
The spatiality of periods in the space-time relationship

La espacialidad de los períodos en la relación espacio-tiempo

A espacialidade dos períodos na relação espaço-tempo

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Received on: 09/08/2021

Accepted for publication: 30/09/2021

Abstract

This article focuses on a topic of the space-time interface. Like geographic regions, periods are open to the scrutiny of time and space. Moving through an epistemological discussion, it aims to reflect on the spatiality of the periods, proposing to see them both as networks, as imagined spaces and as arbitrariness. Methodologically, it is based on a discursive strategy that denies the separate approaches between ideas and materiality, even though the approach to periods through relations - whether by temporal duration or spatial extension - is the one that provides the best adherence. We conclude that periods, when viewed from the perspective of spatial relationships, are caricatures of reality that take part in communicative strategies with an oblique homogenizing principle.

Keywords: Periods; Networks; Relations; Spatiality; Imagined spaces.

Resumen

El artículo trata sobre un tema que reside en la interfaz espacio-temporal. Al igual que las regiones geográficas, los períodos se ofrecen al escrutinio del tiempo y el espacio. A través de una discusión epistemológica, este artículo reflexiona sobre la espacialidad de los períodos, proponiendo verlos como redes, espacios imaginados y arbitrariedades. Se adopta una estrategia discursiva como metodología que niega el enfoque separado entre ideas y materialidad, aunque ve su mayor tangibilidad en el acercamiento a períodos a través de relaciones, ya sea por duración temporal o extensión espacial. Se concluye que los períodos, vistos desde la perspectiva de las relaciones espaciales, son caricaturas de la realidad que componen una estrategia comunicativa con un principio homogeneizador que es oblicuo.

Palabras clave: Períodos; Redes; Relaciones; Espacialidad; Espacios imaginados.

Resumo

O artigo versa sobre um tópico residente na interface espaço-temporal. Assim como as regiões geográficas, períodos se oferecem ao escrutínio do tempo e espaço. Transitando por uma discussão epistemológica, é objetivo deste artigo refletir sobre a espacialidade dos períodos, propondo vê-los como redes, espaços imaginados e arbitrariedades. Adota-se como metodologia uma estratégia discursiva que nega a abordagem apartada entre ideias e materialidade, ainda que veja sua face de maior tangibilidade na abordagem dos períodos por meio de relações, seja pela duração temporal ou extensão espacial. Conclui-se que os períodos, quando vistos sob o prisma das relações espaciais, são caricaturas da realidade que compõem uma estratégia comunicativa de princípio homogeneizador que, por essência, é oblíquo.

Palavras-chave: Períodos; Redes; Relações; Espacialidade; Espaços imaginados.

Introduction

Periods are recurrently problematized in historiographic reflection, whereas in geography, this reflection is incipient. Aprioristically, this fact presents itself as a contradiction sustained by the inseparable character of space-time relationship. The idea that periods have spatiality, as well as the conception that certain portions of space exhibit periods, denote a concatenated spatiotemporal reflection that is not always presented in a simple way. Still, this careless reflection can lead us to inappropriate generalizations.

Temporal dimension affects the experience of space (OLIVEIRA, 2013). Geographers, in many cases, incorporates time in their analysis, even though certain geographic studies cannot be considered properly belonging to the field of historical geography (CORRÊA, 2016). In a similar approach, Haesbaert (2021) argues that space and time cannot have an independent existence, separate from the processes that produce them.

The conception of space and landscape as dynamic categories in its temporality highlights the geographer's need to problematize time. Santos (2012)

emphasizes that the landscape is the “frozen history” that takes part in the “living history”. It is frozen history because it constitutes a photograph captured at a given moment in time. It participates in living history because its forms carry out social functions in space throughout time. These social functions, together with the dynamics of nature, guarantee the ephemeral nature of the landscape. Barbara Bender prefers to refer to the landscape as time in materialization: just like time, the landscape would be in constant movement (BENDER, 2002), inexorable in its dynamism. Atomistic time is strongly relevant in its action of transformation on the materials and objects that make up the landscape, as its shapes are modified over time. Like the Earth itself, the surface of every solid is a crust, a frame captured from a dynamic degenerative and/or incorporating movement (INGOLD, 2007).

