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BEYOND GEOGRAPHISM: POPULAR CULTURE IN PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT:

The peripheries of cities and their inhabitants are represented by stigmas which are (re)produced as marks of an immutable stereotype, through derogatory values that blame them for the maladies of the city. However, it is important to investigate whether the culture of these populations is made up solely by poverty and violence as this single discourse about such communities would have us believe, in a type of geographical prejudice, geographism. From this point of view, this article examines the perspectives of the Rubem Berta neighborhood in Porto Alegre. This work uses the approach of Cultural and Humanistic Geography to investigate the concepts of geographism, speech, identity, place and landscape through local and non-local reports to comprehend the different meanings which social actors attribute to the place, by means of the Discourse Analysis method. The reports helped to recognize that in many cases topophilic experiences coexist with topophobic ones. This study allows an understanding of the Housing Estate not only as expressed by the single discourse, but rather as a locus of pluralities, cultural experiences, thoughts, ideas and ideals, evidencing heterogeneity in terms of place and landscape.

KEYWORDS: Rubem Berta Housing Estate, Topophilia, Topophobia, Place, Landscape.

RESUMO:

As periferias das cidades e seus moradores são representados por estigmas que se (re)produzem com marcas de um estereótipo imutável, através de valores depreciativos, que atribuem a eles as mazelas da cidade. Contudo, é importante investigar se a cultura dessas populações é formada apenas por carências e por violências, como faz crer o discurso único – geografismo – que é constituído para estes lugares. Nessa perspectiva, este artigo investiga os olhares que apreendem o Conjunto Residencial Rubem Berta. A abordagem do trabalho seguiu a linha da Geografia Cultural e Humanística, a partir da discussão dos conceitos de geografismo, discurso, identidade, lugar e paisagem – buscando compreender em relatos locais e não locais os diferentes sentidos que esses atores atribuem ao lugar, tendo como método a Análise do Discurso. Os relatos permitiram reconhecer que experiências topofílicas coexistem em muitos casos com experiências topofóbicas. Este estudo permitiu ler o Conjunto Residencial como um locus de pluralidades, de vivências culturais, de pensamentos, de ideias e ideais, os quais evidenciam heterogeneidade no lugar e na paisagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Conjunto Residencial Rubem Berta, Topofilia, Topofobia, Lugar, Paisagem.

RESUMEN:

Las periferias de las ciudades y sus habitantes están representadas por estigmas que si (re)producen con marcas de un estereotipo inmutable, a través de valores despectivos que les atribuyen las mazelas de la ciudad. Sin embargo, es importante investigar si la cultura de esas poblaciones está formada sólo por carencias y violencias, como hace creer el discurso único – geografismo – que está constituido para estos lugares. En esta perspectiva, este artículo investiga las miradas que apprehenden el Conjunto Residencial Rubem Berta. El enfoque del trabajo siguió la línea de la Geografía Cultural y Humanística, a partir de la discusión de los conceptos de geografismo, discurso, identidad, lugar y paisaje, buscando comprender en relatos locales y no-locales los diferentes sentidos que los actores atribuyen al lugar, teniendo como método el Análisis del Discurso. Los relatos permitieron reconocer que las experiencias topofílicas coexisten en muchos casos con experiencias topofóbicas. Este estudio permitió la lectura del Conjunto

Residencial como un locus de pluralidades, vivencias culturales, pensamientos, ideas e ideales que evidencian heterogeneidad en el lugar y en el paisaje.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Conjunto Residencial Rubem Berta, Topofilia, Topofobia, Lugar, Paisaje.

INTRODUCTION

There is always a place to get to or leave. And there is always a need to know the meaning that is attributed to this place. (OLIVEIRA, 2012).

To inhabit is a strong word and to inhabit the periphery of the city requires a lot of strength. This is because the subject is part of the place in which they live, just as the place is part of the subject's identity. In this respect, the discourses (re)produced about a place impact on the place-subjects and the interests of the actors who produce the discourse define its meaning: positive, with the intention of reinforcing a group's cohesion; or negative – in the sense of “denying place”, which “implies disqualifying both the life and the memories of those who constructed and inhabit a place” (SOUZA, 2013, 125). Thus, the maladies and problems of the city are attributed to the peripheries and their residents, especially regarding violence. It is acknowledged that there is large-scale violence in the peripheries, but it is usually haphazard, because it comes from drug trafficking. However, we postulate that the discourse of violence instituted for these places masks innumerable practices which are distinct from violence and that reinforce stereotypes about the populations in the periphery.

The studies that challenge single and hegemonic discourses about peripheral spaces found in Geography (FIGUEIREDO, 2014; GAMALHO, 2009, 2011; GAMALHO & HEIDRICH, 2008; SERPA, 2011), are relevant as they highlight the multiplicity of actors, stories and geographies in these spaces. In this sense, this article presents a brief discussion about the geographisms that register violent stereotypes of the peripheral areas of big cities. Specifically, the objective is to investigate the discourse on violence, a geographism that is attributed to the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, in Porto Alegre, RS (Figure 1), seeking to comprehend how it impacts the relationships between people's daily life and their place. Beyond geographism, the feeling of attachment to the place, as well as aversion or fear, are felt and experienced, and are influenced by geographisms to a greater or lesser extent; aspects also addressed in this article. This housing estate is one of the countless housing complexes, slums and subdivisions, each with their specificities, which form the Rubem Berta neighborhood,¹ which is in the northern part of Porto Alegre.

The Rubem Berta Housing Estate has 39 residential nuclei (Figure 2), which form four blocks of buildings; each block has 32 apartments.

In the following sections, the concepts of geographism, violence, place and landscape will be discussed, making up a structure of thought. The systematization of these concepts seeks to understand the finding that geographisms strongly emphasize the violence practiced and experienced in the location, and how they are registered as a single discourse, which obscures the intentions of the actors-narrators, as well as the local inhabitants' practices that differ from violence – such as political and cultural practices.

