

CARTOGRAPHIC-STORY-TELLING, PERFORMANCE OF WAY-FINDING AND (E)MOTIONAL MAPPING IN THE CARIRI REGION, STATE OF CEARÁ

Narrativas cartográficas, performance de navegação e mapeamento de emoções e movimentos na região do Cariri, Ceará

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RESUMO

Como tema de pesquisa, mapas e mapeamentos a partir de uma perspectiva cultural têm se tornado cada vez mais popular durante as últimas duas décadas. Portanto, estudos sobre a autoria e a ação humana na produção de mapas e como os fazedores de mapas se entrosam com o lugar e o espaço ainda estão aguardando uma análise mais aprofundada. Sob esse ângulo, mapas devem ser compreendidos como processos e ações em movimento e eventos em formação constante e não como produtos finalizados ou meras representações. Esse artigo trata dessas reflexões teóricas através de um estudo de caso sobre narrativas cartográficas, performance de mapeamento e navegação. A reconstrução parcial do itinerário de viagem do botânico brasileiro Francisco Freire Alemão que viajava pelo nordeste em meados do século XIX é usada como exemplo para mostrar a natureza “emocional e movediça” dos mapeamentos e sua importância não apenas como uma forma de compreender paisagens, mas também como um ato de revelar a noção de geografia do próprio geógrafo.

Palavras chave: Produção de mapas. Navegação. Mobilidade. Relatos de viagem. Francisco Freire Alemão. Cariri (Ceará)

ABSTRACT

As a research topic, maps and mappings within a cultural perspective have become increasingly popular over the last two decades. However, studies on the authorship and human agency in mapmaking, and how mapmakers engage with place and space are still awaiting a deeper analysis. From this angle, maps can be understood as processes, as actions in motion and events in constant becoming, rather than as finished products or simple representations. This paper addresses these theoretical reflections through a case study on cartographic narratives, performance of mapping, and navigation. The partial reconstruction of the travel route of the nineteenth-century Brazilian botanist Francisco Freire Alemão through parts of Northeast Brazil is presented to show the (e)motional nature of mapping and its importance not only as a way of understanding landscapes, but also as an act of drawing out the mapmaker's own geographical self.

Keywords: Mapmaking wayfinding. Mobility. Travel accounts. Francisco Freire Alemão. Cariri (Ceará)

1 INTRODUCTION

As a research topic, maps and mappings within a cultural perspective have become increasingly popular over the last two decades (e.g. COSGROVE, 1999; PICKLES, 2004). However, little has been written about the interactive processes of making maps and

charting landscapes and people in real time. The relations between the mapmaker and the place that he or she maps are frequently left out and require a closer look “behind the scenes.” The result of these mappings is not necessarily a map, but it can be an idea about space, photos from a survey, or any other reflection with a spatial connotation. It is not

the map itself that is used as an object of study, but the processes of thinking, perceiving, and conceiving that eventually lead to the drawing of features on a piece of paper. Mapmaking and mapping are based on human experience (WRIGHT, 1942) and are not value-free and objective activities:

Drawing a map therefore *involves* the subject (self), making mapping a personal, reflective experience. As a result, the map is a 'map' of experiences, and of course can be read as such. Its materiality, its texture and feel, is a critical part of the map's ability to provoke dialogue, and as a result, in turn, that dialogue becomes imprinted on the map (LILLEY, 2000, p.373, emphasis in original).

How do we, as mapmakers in general and geographers in particular, engage with the representation of place and space? How do we represent our findings graphically or cartographically? How do we convert or translate information on place and landscape into maps and graphic representations? And where can we find ourselves in our maps?

2 CARTOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGIES

I will tackle the questions I raised above with the help of three different, but complementary aspects of mapmaking. First, there is a methodological concern: How can we get place into maps? Margaret Pearce (2008) presents a methodological strategy to cartographically depict "spaces shaped by experience" (p.17), taking as an example the travel accounts of the eighteenth century fur trader Samuel de Champlain in the Upper Great Lakes region in Canada. In her study, Pearce converts narratives into cartographic frames with quotations that can be read like a graphic novel. The center piece of her study is a 39-by-59-inch map that combines multicolored graphical elements with diary entries and indigenous observations that allow the reader to establish an intimate relation to the mapped spaces and places. Pearce concludes that

If novelists can express the meaning of place through symbol only – letters on a page – then so, too, we should be able to express place

through cartographic symbol only, using the same device of narrativity (PEARCE, 2008, p. 20).