Reflecting on the spatiality of the period is to penetrate incisively and epistemologically into the congruence zone of history and geography. The ways of elaborating this reflection necessarily bring the irresistible notion that history without space and geography without time are incomplete disciplines; in an analogy, it's like trying to see different dimensions on the same plane. The aim of this article is to problematize, from an essentially epistemological approach, the interface between the notion of periods and geographic space based on the possibility of seeing periods as networks, as imagined spaces and as arbitrariness. We emphasize that our considerations are based on the premise that mind and matter, and materiality and immateriality are indiscernible (WALTON, 1995; INGOLD, 1993; CAETANO; BEZZI, 2011; BERQUE, 2012, 2017; SILVA; GIL FILHO, 2020; SILVA, 2020), since “reality goes beyond the material, at the same time returning to it as well” (BERQUE, 2012, p.7). Thus, “each symbolic form has a role of sense and meaning in this structuring, being part of a universe that is made up of material and immaterial” (SILVA; GIL FILHO, 2020, p.165). We believe that extreme idealism is not the answer to the exclusively materialist position for the interpretation of spatial phenomena.

Brief remarks on space-time interface

The importance of the spatiotemporal interface was explored by Derwent Whittlesey (1929) in the first half of the 20th century. The concept he proposed at the time, "sequent occupance", refers to the possibility of analyzing the same area from different periods defined by more or less homogeneous standards, considering the interrelationships between man and the environment. Richard Elwood Dodge (1938), interpreter of Whittlesey, reflects on the geographer's stance towards the idea of the sequential occupance: "For the sake of clarity the geographer should record such changes systematically so as to bring out the significance of the change as reflecting changing geographic relationships" (DODGE, 1938, p.236). Whittlesey (1929) also seeks to relativize the rigor of its periodization by envisioning the possibility of transitional stages between periods. In his words: "the view of geography as a succession of stages of human occupance establishes the genetics of each stage in terms of its predecessor" (WHITTLESSEY, 1929, p.162). Thus, the sequential occupance makes it possible to establish geographic comparisons over time.

One of the keys to the connections involving history and geography, and therefore time and space, are precisely the processes. If geography is more than a mere description of space - as it presupposes explanations and interpretations about the distribution, comparison, frequency and interrelationship between phenomena -, time becomes a natural participant in geographic analysis.

The crisscrossing relationships of time and space go beyond geography and history: "both space and time are as much the concerns of other social scientists as they are of geographers and historians" (BAKER, 1981, p.439). H. C. Darby (1953), reflecting on the relationship between geography and history, addressed the "geography that underlies history" and the "history behind geography". Darby highlighted that it is not possible to draw a line separating the two disciplines, in the same way that it is not possible to set a date to delimit from when a geography

would as well become historical. John Langton (1988) also reinforced this idea by thinking of geography as a science of spatial relations and, in this sense,

in so far as the relationships described in the present or the past can only be accounted for and made intelligible with reference to the way that they have developed through time, all human geography must be historical and therefore, in the same way that all history must be about same place and therefore geographical (LANGTON, 1988, p.345).

The perspective that all geography is historical calls into question the need for the existence of sub disciplines such as “historical geography”, “geographical history” or even humanistic historical geography⁴. Historical geography, as a subdiscipline, owes its consolidation to the names of Andrew Clark in the United States and Clifford Darby in the United Kingdom, at a time when neopositivist thought was very influential within geography⁵ (from the 1950s to the early years of the 1960).

The term 'historical geography' has come to be increasingly identified with an approach in which the data are historical but in which the method is geographical. The purpose of the historical geographer, according to this view, is to reconstruct the geography of past times (DARBY, 1953, p.4).

However, there are differences regarding the understanding of the scope of the discipline, as well as regarding its nomenclature, which leads some to consider that historical geography and geographical history are different subdisciplines. Craig, Currie and Joy (2001), for example, used the term geographical history to refer to the relationship between the geological history of a region and the endemism of an insect species. However, it is possible to find references with different approaches to the term. Likewise, there is no consensus on what historical geography is, although there is important agreement on its meaning (Baker, 2007), which meets the definition that Darby (1953) presented.

⁴ Richard Dennis (1983) suggested the name “historical humanist geography” for the subfield of knowledge in which humanist methods can be used to interpret “traditional landscapes” (DENNIS, 1983, p.591).

⁵ Historical geography emerged, at least partially, as a reaction to the view that geography was constituted as a purely spatial science (HARRIS, 1991).