THE PRODUCTION OF STEREOTYPES: GEOGRAPHISMS

In the debate on stereotypes, the predominant analytical resource is the concept of representation. In this work, the concept of geographism is used as a reference. Geographism can be understood as a representation with a pejorative meaning. The French geographer Yves Lacoste coined the concept of geographism and he defined it as follows:

[...] the metaphors that transform into political forces, actors or heroes from history, portions of terrestrial space or, more precisely, the names given by geographers to territories. Examples of geographisms are:

'Lorraine fights, Corsica rebels, Brittany claims, the North produces this or that, Paris this or that influence, Lyon manufactures, etc.' (LACOSTE, 1988, p. 65).

Lacoste contributes by giving a spatial concept to the issue of stereotypes, which, from the effort undertaken in the discursive field,² become naturalized. Thus, created and consolidated naturalization enables the acceptance of the geographism by the stereotyped group, and consequently makes challenging it a difficult task. In so doing, overcoming geographism, that is, to claim a different sense of place from that already imposed and naturalized, is virtually inaccessible to the stereotyped group.

Considering these aspects, it is understood that Lacoste's ideas can be observed on different scales,³ as in the Rubem Berta Housing Estate. This comprehension is far from media representations and the teaching of Geography in the classroom, which still associate space with a metaphor for the representation of subjects.

Yves Lacoste questioned the naturalization of geographisms and drew attention to the care that should be taken with the issue, because

[...] these stylistic jugglings are not as innocent as they may seem at first glance, as they gloss over the differences and contradictions between the various social groups that are found in these places or in these territories. (LACOSTE, 1988, p. 65).

Geographism suggests a misguided reading of places by addressing heterogeneity as homogeneity. In this sense, this glossing over is a key element to understand geographisms in their totality. At times this element is presented merely as an inevitable consequence of geographisms and at others it is the very basis on which the origin of these stereotypes is based, as a *conditio sine qua non*. To reflect on geographisms and their construction, we should turn to the philosopher Karel Kosík (1976) and consider that investigating a phenomenon without thinking of the essence⁴ that (re)produces it is certainly a flawed path.

Geographisms produce a series of developments: both by the stigmas they create/record, with the resulting influence on the stigmatized population and space, and the forms of sociability they mask. For a better understanding of the impacts of geographisms, we must resort to the concepts of identity and discourse, elements that have a close relationship with each other and that form the basis of many spatial stereotypes.

Identity is a fundamentally important concept in cultural studies in geography and because it is essentially a representational element, it has a strong link with geographisms. By identity, we understand

[...] a social and historical construction of both the 'self' [the *soi...*] and the 'other', entities that, far from being frozen in an 'essential' permanence, are constantly and reciprocally engaged and negotiated in relationships of power, exchange or confrontation, more or less disputable and disputed, which vary in time and space (BOSSÉ, 2004, p. 163).

Bossé (2004) understood identity as something that is constituted and expressed in a very dynamic way. However, geographism presents an aspect that is generally immutable but which can also be challenged. The identifying marks expressed by geographisms within the discursive field "have more possibilities of circulating", a "greater power to make themselves known and accepted" (Apple, 1996, p. 34) and they are spatially delimited.

Discourses form and can structure material and symbolic fields directly and indirectly. They are relevant as a resource to legitimize and to maintain social structures "intact" in different cultures. The geographer James Duncan (2004) defined discourses as

the structure of intelligibility in which all practices are communicated, negotiated or challenged. They are, at the same time, facilitating resources and constraints or limits within which certain modes of thought and action seem natural, beyond which most of those who have learned to think within a discourse cannot easily venture (DUNCAN, 2004, p. 104).

Thus, we can understand that geographism is constructed through discourse practice(s) and it emerges as a discourse which is materialized in both space and subject. Discourse is the means/end that both constructs geographism and perpetuates its existence. The inseparable relationship between the concepts of

geographism, discourse and identity may be evidenced in the thought of Mathias Le Bossé (2004), who states that

[...] every identity form presents itself as a balance of tensions between the being and the coming-to-be; thus, the identity argument, as consciousness and a presence susceptible to change, to disappear or to adapt, can both turn to the past or project itself into the future. (BOSSÉ, 2004, p. 163).

The “tensions” are mediated through discourses and when they are perceived as natural, geographism can preclude the perspective of “coming-to-be”. Therefore, the spatialized stereotype may immobilize future projections but it can also instigate perspectives for change – even if this possibility is more unlikely, as geographism suggests limitations of thoughts and projections beyond its sphere.