Second, by conceiving mapping as a performative and embodied process we emphasize action and not representation. Maps are not mere static paper landscapes or silent testimonies of geographical space, but must also be understood to be inserted in much more complex production processes in which "relations and flows in a network are more important (...) than entities and their properties" (PERKINS, 2009, p.126). Within this perspective, maps can be understood as actions-in-motion and events in constant becoming rather than as finished products or simple facts on paper (KITCHIN; DODGE, 2007).

Third, as British geographers such as Eric Laurier (BROWN; LAURIER, 2005), Tim Cresswell (2006), and John Wylie (2005) have already shown, our preconceptions, perceptions, or conceptions of space gain a new impulse when we are in movement. Geography and cartography can be experienced by walking, cycling, driving, or any other form of locomotion. These findings are not objective, but rather the result of individual enactments of our bodies, combining motion and emotion, movement and affection. This merging of body and mind becomes even more challenging when the mapmaker has to deal simultaneously with the representation of space – the map – and the represented space – that what we can see in front of our eyes. In other words,

Mobility is just spatial – as geographical – and just as central to the human experience of the world, as place [...] mobility is a way of being in the world (CRESSWELL, 2006, p.3).

3. SETTING THE STAGE: THE CARIRI REGION IN SOUTHERN CEARÁ

Due to my familiarity with its geography, I selected the Cariri region in the middle of the dry backlands of Ceará in Northeast Brazil as my cartographic playground where I could test these theoretical considerations in practice. Many authors (for

example, PETRONE, 1955a; BARROS, 1964; ANDRADE, 1980) praise the almost biblical setting of the Cariri at the foothills of the humid north side of the Araripe plateau that is poetically described as, paradise, “gift of nature”, or even God-sent, in contrast to the desolate *sertão* that surrounds the area.

A color composite image of the CBERS satellite (a technological cooperation program between China and Brazil) shows us a large green “island” in the middle of the purple-colored backland that visibly stands out and catches the idea of the image reader (Figure 1).

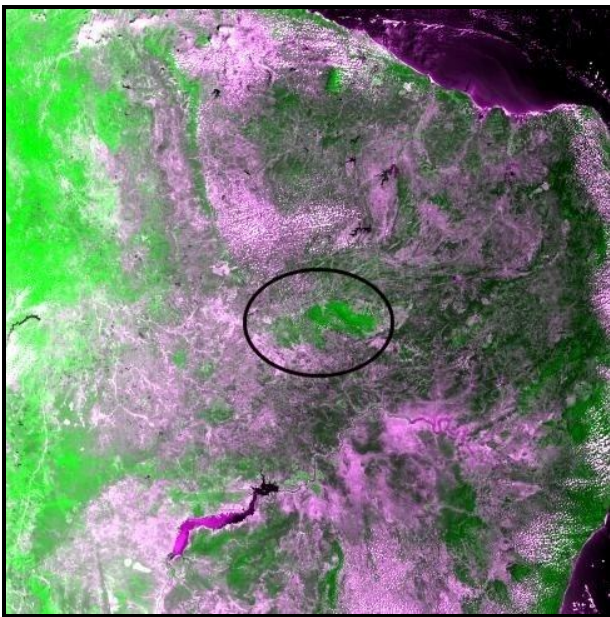


Figure 1: The location of the Cariri: CBERS 2, WFI, Image 151/108, 11-17-2004 (All rights reserved by INPE)

Rising to more than 3000 feet of elevation, the Araripe Plateau (the green area) dominates the image and turns the lands north from its humid flanks into fertile valleys that according to the statement of Senator Pompeu 150 years ago, “without exaggeration, are similar to those oases in Libya to which the Arabs from the desert run” (BRASIL, 1861, p.34).

Especially the travelers from the 19th century left written records in which the Cariri and its physical and cultural aspects were described in detail (for example, FEIJÓ, 1997 [1814]; PATRONI, 1836; GARDNER, 1846; FREIRE ALEMÃO, 2007 [1859-1860]). The *Comissão Científica de Exploração* (1859-

1861) was the first Brazilian scientific commission to travel through the northeastern regions of the country in order to compose “a collection of organic and inorganic products and of all that could serve as proof of the state of civilization, industry, uses and costumes of our indigenous peoples” (BRAGA, 1962, p.17). The findings of this expedition were registered in numerous articles and reports, some of them still unpublished (BRAGA, 1962; LOPES, 1996; PORTO ALEGRE, 2003; KURY, 2009). The botanist Francisco Freire Alemão, the leader of the commission, spent three months in the Cariri between December 1859 and March 1860 and wrote down a meticulous account of the regional flora, fauna, landscapes, and culture in his travel diary.