It is worth noting that the term “geographic history” is less common than “historical geography”. Although the position of the adjective and noun indicates that “geographic history” is a branch of geography and “historical geography” a branch of history, there is a varied record of the use of these terms that deviate from this logic (BAKER, 2007). This issue illustrates the challenges in organizing research or even a written text that refers to the space-time interface, considering that “the difference in principle between geographical history and historical geography has often been blurred in practice” (BAKER, 2007, p.354). Illustrating this issue, JK Wright (1960) listed, in an article, numerous possibilities of approaches that woven geography and history, showing us the broad dimension that justifies the semantic confusions about the subdiscipline(s) that are concerned with the historical-geographic interface.

Periods as networks

Reification of ideas and words that represent collectivities involves the constraint of suppressing identity differences. Thompson (1987) rejects the reification of class⁶, claiming that it should be understood as a relationship and, thus, “like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomise its structure” (THOMPSON, 1987, p.9-10). However, when analyzing the tension involving identity and collective representation, the author highlights:

If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Glass is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition. (THOMPSON, 1987, p. 11-12).

⁶ Thompson claimed, in 1987, that in many Marxist texts of the time it was possible to verify this approach to the reified class, which he considered inadequate.

Thompson's argument is consistent with his idea of class as a relationship, as this takes place over time. These relationships, constituted by human choices based on power relations in spatiotemporally unstable contexts, are sufficiently ephemeral to deconstruct the idea of reified classes (SILVA; COSTA, 2020). The belief in the existence of class, however, helps to understand the arrangement of certain relationships, which makes it difficult to separate the immaterial and material dimensions. In line with Thompson's idea, we think that culture and race, among other collective groups that move between what is a product of mind and what is concrete, can be thought of as relationships. We believe that relationships are intersecting links between mind and matter.

We propose that the establishment of periods is as arbitrary as the definition of what is class (THOMPSON, 1987), nation (ANDERSON, 2008), culture (SILVA; COSTA, 2018) or region (WILCOCK, 1954; HARTSHORNE, 1978; WISHART, 2004; AGNEW, 1999, 2013). If the definition of a historical period involves the analysis of relatively homogeneous processes that have limited spatial scope (after all, it is difficult to consider, for example, the feudal period in pre-colonial Brazilian history), periods can be seen as relationships organized in a network. In this regard, the concept of affect is useful, widely adopted by non-representational theories, as it is capable of contemplating the intertwining between materiality and immateriality. If relationships are tangible faces of networks, affections go further, penetrating the field of intentions and emotions, stimulating formulations that can result in actions. Steven Pile highlights that affection is like a two-way street, as it is “a transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)” (PILE, 2010, p.8), argument endorsed by Ben Anderson (2016). It means that affect is not simply something personal or interpersonal: it is transpersonal, as it emerges in the relationship of many bodies. *Ipsa facto*, affection is expressed at the same time with and between bodies, and involves relationships between human and non-human agents.

The spatiality of relationships highlights processes that, when seen through diachronic lenses, denounce the vitality of the political-social *status quo*, as well as the character of the intertwining between man and space. Periods can be specified in the relationships between human and non-human agents considering their permanences, successions, durations, ruptures and discontinuities (MARTINS, 2007). From the beginning to the end of slavery in Brazil, for example, relationships were established and streamlined; it is mythical, however, to consider that the relationships that reveal slavery are represented by a solid and continuous surface. Networks have the advantage of a reticular representation, which is more realistic in terms of the display of its relationships. However, when relationships are dense, it is common to assume that the processes take place in a monolithic way. As a result, identity subversions are suppressed, thus representing the main weakness of generalizing elaborations. In these situations, the scale of analysis must be adjusted to mitigate this “blur” effect.

Periods as imagined spaces

Generalizations are consequences of modern thinking. Even considering that rationality – the basis of modern thought – should not be confused with gross generalization, the elaboration of theories or applicable models in different contexts gives them a veneer of scientific authenticity. From a theoretical point of view, the so-called post-modernity denies the universalism and generalization that were inherent qualities and procedures to modernity, including the questioning of the existence of strict boundaries that divide knowledge into specialized fields (CORRÊA, 2000). In opposition to the modernists, there is a predominance of the irrational that uses shapes, colors, images, metaphors and senses as tools, which are permanently updated and reconstructed. Modernism seeks universal truth and rests on the stability of meaning, usually through a metadiscourse or metanarrative. Postmodernism, in turn, assumed a systematic opposition against the existing rigid conventions about methods and language (DEAR, 1988; 1994; EAGLETON, 1998; ANDERSON, 1999; LEMOS, 1999; CORRÊA, 2000).