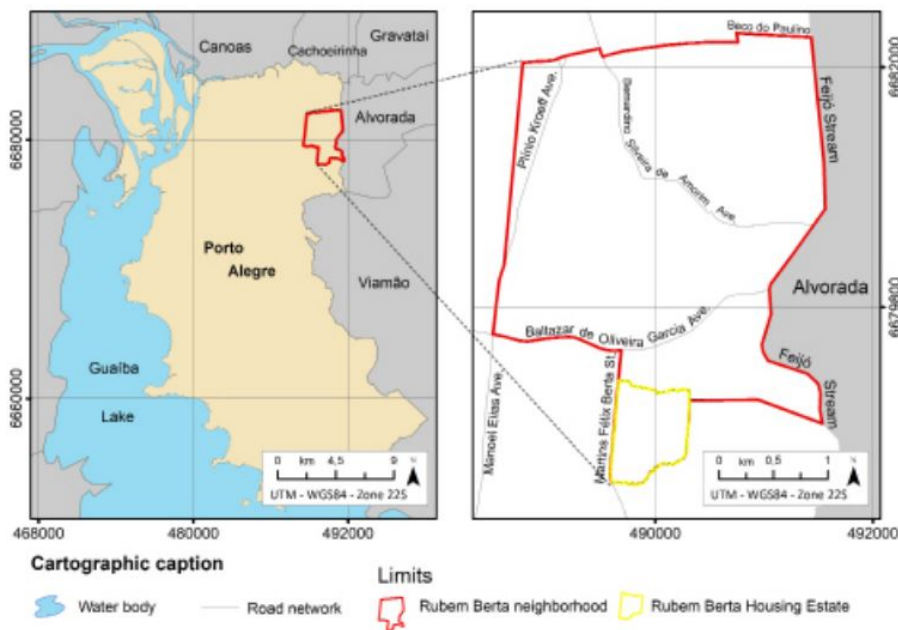


Figure 1 - Location of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

FIGURE 1

Location of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

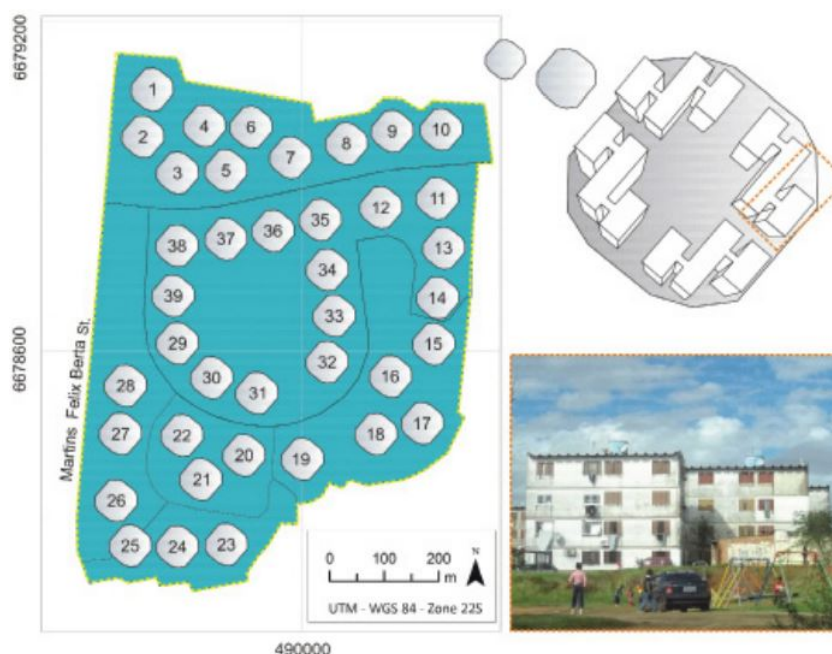


Figure 2 - Map of the housing nuclei of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

FIGURE 2

Map of the housing nuclei of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

VIOLENCE: GEOGRAPHISMS ABOUT THE PERIPHERIES

The authors who address the issue of violence are mainly sociologists, who are forceful in recognizing that violence comes from a process of asymmetrical relationships, which perpetuate deep inequalities (ARENDT, 1985; BAUMAN, 2009; ODALIA, 2012; OLIVEN, 1986; TAVARES DOS SANTOS, 2009; TAVARES DOS SANTOS et al., 2011). In that sense, Ruben Oliven addresses violence as a “mechanism of domination by the ruling classes” and, in contrast, as “a survival strategy by the dominated classes” (OLIVEN, 1986, p. 17).

Oliven’s (1986) understanding of violence is easily visible within the capitalist system of production. Tavares dos Santos (2009) alerts to the issue of a crisis of sociability, which, “reaching, at the limit, manifestations of violence, phenomena that take on new contours and begin to spread throughout society, taking place as diffuse violence” (TAVARES DOS SANTOS, 2009, p. 20). The notion of diffuse violence indicates a change in the theme of violence, which is not structural, but which suggests both its trivialization and an even greater complexity that it acquires in the contemporary world, since it is not enough to “refer violence to economic or political determinations, even though they persist in acting as efficient causes [...]” (TAVARES DOS SANTOS, 2009, p. 20).

Tavares dos Santos (2009) illuminates the phenomenon of violence as the result of a socio-spatial process that the author called “lacerated citizenship”. According to the author, violence is

[...] the social relationship characterized by the real or virtual use of force or coercion that prevents the recognition of the other - person, class, gender or race - provoking some kind of harm, shaping the opposite of the possibilities of democratic society. (TAVARES DOS SANTOS, 2009, p. 16).

Thus, it appears that violence presents itself not only in its ultimate form, as physical aggression, but also in multiple forms.⁵ In the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, as usually happens in peripheral neighborhoods, the most present violence is the result of drug trafficking. It is clear that the instability of trafficking points and

the fight over them by different groups intensifies the violence in areas that are dominated by drug trafficking, since “domination through pure violence comes to the fore when power is about to be lost” (ARENDT apud SOUZA, 2012, p. 80).

These groups’ existence is strongly linked with the imposition of fear in “their” territory. In this perspective, the “capital of fear” (BAUMAN, 2009), which is intensified explicitly by the sensationalist media discourse, contributes to perpetuating the representation of violent places and, to a certain extent, helps drug trafficking groups to affirm “their” territory as the “territory of fear” (TAVARES DOS SANTOS et al., 2011).

It is evident that the scenario of violence is predominantly haphazard in peripheral regions, as it is linked to the practices of drug trafficking groups. Despite this, in the discourse produced by the mass media and academia, the issue is generalized as a situation widespread in peripheral areas and the working classes, because a series of stigmas are applied to these areas, which are constantly pictured as places where the people are inherently violent. Thus, Nilo Odalia states:

[...] in neighborhoods in which slums and favelas abound, violence cannot be glossed over and avoided with fences and walls. It is a lived reality, a reality whose proximity and intimacy helps to forget it. It is faced as one of the many calamities that have to be faced in everyday life. To survive in these places is to suffer and produce violence (ODALIA, 2012, p. 12).

It is necessary to consider the greater concentration of problems in peripheral areas compared to other areas of the cities, which are mainly related to infrastructure and other basic services. Nonetheless, there are several positive aspects in these places, although they are not shown. Angelo Serpa (2011), on addressing the peripheral neighborhoods of Salvador, noted that multiple cultural manifestations are developed in these locations, through the work of neighborhood associations and non-governmental organizations, without the need for institutional or financial aid. These manifestations result from “alternative ideas to the dominant culture, which are manifest in the day-to-day of the working class areas of the metropolis” (SERPA, 2011, p. 105). According to the author, the value given to the ideas originating from vernacular cultures would be

an efficient strategy of deconstructing stigma and prejudice against socioeconomically fragile groups, but which are rich and diverse regarding the cultural capital they have and reproduce in their daily lives. (SERPA, 2011, p. 105).