In my study, Freire Alemão’s 10-day round trip from the town of Crato in Ceará across the Araripe Plateau to Exu in Pernambuco in early 1860 shall serve as an inspiration to reflect about narratives and cartography (Figure 2). I will follow Freire Alemão’s trajectories and compare his observations and doings to my own mappings and performances.



Figure 2: Freire Alemão’s approximate itinerary over the Araripe Plateau

4 MAPPING FREIRE ALEMÃO’S MOVEMENTS

On Monday, January 30, 1860, at nine o’clock in the morning, Freire Alemão and his travel party mounted their horses and left the town of Crato heading for Exu in the neighboring state of Pernambuco on the southern side of the Araripe Plateau. After

about 90 minutes on a neck-breaking slope they reached the top of the plateau and continued their journey through a shrubby, dry vegetation under a scorching sun.

I imagine FreireAlemão on his horse, following the dirt trail to the plateau, passing first urban houses, then farms and sugar plantations, while the native population looked at him, greeting with some astonishment since strangers were not so frequent in the region at that time. Whereas FreireAlemão reached the top of the tablelands “all sweaty”, my trip was easier: Instead of a ride on horseback, my means of transportation was a beaten-up VW *Transporter* van conceded by the Universidade Regional do Cariri. I sat next to the driver, with a set of four topographic maps at a scale 1:100,000 on my lap. During my trip I took snapshots of the landscape and vegetation and produced several short video clips from the car. For this reason, many of my photos are framed by the van’s windshield and “adorned” with the black contours of the wipers (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The “photo frame” for my fieldtrip

On a narrow and potholed asphalt road to the plateau I was able to see a mix of architecture on both sides: simple one-storey houses, weekend homes with lush gardens; many of them were hidden behind stone walls and fences. The green wall of the tablelands was omnipresent in the background (Figure 4). A large, bright linear clearing in the vegetation indicated the trajectory of the road to the top. Our van climbed the slope in the first gear

towards the completely plain surface of the plateau top that contrasted to the steep ascent.

We followed the main road that my map classified as “road with loose surface, transitable under good and dry weather conditions.” The van glided over the sandy dirt road at a speed of about 30 miles per hour. Further ahead we reached a junction and entered a narrow path. The vegetation had grown to such an extent that it formed a kind of tunnel. Tree branches whipped and scratched the van. My driver did not reduce the speed and chattily told me about “what is going on” in this place. He knew where each bifurcation or trail led to and even provided me with estimates for each distance. Despite the rather dense vegetation with only a few breaches, almost all the lands were fenced with barbed wire, indicating that they had an owner.



Figure 4: Contrast between the climbing lope and the flat top of the plateau

After a long day’s ride, FreireAlemão arrived in Exu at the foothills of the southern

slopes of the plateau – “tired, soaked in sweat and covered with dust” (FREIRE ALEMÃO, 2007, p.46). His overall impression of the hamlet was rather gloomy. The local church was one of the few vistas that drew his attention: “The village is insignificant, of a sad and miserable nature: the main church that had never been finished is falling apart into ruins” (p.46).

Different from FreireAlemão who had local guides and trailblazers, I did not find the old settlement in my first attempt. Its name was not on the map, because the old village of Exu was located in a different spot about 150 years ago and is now called Gameleira. Besides, the old and the new settlements were on two different map sheets so that I had to switch between them to check our position. My driver sped downhill, and I had no time to check the map and look for the possible entrance to the hamlet. We had to drive six miles back to the beginning of the slope.

At the farm we searched for the church ruins and were told that they were located a short walk away. The trail led us through an area of flood lands with hip-high vegetation. Overgrown with lianas and other vine-like plants, the thick church walls emerged in the landscape: a bombastic structure with intact gothic arcs, like a fortification without a roof. We walked through the ruins. Remnants of foundations and a wooden cross loomed under the vegetation. So did the snakes (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The danger of fieldwork

At least two poisonous snakes were lying languidly in the shade of the leaf-littered

underwood. I did not believe in what FreireAlemão wrote down in his diary 150 years ago: “They say there are many snakes [in the Cariri], but I did not have the opportunity to see any over there” (FREIRE ALEMÃO, 2007, p.125).

The massive church walls were marked by innumerable graffiti carved in the slightly brittle sandstone, most of them from more than three decades ago: Ana, Maria, Pinau, Dumga, Vita, Edna, Zezé, Estácio, Ribamar, Fitita, Lala... Some carvings are dated: Lieutenant Gusmão was there on December 14, 1967, so was Pedrinho on September 16, 1968. FreireAlemão was there on February 01, 1860, but he did not leave any message for posterity (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Human markers on the walls of the church ruins

FreireAlemão’s next stop was the Caraíba farm, about ten miles further to the south. On my topographic map, I could find two places with the same name. Which one is it (Figure 7)? I suspected that the right Caraíba was a place called Colônia. The botanist did not mention any details of the landscapes that he saw on his trip. We tried to figure out the directions to the farm. I was looking for a left fork that according to my map would lead me to Caraíba. After several failed attempts, we chose a minor dirt road that gradually narrowed into a path. Twigs and branches were banging on our windshield and scraped the van that was jumping up and down on the irregular surface.

We stopped at a small property where the house owner gave us directions by scratching a drawing of lines and points in the dirt with a long stick (Figure 8).

I got very excited because this is one of the moments I had dreamed of as a cartographer of culture: the opportunity to register and record popular ways of mapping. In my romantic vision, I imagined all those ephemeral maps that indigenous people drew in the sand that soon got wiped out, blown away, or trampled on, falling into oblivion. This is what they talk about all the time in Harley's and Woodward's multi-volume on the *History of Cartography* (HARLEY; WOODWARD, 1987)!

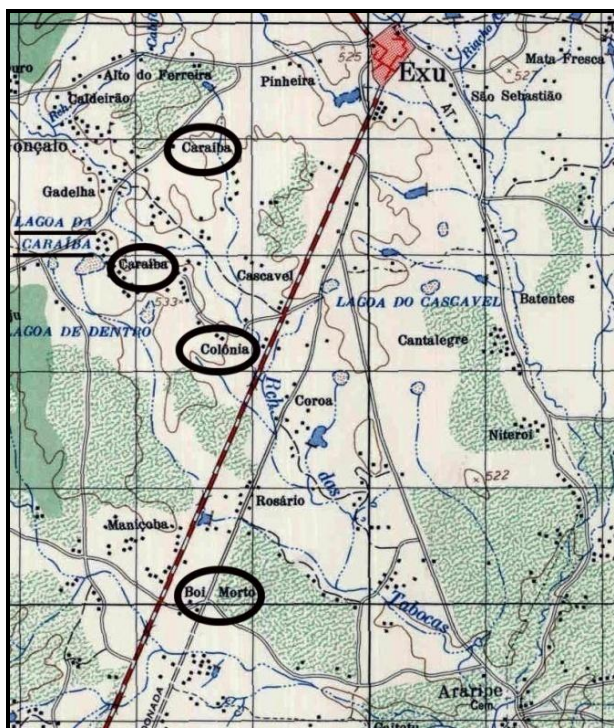


Figure 7: Topographic map sheet SB-24-Y-D-V (Bodocó): where is the right Caraíba?

This situation reminded me of what Robert Rundstrom observed during his fieldwork with the Inuit in Canada when he asked them about the use of material maps:

One Inuk elder told me that he had drawn detailed maps from memory, but he smiled and said that long ago he had thrown them away. It was the act of making them that was important, the recapitulation of environmental features, not the material objects themselves (RUNDSTROM, 1990, p.165).

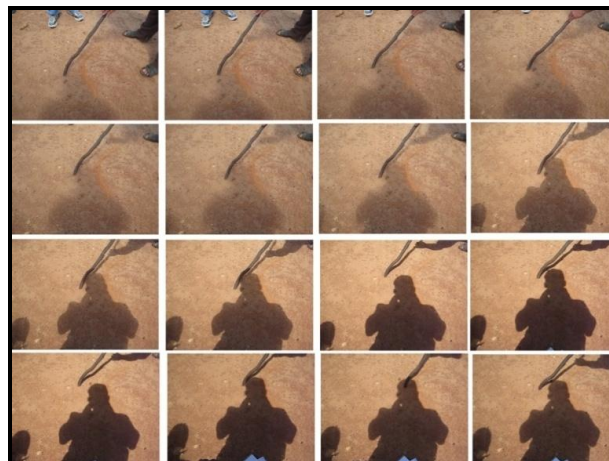


Figure 8: Recording the drawing in the sand

I hurried to our van in order to pick up my camera and my digital recorder. The house owner explained to me that there was a big mud hut that once stood “over there near the river... It is there where you pass the mango trees.” However, the house does not exist anymore. Like Gertrud Stein when she revisited her home town Oakland, I realized that “there is no there there” (STEIN, 1937, p. 289) – not even on the map.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The examples from my performative reconstruction of the travel route of the nineteenth-century Brazilian botanist FreireAlemão aimed to show the (e)motional nature of mapping and its importance not only as a way of understanding landscapes, but also as an act of reflecting about my own mapping strategies as a geographer. Places, spaces, regions, landscapes, and territories that I visited during my fieldwork had a considerable impact on my mapping behavior. In other words:

geographers *themselves* could use drawing and mapping, not only as a way of understanding landscape but for *drawing out* one's ‘geographical self’, and gaining an experience of place and time (LILLEY, 2000, p.383).

These mappings are not necessarily material records in a printed form and rather correspond to Denis Cosgrove's much broader definition of the term: “a measure of the world” ... [that is] not restricted to the

mathematical ... [and that] may equally be spiritual, political or moral ... [and includes] the remembered, the imagined, the contemplated" (COSGROVE, 1999, p.1-2).

Maps are not end product, but starting points. They include thoughts and emotions and must be seen as visual impressions in a broader context of visual culture.

I would like to make three observations on the nature of this (e)motional cartography. These are not conclusions, but rather starting points for a further debate:

First, FreireAlemão's travel account is only one example among many others. There are hundreds of travel writings that can be used for this kind of mapping exercise. Even twentieth-century academic publications could serve as a point of departure to retrace travel routes and reconstruct landscapes, events, and places. Prominent examples from the mid-1950s are Pasquale Petrone's two articles on the Cariri region and the town of Crato (PETRONE, 1955a, 1955b) in which the author vividly described the unique regional geography, the land use pattern, and, above all, the local economy. Petrone's account of the market in Crato is filled with detailed observations and a considerable number of black-and-white photos that help the reader to imagine and feel the pulsation of the regional commerce almost sixty years ago.

Second, following the autobiographical and auto-ethnographical turns in the social sciences, there is also a need to record how mapmakers engage with place and space, including his or her conflicts, decisions, and emotions, see for example (KWAN, 2007; CRAINE; AITKEN, 2009) for "affective cartographies"). This kind of "autocartography" consists of individual experiences that could, nevertheless, contribute to the understanding of cultures of map use and mapmaking in general. The crafting of a map frequently starts with the drawing of a line which is a universal feature, and it is up to the mapmaker to bring life to it. In Margaret Pearce's words:

to mark an individual's path across a map, regardless of the scale of that map, we draw a line. The problem with that line is that it does not

reflect the fullness of the world as we experience it while traveling along a path. Traveling is not a linear sensation but a sense of enclosure by a moving landscape (PEARCE, 2008, p.25).

This citation leads to my third and final point, the non-static character of maps and mappings. My attempts to follow FreireAlemão were a constant way-finding and way-losing. The topographic maps I carried with me were not very useful and even provided me with wrong information and mismappings. Do maps help us to find or to lose our way? Do we need maps at all or is it a matter of knowing and establishing personal bounds, and not of looking at maps so that "ordinary wayfinding, then, more closely resembles storytelling than map-using" (INGOLD, 2000, p.219)? Mapmaking means connecting points. The understanding of places is not based on sites and their positions, but about what they can tell us. In other words:

places do not have locations but histories. Bound together by the itineraries of their inhabitants, places exist not in space but as nodes in a matrix of movement (INGOLD, 2000, p.219).

The aim of this paper was to stimulate a debate on different methodologies for cartographic research that take into account cultural texts and contexts, link the processes of mapmaking to everyday life, arts, and human creativity, and open up refreshing, complementary, and sometimes playful perspectives that go beyond surveys and mapmaking (SEEMANN, 2010). Maps have a social life (PICKLES, 2006), and behind their cold paper façade are innumerable stories, actions, and movements waiting to be explored.

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