In this way, periods were traditionally treated as unquestionable mantras, endowed with rigid dates that marked their beginning and end, without rigorous concerns for their spatial scope. The sequels of these elaborations have remained; even researchers familiar with the spatiotemporal interface need to be aware of their elaborations so as not to encourage, through the communicative act, an opening for ambiguous understandings.

Christian Grataloup (2006) states that periods need to be understood “regionally”, since the historical processes that mark certain periods occur more clearly in certain portions of space. It is interesting to note that such processes have an intensity that dissipates in a spatially diffuse and unlimited way. In this sense, the idea about a feudal period, for example, has an inherent spatiality.

Problematizations about the woven relations between space and temporality are not new. Even within the scope of geographic determinism at the beginning of the 20th century, from authors such as Ellen Semple and Ellsworth Huntington, there were already arguments that defended that historical events could not be seen in the same way in different spaces (HUNTINGTON, 1937). However, deterministic thinking interpreted the space-time relationship from gross differences in the natural framework. Since the advances brought by diffusionism in anthropological studies, it has become common ground that the relationships between man and the environment can vary intensely, even between distant natural environments endowed with great similarities. In this sense, determinism fails to see the differences in the natural framework as lines that delimit the different impacts of historical events on societies.

Regardless of the relativism that applies to spatiotemporal relations, periods are always imagined spaces. It is unthinkable to consider large surfaces as places with homogeneous processes. If diversity is the hallmark of geographic space, it would be fairer to spatially represent periods such as archipelagos, or adopting a reticular morphology. Periods, expressed as relatively homogeneous processes that

manifest themselves spatially, suggest the fragmentation of spatial representation. Would it be fair to imagine a monolithically feudal Europe at a given point in time?

An additional challenge is the passage of atomistic time. The spatially fragmented mosaic that composes the relatively homogeneous core of processes (which allow us to identify periods) are not immune to time. Simple temporal accelerations make the mosaic move as in a kaleidoscope, rearrange themselves in a way that is too complex to be understood globally.

Thus, periods are imagined due to the impossibility of a faithful representation. The flexibility of the criteria for spatial inclusion in areas supposedly belonging to the domain of the period are so great that we can only conceive such inclusions from arbitrary generalizations.

Periods as arbitrariness

Analyzing periods as networks is the apparently objective face of the process of determining time intervals. However, the researcher's choices regarding the sources – necessary for understanding the relationships that constitute the networks – may reveal new arbitrariness that penetrate the field of analytical subjectivity. José D'Assunção Barros (2005) recommends that the spatiotemporal frame of the period should be defined based on the set of available sources on the subject to be investigated, a coherent posture from the point of view of any methodologically flexible research. Letting the available sources define the spatiotemporal range of research; nevertheless, it evokes a risk: the spatiotemporal variation of sources can be extreme, leading the researcher to a universal story that the particularist approach itself criticizes. In this case, the interference of the researcher's arbitrariness may again be demanded.

Periods, while understood as a set of relationships that manifest themselves in space, bring the approach of subjectivity as an alternative. It is known that networks that reveal relationships can have a wide reach. However, it is possible to identify in

them one or more relevant nodes, where the volume of convergence or the diffusion of relationships are more intense. The choice to delimit such nodes as hotspots is one more arbitrariness that reveals the subjective face of the period. And, at the same time, it superimposes the idea of period over the idea of region. Therefore, the understanding of periods of time as relationships that manifest themselves spatially does not seek to establish an objective, quantifiable result. However, from the point of view of spatiotemporal analysis, it is a more adequate form of representation when compared to traditional ways of representing periods.