This appreciation of vernacular cultures is a very important strategy to combat the idea that “if there is no solution to everyday violence, the solution is to integrate it as a normal component of relationships between people” (ODALIA 2012, p. 12). In this perspective, Angelo Serpa points to the need to qualify cultural studies with the intention of showing

what is hidden to production and mass cultural consumption. It is a matter of explaining the manifestations of popular culture in our cities and their organizational forms, rescuing both the lucid sense and the liveliness of the urban in the contemporary period. (SERPA, 2011, p. 104)

Nola Gamalho (2011) discusses the production of space and the representations of the peripheries in his case study of the Restinga neighborhood (Porto Alegre/RS). To this end, he analyzed not only the conceived space, but also the lived one, through the proximities, solidarities and struggles of the residents. The author states that the social representations of this neighborhood portray it as a: “distant place, devoid of infrastructure and filled by a marginalized population” (GAMALHO, 2011). These characteristics, which refer to the Restinga neighborhood, can also be related to other peripheral districts and, consequently, to the Rubem Berta Housing Estate.

Therefore, concerning representations of peripheries, these places are considered to be deficient, whether economically, politically or culturally. However, some research shows other possible readings of the peripheries (without necessarily masking their deficiencies), as in the work of Angelo Serpa (2011). It is important to recognize that there are a series of (social, cultural and economic) specificities in peripheral neighborhoods, which, however, are ignored. For this reason, “it is imperative to distrust common sense,

distrusting the naturalization of a hierarchical society” (GAMALHO, 2011, p. 61). According to Gamalho & Heidrich (2011):

The term periphery is present in society’s daily life; it appears in the media, it advances in common sense, it is interpreted in the bodies and it incorporates values. It is simultaneously an abstraction, a theoretical, political and ideological exercise and materiality, since it composes the lived space of a certain social segment. (GAMALHO & HEIDRICH, 2008, p. 2).

PLACE AND LANDSCAPE: INSTRUMENTS FOR READING PERCEPTIONS

There are some important theoretical contributions to the discussion of the field of perception in this research, such as the work of Yi-Fu Tuan (1983, 2012). This author contributes through the concept of place, as well as its intentions and densities, which are associated with “experience, the quality of the emotional attachment to physical objects, the functions of concepts and symbols in the creation of place identity” (TUAN, 1983, p. 149).

Therefore, interviews were conducted with residents and leaders of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate – “local reports” – and with school teachers, staff of the health centers working in the Housing Estate and residents from surrounding neighborhoods – “non-local reports” (DUNCAN, 2004). The approaches were in the form of semi structured interviews, in which

the interviewer asks questions in a predetermined order, but within each question the interviewee’s freedom is considerable. In addition, other questions can be raised, depending on the interviewee’s answers, that is, there may be additional questions [...]. (MOREIRA apud SANTOS, 2013, p. 330).

The interviews were designed to investigate the perception of residents and others who have some type of relationship with the place in question, to understand how the discourses that circulate develop and how they influence these subjects. The discourse analysis method was also used to interpret the interviews. In other words, the corpus of the work was selected from the interviews texts (reports), followed by the “selection of fragments (discursive sequences)” as well as the reconstitution of the “discursive regularities” (SILVA, 2009).

The reading of humanistic geography’s contributions permits the consideration that the place has the feature of a landscape, a place has a landscape, just as the landscape has a place.⁶ According to Edward Relph (1979), the relationship between space, landscape and place is not constant when we approach them as experienced phenomena: “places have landscapes and landscapes and spaces have places”. In this work, we understand that the Rubem Berta Housing Estate can be apprehended by its residents as a place, which has a topophilic meaning – as described by Yi-fu Tuan (2012, p. 19). That is to say, as the “affective link between the person and the place”, whereas to non-residents it is perceived as a landscape, which has a topophobic meaning.

The place has taken on a great deal of relevance in humanistic and cultural geography, since it is from the place that we discover the world and “where the foundations of our worldly existence and of our human condition are established” (DARDEL apud RELPH, 1979, p. 16). The concept of place refers to the lived; to the space which is full of meanings and values (not only economic and material, but also symbolic and existential); to the locus of the reproduction of daily life, which is permeated by different worldviews and different ideas of ‘culture’ (SERPA, 2011, p. 97).

Yi-Fu Tuan (1983) understands the place as a space endowed with value, stating that as it acquires definition and meaning, the space transforms itself into a place. Edward Relph (1979) affirms that the place refers to a “kind of experience and engagement with the world, the need for roots and security”, endowing it with a much deeper and fruitful meaning than a “sense of geographical location” (RELPH, 1979, p. 17).

According to Oliveira (2012), the place can be addressed in its significant dimensions through a geographical perspective when we think “from experience, from residing, from speaking and from rhythms and transformations” (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 15). In this sense, when the place is understood as a field in which

socio-spatial experiential relationships are established, this concept enables the apprehension of different meanings, speeches and experiences – essential for understanding the discourses that circulate in the place and outside of it.

The place may have an operational character, as an instrument for reading perception,⁷ since “it expresses and conditions the routine, the confrontations, the conflicts and the dissonances” and, for this reason, allows “a reading of daily life, with its rhythms and contradictions” (CARLOS apud SERPA, 2011, p. 100). Therefore, it is clear that the concept enables a wide range of insights into and understandings in the experiential field when seen as “centers of meaning in space and landscape” (TUAN apud RELPH, 1979, p. 8).

There is a strong affinity between place and landscape because both express spheres with endless meanings, experiences and proximities, as according to Edward Relph (1979, p. 13) landscapes “do not only have content and substance, but they are also the significant scenarios for daily and exceptional experiences”.

In this perspective, Jean-Marc Besse (2006, p. 80) understood that landscape “is first and foremost the experience of the proximity of things”. The affinity between these concepts is evident with the realization that the landscape also refers – although in a context and a scale that are larger than the place – to values and to existence, in other words, “the landscape is in the order of feeling”, which can be “understood less as an object than a representation, a value, a dimension of discourse and human life, or even a cultural formation” (BESSE, 2006, p. 78).

From the perspective of the cultural approach in geography, the landscape is a tool that allows reflection about discourses – it conveys, conditions and (re)produces. It was understood by James Duncan (2004) as:

one of the central elements in a cultural system, because, as an ordered set of objects, a text acts as a sign-creation system whereby a social system is transmitted, reproduced, experimented and explored. (DUNCAN, 2004, p. 106).

The conceptions of culture and cultural production as a “sign-creation system”, which “is present in all other social systems and that manifests all of them within itself” avoids a fragmented interpretation of reality and, consequently, allows a reflection that seeks to approach an apprehension of the totality (DUNCAN, 2004, p. 102).

Duncan’s perspective (2004, p. 103) proposes an “interdisciplinary approach to culture and cultural production, which sees them not only as a sign-creation system but as texts that allow multiple readings”. This view opens up a range of interpretations (readings) of a landscape, which, a priori, would avoid the homogeneous reading of something that is heterogeneous. This is not to say that the readings – of the text – necessarily complement each other; on the contrary, they are often opposed, forming a “discursive field”.

Therefore, the methodological perspective indicated by James Duncan (2004) is engaged in the reading of the landscape, proposing that we investigate the “meaning of the landscape” and the “rhetoric of the landscape”. The first aims to question “what is meant by the landscape”, whereas the second deals with the “way this signification occurs”. According to Duncan, to understand the “significance of the landscape” we must investigate local and non-local reports to ascertain the difference between discourses. As the last step, it is necessary to interpret the “system of signification underlying the landscape itself” (DUNCAN, 2004, p. 109).

BEYOND GEOGRAPHISM: TOPOPHILIA, TOPOPHOBIA AND POPULAR CULTURE IN THE RUBEN BERTA HOUSING ESTATE

The interviews with residents and leaders of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate indicated the importance of the occupation of this complex in the consolidation of the dwellings and lives of the inhabitants. Therefore, we first present a brief history of the occupation of the study area. In addition, the interviews make it possible

to verify that the subject's perception of this place can be understood by views expressed as both topophilia and topophobia, and, therefore, we present local and non-local reports.

The Rubem Berta Housing Estate was taken over on April 27, 1987, in a context of many occupations of housing complexes in the end of the 1980s, which had been abandoned by the Housing Company of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (Companhia de Habitação do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul – COHAB/RS), in the Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre (RMPA). Cláudia Pires et al. (2013) highlighted the number of occupations that occurred at that time, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Occupations of Housing Complexes in RS in 1987
Table 1 – Occupations of Housing Complexes in RS in 1987

City	Occupations of Housing Complexes
Porto Alegre	6
Alvorada	5
Gravataí	2
Canoas	1
Cachoeirinha	1
Total	15

Source: Pires et al. (2013).

Source: Pires et al. (2013).

Paulo Azevedo (2002) noted that the reasons that gave rise to occupations relate mainly to three factors: the inequalities that arise from the (re)production of the monopolistic capitalist system, which caused increases in poverty, the concentration of the population and lack of access to basic goods among the working classes; the reorientation of the housing policy of the National Housing Bank (Banco Nacional de Habitação – BNH), which limited the housing supply for low-income contingents; and the political-economic policies of the period, which resulted in the unfreezing of rents that resulted in many rents tripling in value, making payment impossible, while workers' wages remained low and unaltered. (Azevedo, 2002).

The reports of residents and leaders from the Rubem Berta Housing Estate expressed the importance of engagement and creating bonds between people. They were needed, at least at the time of the occupations, to consolidate the movement that claimed the right to housing. When asked about the place where they live, a resident, who acted as a leader during the occupation, said:

The people who came here at the time of the occupation, and who are here today, are very brave, very supportive of each other, do you understand? They are people, that we have a sincere friendship with, they are all people who were in the same boat, who fought for the same purpose, that is, a house to live in. (Report of Laudenir Figueiredo, which was obtained during field work, in August 2013).

The apartments in the southern part of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate are called *carijós* by the occupants, because, according to them, "the plaster on the walls had not been finished" in many of these buildings, neither were stairs and windows installed. Moreover, the problems faced in the occupation were similar to the adversities which were verified in other occupations that occurred at this time, such as a lack of water, electricity and food, besides facing military and police repression, which was very blatant.

The Zero Hora newspaper reports that covered the 1987 occupations generally portrayed the occupiers as invaders, making clear its position regarding the illegality of the occupation. Silva (2009) returns to Mikhail Bakhtin to present the notion of a sign as something that comprises the disputes between social classes. In this sense, Fernandes (2007) observed that the discourse of the Landless Movements denominates their actions as occupations; however, both the mainstream media and landowners denominate such actions as invasions. Such discourses are opposite, and their meanings are conflictive: the term occupancy refers to the legitimate appropriation of a disused place, to the claim of the right to housing, while the term invasion expresses this action as illegal and labels its practitioners as criminals (FERNANDES, 2007).

The Rubem Berta Housing Estate as topophilia

The local reports evidenced the topophilic experiences of the residents and leaderships regarding the place. In a first moment, these individuals talked about their histories, their friendships and the values cultivated in the neighborhood – the topophilia: the “affective link between the person and the place” (TUAN, 2012, p. 19).

In the interviews with the women who live on the Rubem Berta Residential Estate, they are concerned about the way the place is represented (they are bothered by “the denial of place”) and the importance of the place for raising their children. In this sense, Dona Maria, a retired resident who acts politically in the neighborhood, said:

I like Rubem Berta a lot, here are simple people, right? There’s informal transport close to home, buses, stations, schools. [...] I do not like to criticize Rubem Berta because it is where we live, right, where we bring up our children. (Report of Dona Maria, which was obtained in field work, in August 2013).

Dona Maria’s report showed that her lived space contrasts with the conception of space of peripheries in general, portrayed as places with a precarious infrastructure. In the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, most of the residents evaluate the infrastructure of their neighborhood as positive, but with the reservation that this has resulted, and still results, from the community’s struggles for better living conditions.

Like Dona Maria, other residents and leaders of the study area stated the importance of the neighborhood and the friendships they experience there. Thus, these reports evidence the existential character that the Rubem Berta Housing Estate has in residents’ life – a place that is full of the value and meanings to which Tuan (1983, 2012) and Relph (1979) refer. The geographism of violence is perverse, because it masks many facets of the space, which are only perceived by the people who construct them daily. Moreover, the single discourse – recorded as a geographism – also has the intention of reducing the socio-spatial potential of a population accustomed to hardship.

In daily life peripheral neighborhoods are rarely treated as places with cultures, that is, the people who live there are not treated as thinking and creative beings, with numerous ideas and ideals. However, these places, these people, are covered by marks that inscribe and portray culture, art and values that belong to a popular and peripheral culture.

In the Rubem Berta Housing Estate there are several groups that organize, participate and act in socio-cultural movements, such as the Alvo Cultural Association (Alvo Associação Cultural), the Rubem Berta Housing Estate Residents Community Association (Associação Comunitária dos Moradores do Conjunto Residencial Rubem Berta – AMORB) and one of the most well-known rap events in the country, Cohab is just rap (Cohab é só rap), organized by Leandro Seré.

The Alvo Cultural Association, established in 2005, develops and produces rap artists from the periphery and directs part of their earnings to social projects, acting not only in the Rubem Berta, but much of the RMPA. This group carries out many activities, such as skateboarding, street dancing and hip-hop classes in economically vulnerable regions and the RMPA’s schools, for students who have a record of school violence. The president of the association, Jean Andrade, a longstanding resident of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, was awarded the Porto Alegre Medal in 2013. In 2010, the musician and Alvo Cultural Association founder-

member W Negro received the “Açorianos” Music Award (Prêmio Açorianos de Música) for his CD Portal dos Anjos.

The AMORB, which was created in 1987, is strongly engaged in the struggles of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate’s community, playing an important role in pressuring the public authorities and promoting cultural activities (capoeira classes, professional training courses, among others), together with the locals. AMORB has a community radio that dedicates time to discuss neighborhood issues. The importance of community radios was highlighted by Angelo Serpa, who said:

Practices of media appropriation by the working classes, such as the initiatives that are disseminated in metropolitan peripheries through community radios, tactically subvert the cultural hegemony conveyed by traditional broadcasting media and create between-places to reestablish liveliness as a transverse value. (SERPA, 2007, p. 54).

The Cohab is just rap event, which involves many musical groups, is another important movement that happens in the neighborhood and it has great magnitude and importance to young people of the periphery, who experience popular culture. Synchronized with this event is the “Coloring COHAB Project”, which is organized by the Núcleo Urbanóide, in which graffiti artists execute their art on the Rubem Berta Housing Estate’s buildings and houses (Figure 3).



Figure 3 - Building of Rubem Berta Housing estate with art by Núcleo Urbanóide.

FIGURE 3

Building of Rubem Berta Housing estate with art by Núcleo Urbanóide.

Leandro Seré states that the event was designed to encourage art as a possibility for the community and as an alternative that contributes to the decrease of violence. According to his testimony:

We want to foster local arts and seduce the youth of the neighborhood to try a new peace culture. Through graffiti, dance and music we try to show young people who have few cultural options and many paths to crime that there are alternatives available for a better future. (Municipal Youth Secretariat of Porto Alegre (Secretaria Municipal da Juventude de Porto Alegre). Source: <www.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/smj> Accessed on: 30 Sep. 2014.

Regarding the socioeconomic conditions of the residents of the complex, using data from IBGE’s 2010 Demographic Census (IBGE, 2011), a map was produced of the resident population and the per capita monthly nominal income of the permanent private households (Figure 4).

Figure 4 shows the differences in income within the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, there are differences between the residential nuclei and between these and the “garages”.⁸ In the area of garages, the per capita income is lower compared to the residential nuclei: in the former, the percentage of extremely poor, poor and vulnerable people reaches 70%; in the latter, this percentage does not exceed 56%. The number of non-poor persons is higher in the residential nuclei 1 to 10 than in the other residential nuclei (11 to 39). In the first group, the percentage of non-poor people ranges from 53% to 67%; in the second, this percentage varies from 42% to 61%.

It is important to note that in some residents' reports, they proved to be aware of the differences within Rubem Berta Housing Estate, as is evident in the report of a community leader, which stated:

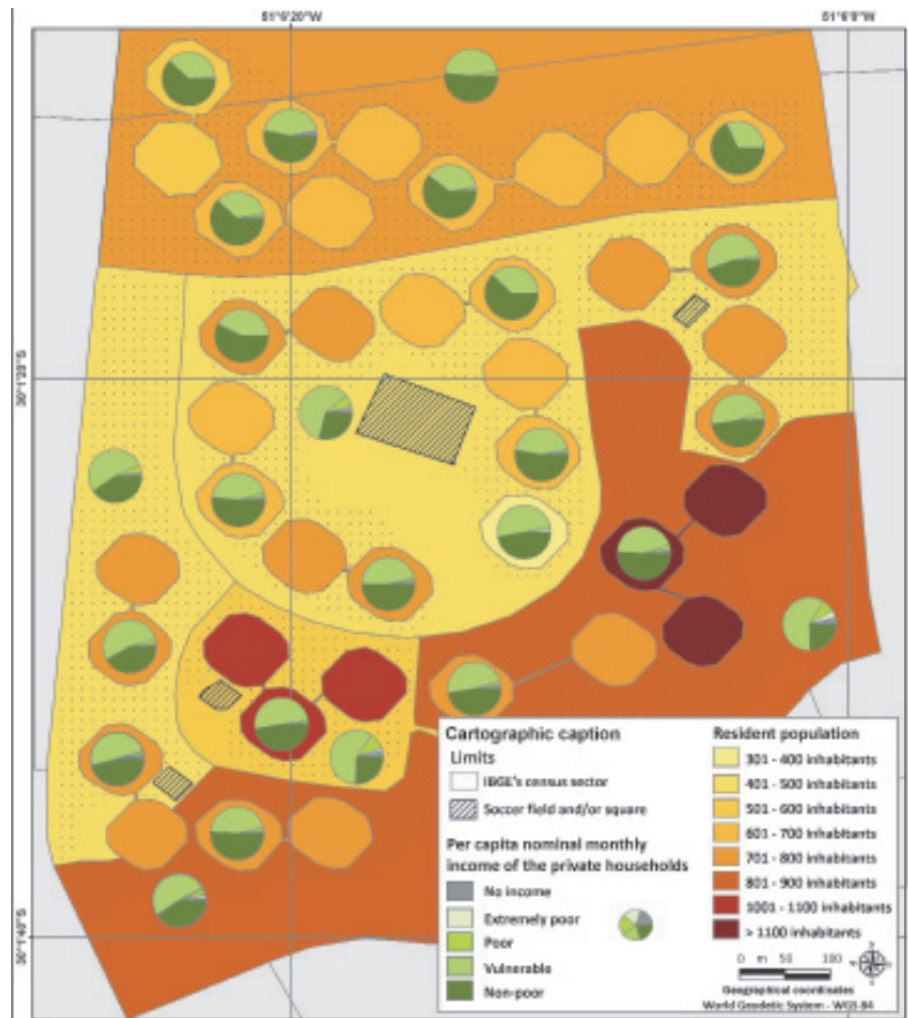


FIGURE 4

Map of the residents and the per capita nominal monthly income of the private households of the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, in Porto Alegre/RS.

The issue of very large inequality within the Cohab, less so today, with the rise of class C, but still very unequal. So, there are people who have a car, right, they have a nice apartment, with work done on it, they have a good structure inside their house, they have a nice car, but other people are destitute, right? The neighborhood itself is very unequal, right, even being a peripheral neighborhood, having class C, B, and, of course, infinite classes. (Interview with Jean Andrade, which was obtained in field work, in September 2014).

This leader's narrative shows an awareness that there is a representation of peripheries that considers them as something homogeneous, when he states that "[...] The neighborhood itself is very unequal, right, even

being a peripheral neighborhood, [...], that is, there are a series of differences that make the housing complex heterogeneous, with specific characteristics, and the residents can perceive this.

The Rubem Berta Housing Estate as topophobia

Initially, the residents' reports expressed topophilia towards their place. However, after the topophilic narrative, these residents began to expose the problems they encounter in the neighborhood, which mainly refer to the issue of violence and because of this they expressed topophobic feelings. In some reports it was observed that residents had to adapt their routine and their routes in the neighborhood, due to the feeling of insecurity generated by the violence that originates from the disputes between drug trafficking groups, as shown in this resident's report:

[...] I feel partly safe, in my corner as it were, not to go out on the street, I do not go out at any time, I already take care what time I go to the store, all because of the violence. I'm more careful now, not like when the children were small, right now, it's changed a lot, changed a lot, changed very much. (Resident's report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

The issue of violence in the neighborhood was recognized by all interviewees, except for one local resident and merchant. Therefore, the residents recognize the violence, but each report pointed to different reasons for the existence of this violence, they also questioned how it appears in the media. In this sense, a Rubem Berta Housing Estate resident said:

But it is also a very difficult community, very violent, right, because the occupation, the initial architectonic project, did not anticipate, or rather it foresaw more open areas, areas for socializing, because of the irregular occupation these open spaces were occupied by garages and houses, which became people's houses. [...] The phenomenon of the garages spread, today they are not garages, right now there are even buildings, 3-storey buildings and taking up all the space of the Cohab, creating numerous alleyways, right, a tangle of irregular buildings, it is a vertical favela. And then, man, what happens is that in this situation there is no leisure area, there is no area for culture, there is no open space. So, the quality of life in Cohab is very low, very low in the sense of housing itself. (Resident's report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

The importance of public spaces in a neighborhood is evident, as are the possible problems arising from the lack of these spaces, which, according to the report, can lead to violence. It also shows that despite the existing cultural activities in the complex, there is need for children and young people to have more access to cultural spaces, which end up being co-opted by drug dealers when they are not being used.

The report also reveals a clash within the Rubem Berta Housing Estate: while some residents approve of the occupations of spaces beyond the buildings on the estate, the "garages", because they understand that there is a demand for more houses, others disapprove, considering that they generate problems in the place.

There are other reasons for violence, which appeared in many residents' interviews, which concern the Rubem Berta neighborhood as a whole. According to these residents, the neighborhood is very large and episodes of violence occurring elsewhere are attributed to the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, as demonstrated by this resident's report:

What I think, there is a reputation out there for those who do not know Rubem Berta, they have a very bad image of the Cohab Rubem Berta. People think that Rubem Berta is just the Cohab, but it's not just the Cohab, Rubem Berta is Santa Rosa, Santa Fe, and there are other neighborhoods like that, which are Rubem Berta. When it comes to violence in Rubem Berta, sometimes it has nothing to do with our Cohab here, the buildings that were occupied in 88, in 87. So people think everything that is in the news and that people comment on outside, everything is Cohab. It has nothing to do with it, it is a very populous neighborhood, it is a lot of people, there are people who live here and are poor, there are people who have money and could even live in another neighborhood, but they live here in Rubem Berta, because it's a neighborhood where we have everything here [...]. (Resident's report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

The actions of the military police are another aspect referred to by residents among the possible factors allied to violence in the neighborhood. These residents question the *modus operandi* of some police officers and associate their actions with young people's entry in illegal activities, as it can be seen in the following statement:

The greatest violence is the police not respecting citizens. The biggest violence for me is the police, it's not the authority or anything, it's the police not respecting the young people. First they hit them and then ask for their document. The police themselves put many youths into crime, for not respecting, for not having that respect with the young. So they are like, I get beaten up when I haven't done anything, so I might as well do it. (Resident report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

In this sense, there are a series of opposing discourses, even within the housing complex itself. While some residents feel insecure, even in part, there are residents who feel very comfortable inside the housing estate and question the statements that attribute heavy violence to the neighborhood, as recorded in the report of a merchant who lives and works in the housing complex:

OK, this hold up business, that many people say there is robbery in Rubem Berta, this does not exist. There are other things right, but saying: So I have to close my shop because there is a curfew? I've been here for 25 years, it has never happened that somebody comes to my door and says, "You have to close your store, you understand? Here staff work late at night, there is a supermarket that even has an ATM inside the supermarket, if you go there at almost ten o'clock at night the shop is open [...]" (Resident report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

Most of the reports of non-local residents, who had some contact with the Rubem Berta Housing Estate people expressed, at first, the issue of the violence and deprivation that afflicts the people who live there. A teacher, who works in a nearby school, gave this interview:

I thought it was a quiet neighborhood, but we have a lot of violence in the neighborhood, there are people being killed, appearing ... So this is very strong for the people who work here and who often live in other neighborhoods and have to come to this reality. Right now I'm pretty scared. [...] Anyway, now this has surfaced in us, in the students, bringing various issues of violence, at the moment, before I did not have a vision like that, right [...] (Non-local resident report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

Both some non-local and local reports expressed the need to adapt routes within the neighborhood and change habits, such as this teacher:

[...] this, then, is causing me to reconstruct what I thought of the neighborhood, because, since I've been here, there have been some isolated facts of violence, but in the last month it's well, very complicated, before I was not afraid, I thought it quiet, I shopped in the neighborhoods, in the supermarkets of the region, now I circulate as little as possible, I try to come by car, because the bus passes in front of the violent part. So it's a little difficult. (Non-local resident report obtained in field work, in 2014).

However, there were narratives of non-local residents who did not express a topophobic feeling about the Rubem Berta Housing Estate, such as this employee, who, referring to the housing complex, said:

I live in the north zone, here the neighborhood, until I was moved here I had never been here before, to these places. It is so notorious as a violent neighborhood, it is the neighborhood of Peace Territory, those things that leave us scared, but, during the day is a normal neighborhood, I do not know what happens at night, during the day it is very peaceful. [...] It is very quiet like this, the people are very nice, it contradicts what you hear that are exceptions right. (Non-local resident report, which was obtained in field work, in 2014).

Through the reports it is evident that violent manifestations are temporal, that is, there are times when violent practices blossom, such as during the night. However, as is stated in a leadership report, the clashes over drug trafficking points have "four-year cycles or five years, at times". In this sense, it is important to affirm that this topophobic feeling is not stable: it varies in time and space – as observed in reports (both local and non-local), which showed some care in avoiding certain routes within the housing complex.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study shows that the geographic approach can be relevant in deconstructing geographisms, which implies the need to deepen the understanding of place and landscape as a specificity, diversity and plurality.

The Rubem Berta Housing Estate is established on a tangle of ideas and perceptions of people who (re)cognize it as a lived-in space and, on the other hand, the ideas of people who only access the representation of the place, its conceived space. It was possible to apprehend that the stigmas attributed to the place and to its inhabitants impact them directly, so that, sometimes, these residents sought to explain or question violence-related issues. This is noteworthy in the residents' reports, the memories of the time of occupation related to stories of struggle, survival and resistance. People who saw in unity an element that enabled their conquests.

The complex's residents do not perceive this only through topophilic experiences, unlike the implication at the beginning of this article, in fact, topophilic and topophobic experiences coexist. However, these perceptions have spatial and temporal variations, which alternate, according to the waves of violence in the neighborhood. That is, they vary between different locations on the estate, between cyclical periods (daytime/ nighttime and yearly) - corresponding to disputes between drug trafficking groups.

Mostly of the reports given by non-local people expressed topophobic experiences regarding the place, evidencing feelings of insecurity, fear and helplessness inside the housing complex. However, there were non-local testimonies that reported topophilic experiences in the neighborhood, because of affective relationships with residents or due to work they have done in the place.

The Rubem Berta Housing Estate can be apprehended by multiple views, experiences and meanings, by people who are engaged in writing their stories. There are scarcities and violent practices in this place, but it is also a place full of people who manifest themselves through graffiti, art, rap culture, resistance and struggles.

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NOTES

- 1 The Rubem Berta neighborhood was “created and delimited by municipal law nº 3159, in 07/9/1968”.
- 2 According to James Duncan (2004, p.103), the discursive field can be understood as “a class of opposing discourses consisting of a set of narratives, concepts and ideologies, which are relevant to a particular domain of social practices.”
- 3 The approach of this work has prioritized the local scale, but geographisms are present from local to national levels, in general.
- 4 In order to understand both the relationship and the unity that form the phenomenon and its essence, we must turn to Karel Kosík (1976, p.15), who stated that “the essence manifests itself in the phenomenon, but only in an inadequate, partial way, or only from certain angles or aspects. The phenomenon indicates something that is not itself and it lives only thanks to its opposite. The essence is not given immediately; it is mediate to the phenomenon and therefore it manifests itself in something different from what it is. The essence is manifested in the phenomenon. The fact of manifesting itself in the phenomenon reveals its movement and demonstrates that the essence is neither inert nor passive. Precisely

for this reason the phenomenon reveals the essence. The manifestation of the essence is precisely the activity of the phenomenon”.

- 5 Discussing violence is mainly to consider social inequalities as generators of violence, such as institutionalized, political, symbolic and racist violence, but also violence that goes beyond these spheres, such as sexual, gender and ecological violence (TAVARES DOS SANTOS, 2009; ODALIA, 2012).
- 6 See the example of the approach of the relationship between the geographic concepts in the work of Heidrich (2008) and Suertegaray (2000).
- 7 For Yi-fu Tuan (2012, p.18), perception can be understood as “the response of the senses to external stimuli like purposive activity, in which certain phenomena are clearly recorded, while others retreat into the shadow or are blocked “.
- 8 The documentary Dasgaragens (NEP, 2005), prepared by the Center for Studies and Projects of the Department of Architecture of the UFRGS, presents the stories of some people who make the “garages” their home, as well as the different perceptions regarding these locations.