garcia (2017) emphasizes the region's internal plurality, frequently erased. Tamanini and Silva (2019) reinforce how the media and the drought iconography have consolidated homogeneous images, whereas Bauman (2005) and Hall (2003) allow us to understand the Northeastern identity as a dynamic process, related to the environment and in constant transformation. In this sense, this article shows that the homogenization of the Northeast is the result of representation disputes and power relations, and that geography teaching, by working critically with the



concepts of region, territory and identity, constitutes a fundamental instrument to break with simplistic readings, appreciating the regional diversity, at the same time that contributes to the formation of subjects capable of questioning homogeneous discourses.

This way, it is worth highlighting that this work does not have the intention of subjugating the northeastern symbols or saying that they are not important. The historical construction of symbols still existing such as the cangaço, the accent, the sertão, and the drought compose part of the historical, economical, and political construction of the region, but they cannot be the symbols that totalize it. They are characteristics that carry along the strength of the northeastern people and contribute to the construction of plural identities, therefore, must be guarded and portrayed in a non-stereotyped manner. The appreciation of the northeastern culture will only contribute to the comprehension of the region's multiculturalism. This way, it shall no longer be represented solely by specific characteristics, but as a mosaic of richness that structure it as one of the most important regions of the country.

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