What could be said then about the challenge of transforming the idea of a spatially represented period into a narrative? The construction of a historical narrative is a difficult task, considering both the narrator's instability and the endless questions about what would be historical truth. These reasons inspire David Lowenthal to argue that the past is a foreign country (LOWENTHAL, 2015). Roberto Lobato Corrêa – in clear harmony with Lowenthal's perspective – emphasizes that “the past can be seen as an incomplete text, whose reading allows, more than the present, different interpretations, enabling adequate reconstructions to the vicissitudes of each moment and each social group” (CORRÊA, 2007, p.13). Karen E. Till (2001) adds that the past does not exist literally, being expressed as traces of actions that take place in the present, which can last longer than the very existence of those who witnessed it. The author also states that, for the practice of historical geography, it is always important to exercise empathy, as it is necessary for the narrator to place himself in a problematic position of interlocution, either by writing or talking about a time, event or place that has not been experienced. Even if the narrator is familiar with the object, as it is a not-too-distant past or a familiar geographic region, the problems associated with the narrative persist.

This subject is approached in depth by the American historian Hayden White (1981), who reflected on the events based on the problematic that involves the narrative that reports them. In another publication, White (1984) argues that a narrative is a type of discourse, a way of speaking and also the result of a discursive

strategy. He rejects the dichotomy between what is “true” and what is “false” in the narratives and suggests that the differences be expressed in another opposition: real versus imaginary. Ankersmit (2001) points out the limitations of the narrative when reflecting on a paradoxical situation found in them: “the text is not transparent in relation to the past, but it draws the reader's attention to itself; in doing this, it obscures the past itself” (ANKERSMIT, 2001, p.159). The author also adds that narratives should not be understood as reports that approach an untold story that would bring the truth of the facts (ANKERSMIT, 2010). This argument rejects the idea of a historical truth, reinforcing the notion that there are only stories “under description”, as advocated by Hayden White. Ankersmit (2010) highlights that narratives are representations and, as such, are similar to landscape paintings that stand out for emphasizing what captured the painter's attention, or even what he wanted to see.

Ana Maria Alonso (1988) adds that stories (a word used here in the sense of narratives) are ideologically constructed, as “re-presentations of the past are organized by interpretive schemes and by discursive strategies which produce effects of truth” (ALONSO, 1988, p.50). David Wishart (1997), in turn, argues that traditional historical writing, based on metanarratives, was founded on the belief that the “real past” could be dimensioned through reports. In this sense, the validation of these reports was a mere comparative exercise between the discursive forms that were presented and the real past. However, it is plausible to consider that “the real past is not available” (WISHART, 1997, p.116), in an argument similar to that brought up by Ankersmit (2010).

The nature of narratives, much problematized in the theory of history, is another arbitrary facet of the definition of periods as spaces. Thus, the arbitrariness of spatial periods manifests itself, at least, in the following areas:

- In the selection of sources that illustrate relatively homogeneous processes and support the temporal and spatial delimitation of periods;

- In the spatial delimitation of the processes that the researcher takes for granted as relatively homogeneous, that is, in the elaboration of period-regions;
- In the nature of the narratives.

Final considerations

In this article, we reflect on the notion of period, highlighting its spatiality, as did Grataloup and Wishart. Our original contribution lies in considering periods as networks, imagined spaces and arbitrariness. The starting point is the understanding of periods as spatial manifestations of relatively homogeneous processes, measured from the action between agents that, spatially distributed, arrange a fabric similar to a network. It is important to remember that relationships do not exclusively express materialities; they are, from the point of view of affective relations, charged with the intertwining between the material and immaterial plane, that is, between mind and matter. Dialectically, the relationships themselves are in motion, as they also affect the agents involved, who, in turn, emanate and receive new ties. This is the explanation why periods, seen as spatial manifestations, have perennial dynamism.

From the idea of periods understood as spatial relationships, we conceive them as imagined spaces and arbitrariness. Periods are imagined spaces because they are generalizations, caricatures of reality that ignore their own exceptions in favor of a communicative strategy, or even because of oversights regarding the diversified essence of space. Periods are arbitrary once they are defined through the collection of sources that allow for the inclusion or exclusion of information, making the spatial delimitation of the period a matter of method/choice. The arbitrariness of the periods is also manifested through the narratives, which never tell a historical truth, but bring, as advocated by Hayden White, a biased history.

It is important to realize that periodization strongly alludes to the dilemmas experienced by regionalization, showing us that history depends on space, just as geography depends on time.

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Author contributions:

Author 1: conceived of the presented idea, performed the analysis, wrote the paper.

Author 2: conceived and designed the analysis, wrote the paper, reviewed the translation.

Author 3: provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript.