

**AN EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT OF LANDSCAPE WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF THE RAIN PROPHETS IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL**

**UMA EXPLANAÇÃO SOBRE O CONCEITO DE PAISAGEM DENTRO DO
CONTEXTO DOS PROFETAS DA CHUVA NO NORDESTE BRASILEIRO**

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ABSTRACT

In the hinterland of Ceará, marked by a semi-arid climate and the scarcity of rainfall, the Prophets of Rain emerge as important figures in the search for predictions and hope for rainfall. These prophets, often using empirical methods and observations of the environment, developed knowledge and practices related to climatic conditions and agriculture. Therefore, the main objective of this scientific work is to understand if there is a correlation between the practices of the rain prophets in northeastern Brazil and the geographical concept of cultural landscape. The present research is classified as exploratory, using data of a secondary nature, with its approach of a qualitative nature, and having as a development technique, the bibliographic review supported mainly by periodicals and books on the theme in question. The main findings are that landscape concepts play a fundamental role in the understanding and interpretation of these practices and beliefs. Studying the cultural landscape helps in understanding the hinterland as a space loaded with cultural meanings, where the Rain Prophets play a central role in the local community.

Keywords: Landscape; Rain Prophets; Northeast Brazil.

RESUMO

No sertão cearense, marcado por um clima semiárido e a escassez de chuvas, os Profetas da Chuva emergem como figuras importantes na busca por previsões e esperança de precipitações pluviométricas. Esses profetas, muitas vezes utilizando métodos empíricos e observações do ambiente, desenvolveram conhecimentos e práticas relacionadas às condições climáticas e à agricultura. Desta forma, o objetivo central desse trabalho científico é o de entender se há correlação entre as práticas dos profetas da chuva no nordeste do Brasil com o conceito geográfico de paisagem cultural. A presente pesquisa é classificada como exploratória, utilizando-se de dados de natureza secundária, sendo sua abordagem de caráter qualitativa, e tendo como técnica de desenvolvimento, a revisão bibliográfica suportada principalmente em periódicos e livros

sobre a temática em questão. Como principais resultados tem-se que os conceitos de paisagem desempenha um papel fundamental na compreensão e interpretação dessas práticas e crenças. Estudar a paisagem cultural auxilia na compreensão do sertão como um espaço carregado de significados culturais, onde os Profetas da Chuva desempenham um papel central na comunidade local.

Palavras-chave: Paisagem; Profetas da Chuva; Nordeste Brasileiro.

INTRODUCTION

Drought in the Northeast is a problem that has affected the region for centuries, causing disruptions and losses to the population, especially the poorest (SANTOS et al., 2012). Within this context, for this region, the word "drought" means much more than just a lack of rain. For the local population, drought is synonymous with poverty, hunger, and migration. Conversely, the word "winter" holds a special meaning in the region as it is associated with the rainy season, which is essential for agriculture (CAMPOS; STUDART, 2001).

The landscape of the caatinga, a predominant biome in the region, presents a striking duality. On one hand, it reveals a charming ruggedness, with its unique delicacy. During certain periods, the region teems with life, displaying flowers of various shapes, colors, and fragrances, along with lush vegetation, with foliage extending in various shades of green. However, at other times, the image is one of desolation, where the vegetation appears lifeless, with a whitish-gray coloration. This transformation reflects the natural and cyclical phenomenon of drought, which brings with it water and food scarcity, as well as evidencing the presence of dead animals along the paths. It is in this bitter landscape that the harsh reality of this context is revealed (GUERRA, 1981; MAIA, 2004).

The inhabitants of these drier regions, especially the older ones, have become accustomed to predicting the weather so they can prepare for agricultural and pastoral practices. Historically, the sertanejos (inhabitants of the region) observe the signs of nature to predict rain. Those who are more experienced in this practice are called 'rain prophets'. Belief in rain prophets is common in various cultures around the world, especially in regions where water is scarce and rain is vital for survival. In the Brazilian Northeast, the predictions of rain prophets are so respected that they are broadcasted on local radios, even when they do not coincide with the forecasts of official institutions (TADDEI, 2009).

Rain prophets generally use criteria for observing nature to interpret signs from the world around them. These signs can be found in the positions of the planets, in the wind, in the mating of animals, in the halo around the moon during Christmas, in the singing of birds, and in bodily humors (MARTINS, 2006). In this sense, interest in rain prophets is aroused not only for their cultural importance but also for their uniqueness in relation to contemporary forms of communication and knowledge (BRUNO; MARTINS, 2008).

Therefore, to better understand the entire universe encompassing rain prophets, a theoretical foundation regarding the geographical concepts contained within is necessary. It is known that a concept never arises out of nothing but rather from a multiplicity of situations, resulting from an intersection of problems, other concepts, and events. Every concept gains meaning only when considered in conjunction with other concepts, in

relation and interaction with elements and concepts, constructing networks, webs, constellations, and conceptual planes (CRUZ, 2013).

Geography, like any disciplinary field, has developed over its trajectory a wide range of theories, concepts, and analytical categories. However, there is a reasonable consensus that there are some fundamental categories that structure this scientific field, namely: space, landscape, region, territory, and place. These categories are considered by the community as those that confer a relative identity to Geography as a science (CRUZ, 2013).

Among all these concepts mentioned, the concept of landscape will be the focus of this article, given the relevance of understanding it for the study that encompasses the main actors that will be highlighted here, namely, the rain prophets of the northeastern backlands. It is emphasized that the study of this concept assists in understanding the cultural and social practices of the region's inhabitants. It is not aimed to attribute to this category a level of importance that belittles the others; it is only understood that this focus is necessary for a better depth and understanding of the subject under study.

The understanding of the concept of landscape has been the subject of various conflicts among theorists over time, not only in conceptual and epistemological terms but also regarding the elements that should be considered. From Salgueiro's perspective (2001), the landscape is understood as a central concept in geography, representing the interaction between natural and human elements in a given space. The author emphasizes the importance of understanding the landscape as a social construction, the result of human practices and representations. Through the analysis of the landscape, it is possible to understand the transformations that have occurred in a particular place over time and the power relations that influence its configuration. Geography, in turn, uses the landscape as an object of study to understand spatial processes and social dynamics that shape places.

The landscape is not limited to the sum of disconnected geographical elements. In a specific portion of space, this concept emerges as the product of the dynamic combination, thus, unstable, of physical, biological, and anthropogenic components. These elements interact dialectically with each other, giving rise to a unique and inseparable landscape, in constant evolution (BERTRAND, 2004)

Conventional geographers establish a distinction between natural landscape and cultural landscape. The natural landscape refers to the combination of elements such as terrain, vegetation, soil, rivers, and lakes, whereas the cultural landscape, shaped by human intervention, encompasses all alterations made by humans, whether in urban or rural environments. Generally, the analysis of the landscape requires a specific approach to carry out an evaluation defining the set of elements involved, the scale to be considered, and the temporality in the landscape. Ultimately, it is about presenting the object within its geographic and historical context, considering the social configuration and natural and human processes (SCHIER, 2003).

For Carvalho and Marques (2019), the cultural landscape is considered a heritage to be preserved and valued, contrasting with the perspective of the natural landscape, which is seen as a resource to be sustainably exploited. As pointed out by Araújo (2009), the preservation of cultural landscapes has the potential to drive the development of modern land use techniques and enhance the natural values of the landscape. This strengthens the notion that the persistence of traditional soil management methods supports biodiversity

in various regions of the world. As a result, we can infer that safeguarding traditional cultural landscapes can ensure the maintenance of biodiversity.

The interpretation of concepts associated with the cultural landscape has undergone various transformations over time, resulting in new generalizations in different periods in the search for a more comprehensive explanation. The expectation is that this theoretical analysis will provide support for studies in the field of Cultural Geography, especially those exploring the values and meanings attributed by communities to the landscapes in which they reside and interact, establishing emotional bonds with these environments.

There are several definitions and interpretations of geographical concepts, influenced by geographic schools of thought and the historical context of academia. It is important to note that it is not the intention of this scientific work to extensively delve into the concept of landscape, but rather to provide an explanation of it and highlight its importance within the specific context of the "rain prophets" in the northeastern backlands. As noted by anthropologist Taddei (2005), in studying geographical concepts related to the Rain Prophets, it is possible to observe their interaction with physical elements such as climate, topography, and water resources, as well as the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the region.

Studying the concept of landscape in the context of rain prophets in the backlands allows us to understand the complexity of the relationship between society and the environment in this region. The interaction between traditional and scientific knowledge reveals the importance of integrated and multidisciplinary approaches for a more complete and contextualized understanding of geographical phenomena. Thus, it is possible to analyze the socio-environmental dynamics and cultural practices that shape life in the backlands, contributing to a dialogue between different forms of knowledge and better management of available resources.

In this context, the guiding question of this article is: Is there a correlation between the practices of rain prophets in northeastern Brazil and the geographical concept of cultural landscape? Seeking to answer this question, the general objective of this work is to understand if there is a correlation between the practices of rain prophets in northeastern Brazil and the geographical concept of cultural landscape.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

An exploratory study was conducted on the rain prophets of the Northeast Region of Brazil. This region is composed of nine states (Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, and Sergipe). It has an approximate area of 1.5 million km² and 53 million inhabitants.

Research Type

The methodology used to support this research will be qualitative, which (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2017) define as an approach that "seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the social actors involved." The authors highlight that qualitative methodology is a flexible and adaptable approach that can be used to study a wide range of social phenomena. They also emphasize the importance of data triangulation in

qualitative methodology, which involves using different data collection methods to increase the reliability of the research.

The approach of this research will be exploratory, which (GIL, 2022) defines as one that "seeks to gather information on a subject in order to make it more explicit or to build hypotheses." The author emphasizes that exploratory research is an important approach for understanding new phenomena or problems. Exploratory research is a valuable approach for understanding new phenomena or problems.

Data Collection

In this scientific work, we will highlight the work of 6 (six) geographers from the period called New Geography, that is, after the year 1970, considering that it was during this period that the concept of "cultural landscape" was strengthened and began to be seen with a new perspective as science (CLAVAL, 1999). These geographers are: Cosgrove (1998, 2012), Schier (2003), Claval (1999, 2003, 2011, 2012), Sauer (1997), Maximiano (2004), and Santos (2004). Additionally, in order to support the theme related to rain prophets, we used theorists such as Paiva et al. (2023), Bussi (2019), Taddei (2013, 2023), Pennesi (2015); Pennesi and Souza (2012), Bruno and Martins (2008), Martins (2006), Teixeira, Albuquerque, and Paula (2020), and Câmara (2021, 2023).

In this sense, aiming to demonstrate the viability of this article, Table 1 was formulated. This is a compilation of articles aimed at obtaining bibliographic research. The use of this research method is based on the analysis and review of previously published materials. For the present study, scientific articles were selected to explore previous knowledge and understand the relationship between the geographical concept of cultural landscape and the rain prophets of northeastern Brazil (GIL, 2008)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Cosgrove (2012), the meanings attributed to landscapes reflect the interaction between the individual and the environment. This interaction is shaped by processes of environmental perception and cognition, influenced by cultural and unconscious factors, resulting in specific feelings and interpretations regarding a particular landscape, conferring value or disvalue to it. Even when inserted into a specific culture, an individual may have a unique perspective on the environment, although observable behavioral patterns tend to emerge regarding the landscape within a culture.

By applying the concepts of Landscape and Culture to the community of the so-called "rain prophets" of northeastern Brazil, it was possible to examine the values that this community attributes to its own landscape. The rain prophets attach great value to this environment because it is the place of their ancestors, where they reside, and where they envision their future. They consider themselves an integral part of this landscape, just as this landscape belongs to them. Therefore, it is the landscape in which they have built their identity, understood as the feeling of being and belonging to a place and a specific group (SANTOS, 2004).

In this sense, Table 1 draws a parallel between what the so-called modern geographers, after 1970, describe as cultural landscape and the reality experienced by the rain prophets in northeastern Brazil, according to some renewed authors who write about this theme. Therefore, the following paragraphs will discuss the ideas brought by the authors cited here.

Table 1 – Correlation between the concept of “cultural landscape” and “rain prophets”

AUTHOR/YEAR – ABOUT CULTURAL LANDSCAPE.	AUTHOR/YEAR - CORRELATION WITH THE RAIN PROPHETS
<p>Cosgrove (1998, 2012) - Landscapes carry both residual and emerging cultural meanings, in addition to the current ones. The historical approach of cultural geography, a valid preference, proves to be essential to understand the forms and characteristics present in different areas of the landscape. The landscape not only reflects but is also shaped by symbolic power. This analysis is particularly appropriate for monumental and ritual landscapes, such as those occasionally explored by geographers.</p>	<p>Taddei (2013; 2023) - RITUALS THAT INTERCONNECT PRACTICES FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT</p>
<p>Schier (2003) - Certain landscapes incorporate distinctive cultural traits into their configuration, thus acquiring a characteristic identity. Contemporary environmental issues are intrinsically linked to the cultural dimension and consider the unique influence of human action in the formation of the landscape.</p>	<p>Chamber (2021; 2023) CULTURAL BRANDS</p>
<p>Claval (1999, 2003, 2011, 2012) different cultural groups have the power to cause different changes in it, generating a concern more focused on cultural systems than on the physical elements of the landscape themselves. It is no longer simply about man's interaction with nature in the landscape, but rather an intellectual approach in which diverse cultural groups perceive and interpret the landscape, constructing exclusive landmarks and meanings within it..</p>	<p>Paiva et al. (2023), PERCEIVE AND INTERPRET THE LANDSCAPE</p>
<p>Sauer (1997) - Human actions manifest themselves directly in the cultural landscape. Thus, the cultural landscape is subject to change due to cultural development or the replacement of cultures. This specific form of landscape is geographic expression in its broadest sense, and its characteristics are all the human creations that define and characterize this landscape.</p>	<p>Pennesi and Souza, (2012) GEOGRAPHIC AREA SEEN FROM A TRANSCENDENTAL WAY</p>
<p>Maximiano (2004) - The concept of landscape has persisted in the memory of humanity since before the concept was formalized, the initial idea of which already existed based on observation of the surroundings. Manifestations of this memory and observation can be identified in the arts and sciences of various cultures, initially representing common elements, such as animals, mountains or rivers.</p>	<p>Bussi (2019) OBSERVATION OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND EXPRESSING IT AS ART AND SCIENCE</p>

Santos (2004)- The landscape is anything but static, unchanging. With each transformation in society, the economy, social and political relations also change, each at its own pace and intensity. The same applies to space and landscape, which metamorphose to adjust to the new demands of society.

Taddei (2013;
2023)
ADAPTATION
BETWEEN
GENERATIONS

Source: Prepared by the authors

For Cosgrove (1998, 2012), understanding the complexity of the meanings associated with the landscapes we observe, incorporating expressions of past and present ways of life, requires meticulous empirical study. In this sense, Taddei (2013) suggests that when it comes to predicting rainfall, various seemingly recurrent strategies are observed in the way nature and animals (together with their bodies) participate in this process. It is not just about identifying signs, but about perceiving indicators that reflect the transformation of life and the intensity of energetic flows. This fundamental understanding primarily occurs through the visceral experiences of animals and plants. The essential principle seems to lie in the perception of the intensity of becoming-a collective organism, in the organic reproduction of living beings, embedded in ecosystem cycles.

From this perspective, according to Claval (2012), the landscape becomes the concretization and materialization of ideas within certain systems of meaning. Therefore, it is humanized not only by human action but equally by thought. The landscape is conceived as a cultural representation. Regarding the rain prophets of the northeastern backlands (sertão), Paiva et al. (2023) affirm that with their folk wisdom, people are capable of interpreting nature's signs, representing an invaluable richness. This cultural tradition of rain prophecy was born and consolidated, most likely, due to the uncertainties in the region about the occurrence of rainfall in the following year. The backlands prophets follow a systematic observation of nature, based on experiences and readings that include the position of planets, cloud formations, wind, and the behavior of animals and birds. The prophecies, in this context, take the form of bringing hope to rural people.

According to Schier (2003), the conception of landscape deserves deeper consideration in the context of environmental and aesthetic evaluation. In this sense, its understanding is profoundly influenced by the culture of the people who perceive and shape it. Furthermore, according to Câmara (2021), the ancestral knowledge transmitted by rain prophets is not limited to formal teaching; on the contrary, it permeates the soul of the northeastern people, of the backlander, being acquired empirically. Sharing this wisdom not only contributes to the preservation of our roots but also fosters an approach devoid of prejudices, with acceptance and respect from the Academy towards this tradition.

Understanding the concept of landscape is essential for comprehending the significance attributed to the backlands and how the practices and beliefs of rain prophets fit into this specific context. Thus, the cultural landscape is laden with memories, stories, and traditions that shape people's perceptions and relationship with the environment (TADDEI, 2009).

The backlands landscape plays a significant role in the perceptions and representations of rain prophets. Through the observation of the physical landscape and its transformations over time, prophets interpret signs and patterns that may indicate the arrival of rains. The landscape also influences agricultural practices and subsistence strategies of

communities, reflecting human adaptation to the specific conditions of the backlands (TADDEI, 2005)

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the study of the landscape concept in the context of the northeastern backlands, specifically related to the Rain Prophets, reveals the interaction between traditional and scientific knowledge in understanding the environment and social practices in this region.

The rain prophets are individuals locally recognized for their abilities to predict rainfall. They employ traditional methods such as observing natural phenomena, animal behavior, and interpreting climatic signs to make their predictions. These practices are deeply rooted in the culture and history of the backlands, where rainfall scarcity is a constant challenge for the lives of local communities (PENNESI and SOUZA, 2012).

As noted by anthropologist Renzo Taddei (2005) in the study of the landscape concept related to the Rain Prophets, it is possible to observe their interaction with physical elements such as climate, topography, and water resources, as well as the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the region.

Thus, by examining the landscape in the context of the Rain Prophets, we can explore the intersections between the physical environment, cultural practices, and social relations.

In summary, the analysis of rain prophets in the context of the backlands highlights the importance of the landscape concept in the existing relationships in the studied region. Furthermore, the prophets' ability to predict rainfall confers upon them a position of influence in the community, as rainfall is vital for the survival of people in the backlands, which is all related to the concept of cultural landscape.

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