


Cartography of social action and the struggle for the use of territory in Brazil: contributions to reflection on method from the experience of Rede Fitovida in Rio de Janeiro

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e-187100

revista

Geo 
USP
espaço e tempo

Volume 26 • n° 2 (2022)

ISSN 2179-0892

How to cite this article:

RIBEIRO, L. H. L; SILVA, C. A. Cartography of social action and the struggle for the use of territory in Brazil: contributions to reflection on method from the experience of Rede Fitovida in Rio de Janeiro. **Geosp**, v. 26, n. 1, e-176224, aug. 2022. ISSN 2179-0892. Available in: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/geosp/article/view/187100>. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geosp.2022.187100.en>.



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Cartography of social action and the struggle for the use of territory in Brazil: contributions to reflection on method from the experience of Rede Fitovida in Rio de Janeiro

Abstract

In the 1990s, new subjects and technical possibilities of mapping emerged on the heels of increasingly fierce modernizations and conflicts between hegemonic agents (State and major capitalists) and counter-hegemonic agents (traditional communities and social movements) over the use of territory. In this context, one can highlight the USA's *critical cartography* and Brazilian's *social cartography* premises at the forefront of disputes over spatial representations in social struggles. We focus on Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro's *cartography of social action* methodology, which has been developed on two main fronts: the experience of school and focus groups with social entities and movements. To present the results of experience research with focus groups of the Rede Fitovida in Rio de Janeiro, we bring to the fore two contributions of this method: (i) to focus the analysis on the action and on the subject of this action to grasp the underlying meanings behind it, and (ii) in the open possibility of working with struggles for the use of territory by more diffuse subjects in urban contexts, and not only in those happening in occupied lands.

Keywords: Critical cartography. Social cartography. Social action cartography. Subject of action. Territory in use.

Cartografia da ação social e luta pelo uso do território no Brasil: contribuições à reflexão do método a partir da Rede Fitovida no Rio de Janeiro

Resumo

Nos anos 1990, surgiram novos sujeitos e possibilidades técnicas de cartografar, na intensificação das modernizações e dos conflitos pelo uso do território entre agentes hegemônicos (Estado e grande capital) e contra-hegemônicos (comunidades tradicionais e movimentos sociais). Destaque-se aí a afirmação da *cartografia crítica*

nos EUA e da *cartografia social* no Brasil, ferramentas fundamentais na disputa pelas representações espaciais nas lutas sociais. Focalizamos a *cartografia da ação social* proposta por Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro, que vem sendo desenvolvida em duas frentes principais: experiências em escolas e grupos focais com entidades e movimentos sociais. Apresentando resultados de pesquisa de experiência junto a grupos focais da Rede Fitovida no estado no Rio de Janeiro, destacamos duas contribuições desse método: (i) foco na ação e no sujeito da ação, compreensão dos sentidos da ação e (ii) possibilidade de trabalhar com lutas pelo uso do território por sujeitos da ação mais difusos em contextos urbanos, e não apenas naquelas por terras tradicionalmente ocupadas.

Palavras-chave: Cartografia crítica. Cartografia social. Cartografia da ação social. Sujeito da ação. Território usado.

Cartografía de la acción social y la lucha por el uso del territorio en Brasil: contribuciones a la reflexión del método desde la red Fitovida en Río de Janeiro

Resumen

Años 1990 aparecen nuevos sujetos y posibilidades técnicas de cartografía en la intensificación de las modernizaciones y conflictos por el uso del territorio entre agentes hegemónicos (Estado y gran capital) y contrahegemónicos (comunidades tradicionales y movimientos sociales). Destacando la afirmación de la *cartografía crítica* en EE.UU. y *cartografía social* en Brasil, herramientas fundamentales en la disputa por las representaciones espaciales en las luchas sociales. Nos centramos en la *cartografía de la acción social* de Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro, que se ha desarrollado en dos grandes frentes: experiencias en las escuelas; y grupos focales con entidades y movimientos sociales. Presentando resultados de investigación junto a grupos focales de la Rede Fitovida en Rio de Janeiro, destacamos dos aportes de este método: (i) focalizar la acción y el sujeto de la acción, comprensión de los significados de la acción y (ii) la posibilidad de trabajar con luchas por el uso del territorio por parte de sujetos más difusos en contextos urbanos, y no solo en aquellos sobre tierras tradicionalmente ocupadas.

Palabras clave: Cartografía crítica. Cartografía social. Cartografía de la acción social. Sujeto de la acción. Território usado.

Introduction

Cartography is a most-important area of knowledge, a task consisting of producing maps as a form of representation and a way to read the world from its clear imagery nature. Even more relevant in today's world, cartography becomes a methodological possibility for mediating theories and the need to produce empirical evidence of the world, especially for those sciences working with the analysis of spatial processes and facts. Cartography is a technique and practice of producing maps, georeferenced maps in dialogue with geography, social sciences, engineering, architecture and urbanism, social medicine, agricultural sciences, and environmental sciences. There are several possibilities.

With the advent of new communication and information technologies, based on interactive geo-technology systems, cartography enables the expansion of the sense of spatial representation, including data information systems, which become attractive to companies, consumers, and governments. Real-time (daily) tracking of georeferenced information greatly increases the uses of cartographic products such as interactive maps, applications and mapping platforms. Another important contribution is the use of mapping techniques as an instrument of social struggle. Cartography becomes a social practice and an instrument to represent traditional community territories (indigenous, quilombolas, artisans and small-scale fisheries, for instance) if we consider the use of the territory and understand social conflicts as territorial conflicts.

Our time is marked by the visibility and aesthetics of moving images and by the greater presence and strength of the synthetic image (Ribeiro, 2011, 2012a). These images often replace political discourses and the more conceptual reflection delivered by words and texts. The synthesis-image depicts a seductive space, and it is marked by the manufacturing of consensus that pursues rapid social adherence, in order to reject diverse experiences and produce invisibility or concealment of alternative uses of territory. The tributary dispute of map production simultaneously represents the dispute of narratives and of synthesis-images.

Therefore, in every mapping process or when we face a cartographic product, one must question who produces it and for whom?

The purpose of this article is to reflect on cartography as a tool to represent the aspects of social life that value the existential dimension of the subject, how social movements keep their resistance, and as the expression of memories and generational narratives. In the first section, we present the academic methodological choices of mapping from John Brian Harley's perspective, representing the movement of *critical cartography* in the USA, and the phenomenological contributions of Jörn Seemann and Denis Wood that, dialoguing with Geography, stress the possibility of dealing with cartographic production as a symbolic construction of common life compared to conventional forms created by official cartography. Finally, we also discuss the *social cartography* of Brazilian anthropologist Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida. In the second section, we highlight the *cartography of social action*, proposed by sociologist Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro. In the third section, from the case of the social movement Rede Fitovida, we analyze the experience of applying cartography as a tool for gaining visibility, preserving memory and keeping the resistance, considering that this experience is better explained by the cartography of social action (Ribeiro, 2011). We end this text with some final considerations.

This cartography of social action proposes a set of exercises: to report elements that guide and inform about social action; to unveil particular contexts and recognize acts; to value imaginative appreciation of living places, where life opens up itself to reflective action and transformation; to analyze and support of *other's* memories; to keep building the “incomplete” cartography that is made in the mapping process itself; to map the practice, which is always usable and malleable; and to build comprehensive tactics, mapping the practices of society, to give light to hidden subjects, resistances and organized or spontaneous social action (Ribeiro et al., 2001).

The methodology used was the bibliographic survey, production of reports and interviews with Fitovida's leaders, in addition to source materials from Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro's personal archive.

Critical cartographies, social cartographies

If cartographic images are taken as reality itself, there is a risk of interpreting the world by its apparent or static status, leveling geographical space by its geometric representation, and not by its territorial form or by the way that it is being used (Santos, 1999). Maps often mask conflicts in space, freezing certain types of movement and events. Indeed, it is an exercise of power that simultaneously represents and distorts, reveals and hides, according to the perception and worldview of those who produce it. It holds a political bias that legitimates a certain normative reading of the world and imposes a certain project on powerless people (Silva, J.; Kaercher, 2013).

The emergence and consolidation of John Brian Harley's *critical cartography* in the late 1980s, among other authors in the same vein, gained prominence. The critical turn in cartography in the 1990s pictured greater engagement and there was an effort to reflect on the implications of cartographic knowledge and its social relevance, questioning the notions of power, ideology and surveillance present in the mapping process. Although this was not representing new ideas or critical perspectives to geography, this was true for the cartographic discipline (Crampton; Krygier, 2005).

Also noteworthy is the humanistic approach that was carried out, and American geographer Denis Wood was a distinguished author at that moment. In fact, since the 1970s he has been producing articles, books, poems, and performances about cartography, representing with his work common people's trajectories, actions and emotions. The representation of everyday life, collective life, and children's play contributes to transforming cartography into a piece of art, in the expression of feeling. It also could break through the Newtonian scheme of linear time/space that subordinates the idea of representation and official location (Wood, 1978, 1992).

Thus, these all-new technologies, modes of understanding and using, brought forth the spread of cartographic tools and fresh possibilities after the 1990s, not only of the most intensive technologies or the development of comprehensive and open-code mapping tools and resources (Crampton; Krygier, 2005), but it had led to alternative (and often) not-intensive technological practices that gave rise to further meanings.

In relation to community projects, cartography is the technique for putting in map-form places, neighborhoods and cities, to build indigenous atlas, it can strengthen the making of

participatory geographic information systems (GIS) and contribute to artistic projects. These are just a couple of examples of how “maps could be used in urban everyday life, as a political protest or expressing emotions. Cartography’s different angle opens up space for new research agenda which exceeds the academic environment to reach everyday life” (Seemann, 2012, p. 147).

Along with the emergence of new technologies and new *mapping subjects* and its worldwide dissemination in the 1990s, *participatory*, *community* or *ethnographic* maps were first-time produced (Acselrad & Coli, 2008, p. 24). This form of mapping that relies upon local populations led to the adoption of new terminology: *ethnoecological survey*; *ethno-environmental mapping of indigenous peoples*; *mapping of traditional uses of natural resources and occupation of the territory*; *participatory mapping*; *cultural mapping*; *participatory macro-zoning*; “*ethno-zoning*”; *ethnomapping*; *ethno-environmental diagnosis*, *social cartography* etc.

Following anthropologist Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida (2004) and geographer Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves (2006), both contributed to the emergence of social cartography in the 1990s, which calls forth new social subjects and their territorial struggles and the importance of maps as an instrument of gaining visibility and political recognition for their traditional territories. Spatial self-representation in cartography provided an important tool of struggle in the material and symbolic appropriation of territory, and researchers are able to deeply contribute to formulating participatory mapping. This can be seen especially concerning renewed processes and more intense modernizations of hegemonic projects (State, big companies and major capitalists, such as agro-industrial, contractors, energy, mining and metallurgical sectors, also logistics, tourism and financial sectors) that have blocked access to land and making the use of the territory unfeasible. This appropriation is often carried out through brutal elimination of traditional communities all over the national territory and of social movements spread in urban peripheries (organized or spontaneous).

Thus, Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida (2004, 2018) develops the methodology of Amazon’s social cartography in his work with indigenous leaders and ribeirinhos (small-scale fishers) in the map-making process, expressing precise map keys and the borders that demarcate the sacred territories, the places where life happens, but also the delineating invaders’ actions and socio-environmental conflicts. The leaders help to elaborate titles and legends on the maps, thereby also contributing to identifying borders and densities of internal areas (local points of conflict, sacred spaces, places of everyday life and common activities). The final map is inserted in a booklet format fascicle that is published as a dossier and becomes an instrument of struggle in the hands of leaders.

Social cartography is born to guarantee rights by producing visibilities and, through academia – from anthropology initially – it guarantees the “competent discourse” as a confronting strategy in the judicialization process. Thus, the methodology of social cartography is disseminated in Brazil as an instrument of struggle for the use of territory that copes with territorial appropriation and exclusion of traditional peoples and communities to give place to so-called modernization represented by military training fields, aerospace bases, mining areas, protected areas, dams, large land holdings, agricultural-industrial production complex and agribusiness, highways, railways, port and airport complexes, real estate appropriation and speculation and tourism.

Between 1992 and 2012, Brazil had 284 self-proclaimed experiences on social cartography or participatory mapping, of which 42% portrayed struggles for territorial recognition and 38% related to ethnoecological or environmental management projects represented by indigenous lands in 33% of the cases and other traditionally occupied lands in 27%. Group identity movements that promoted these experiences stood out representing 44% of ethnic groups, and extractivist groups 20% of final cartography (Acselrad, 2013).

According to Almeida (2004), the building of legal reference for *traditionally occupied lands* implies four dimensions: the existence of areas of appropriation and common use of resources; the rupture with overall invisibility; the search for transforming the concentrated land structure and resuming Brazilian agrarian question; and lastly, the inclusion and valuation of cultural elements. This scheme also includes different productive activities such as extractivism, smallholding agriculture, fishing, and cattle breeding.

In Brazil, *social cartography* has been the foremost terminology applied in reference to this new form and sense of mapping and social struggle, in the last decades, confronting the intensification of spoliation processes (Harvey, 2005). Since the emergence of studies focused on the role of cartography as an instrument for action (Haesbaert, 2004), new subjects could problematize *political action to which the cartographic work actually serves as support* (Acselrad; Coli, 2008).

Since 1988's Federal Constitution and 1989's International Labor Organization Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the meaning and use of traditionally occupied lands in Brazil has been expanding from collective identities and ethnically-based territoriality to the creation of the "*traditional population*" category. It represents the transition of an inferior natural framework of "biologized subjects", from this point of view, to real agents and subjects who define themselves autonomously (a collective political-organized existence) (Almeida, 2004)

These measures contribute to giving visibility to different use of territory by a set of subjects: indigenous people, quilombolas, artisanal fishing, small farmers (family, urban, agroecological agriculture), babassu coconut breakers, extractivism (medicinal plants, rubber trees or chestnuts), ribeirinhos (small-scale fishers), traditional vine-workers, Brazilian traditional rural forms of land use such as faxinalenses, geraizeiros and sertanejos, traditional female healers and herbalists, settlers and camps of peasant movements and family farming. Still, it brings multiple associative forms based on deep local roots, political-organizational formation, collective self-definition, environmental awareness and collective identities.

Cartography of social action: contributions of sociology of today

Considering Brazilian's social cartography and the use of maps as an instrument of social struggle, the pioneering and all-importance methodology developed by Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro, to *map social action*, stands out (see Ribeiro et al., 2001; Ribeiro, 2009, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Biase, 2012). This set of tools allows us to discuss traditional peoples' and communities' struggles from their territory and the social action of more-diffuse inhabiting large cities and metropolises. "To properly grasp the resistance to oppression and exclusion we need to carry out analytical mapping of everyday practices and survival tactics. This allows us that specific

social identities before concealed by political projects of modernity come to the surface” (Ribeiro et al., 2001, p. 35).

As with herbalists, extractivist workers and producers of Rede Fitovida that prepared people to master traditional knowledge in medicinal plants, within the state of Rio de Janeiro, to diffusely appropriating bodies of water, forests, community kitchens, houses’ backyards and churches, neighborhoods, flowerbeds and vegetable farming in churches and schools, market stalls, networks and places with variable morphology and climate. Hence, from the map-making process resulting from social action, we can reflect on conflicts and resistance, cooperation and solidarity, social struggles for the use of territory and the dispute for memory led by these communities and subjects of action inside urban and metropolitan contexts.

[...] the unofficial cartography of social action deals with the trajectories of common people, of their routes of struggles and manifestations, it is engaged with trajectories of everyday work, cultural manifestations and non-state hidden social norms. It is possible to unveil a new world following this orientation, to make known what is invisible, see the unknown beauty of anonymity, and the potential of what is not considered, of those who have nothing. The proposal dialogues with the “slow people” conception of Milton Santos, and with the ideas of Paulo Freire (1979)¹ on the dimension of human commitment to reflection and awareness about the contradictions and ambitions that produce fragmentation and socio-spatial segregation. [...] We need to be open to seeing new possibilities for building the world, writing our history, and the history of common people (Silva, C., 2011, p. 17-18).

The central concern of Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro in creating the base for social action cartography, ideas that have emerged in the context of Latin American thought and 1990s social struggles, was to contribute to the organization and expression of data about social struggles (Ribeiro et al., 2001). This was a landmark, since maps and synthesis-images in general represented macro-economic and political entities (State and big companies), giving no importance to the actions of society or common people (Biase, 2012).

What really counts in this methodology is to map *social action* and the *subjects of action*, to make apparent the process of collective production and learning, putting less emphasis on the final cartographic product itself. It represents a methodological tool to discuss the indivisibility between society and space, to highlight the use of territory by the subjects of action. In fact, this approach brings a commitment to analyzing the local conjuncture from which derive the meanings of the action of social subjects. Social action cartography expresses resistance and insurgence and gives room for alternative ways of seeing the world other than media-based or big-companies official cartography (Silva, C.; Schipper, 2012).

Finally, the cartography of action in Ana Clara’s work (Ribeiro et al., 2001; Ribeiro, 2009, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Biase, 2012) seeks to grasp society in motion, its everyday life, in a dialectical and dialogical fashion. Its best feature and innovative spirit were to pay attention to protests, riots and social claims of the most organized social movements at play in the city (struggling for housing, street-seller rights and labor unions demands) and those more spontaneous (lynch

1 FREIRE, P. *Educação e mudança*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1979.

mobs, mugging gangs, roadblocks and barricades, and cultural appropriations of peripheral and central youth throughout the metropolis). It also pays attention to the unity among territory, social action and collective life.

Thus, the purpose of this cartography is not only to create the map but to find the meaning of the action and the subject of the action. The map function then is to assist the group in developing some critical themes, giving all possible support for the same to evaluate the real need to materialize or represent their activities in a map (Ribeiro, 2012b). From a methodological standpoint, Ribeiro teaches that the cartography of action begins with the recognition of a problem presented by a social subject in collective meetings. This subject is treated from a social and focus group perspective, and the goals are to (1) gather a collective to narrate a problem. Therefore, the writing and oral traditions are necessary techniques for socialization in the map-making process and for the meaning of this set of actions; (2) elaborate a glossary with terms used during explanation and round conversation that bring collective memories of social struggle; (3) present to the collective some sketch-maps representing social borders, the symbols brought by map legends and by the expression language of protest: social bonds, sources of conflict, common places and opponents, and everything that is built on the social struggling; and, lastly, (4) the produced map would expose subjects' trajectories with their particular significance and spatiality, exposing their strategies of social dispute. Therefore, both the final map and the social cartography itself are produced by the social movement. Unlike other maps, it gives visibility and recognition to the subjects, but it cannot be perceived as a neutral object. It is a political document, defined by strategies and struggles. The role of the university has been to improve the object, but without losing sight of responsibility and ethics. Its exposure should always be respected by the authors of this map. To Ribeiro, the exercise of making the cartography of action, for researchers, represents a methodologic procedure that puts the subject of knowledge as essential to understanding the meaning of action, that is, it tries to build up a framework that establishes a dialogue between many fields of scientific knowledge with one produced in collective and everyday life and their struggles. Thus, geography, sociology, anthropology, arts and popular education are now mingled with so-called common sense and the *ordinary man's* know-how and *tactics* (Certeau, 1998), as well as the counter-finalities of *slow people* (Santos, 1996, 2000). One may observe a real articulation among different agents: teachers, researchers, students, community leaders, workers, social movements, and managers. An expanded collective production, beyond the community group, which faces a problem experienced and perceived by the social group. It is indeed a collective representation and learning, a new reading of the uses of the territory and the possibilities and constraints to the group or social movement in question.

The cartography of social action is a conjunctural analysis aiming at unveiling agents' strategies and tactics, working in the analysis of public policies, general State activity, and hegemonic economic agents that affect a territory. But for the political field, cartography is an instrument of power; one should always question which cartography serves the action of who, that is, which subject of action is being served. Cartography is deemed to be neutral, mainly because it is covered by its technical (or geotechnical) features, even though there is no neutrality in the choice of what or who to represent. The question of technique and neutrality contributes

to social domination and social order. It is far from discussing the meaning of making science or questioning whom it serves. Therefore, “it is not all cartographies that we should do” – it should actually be ethically questioning map-making, and not just present technically or conceptually a result. “This is a very complicated issue, I guess. These are very serious decisions” (Ribeiro, 2012b, p.16).

From the cartography of social action with focus groups of social networks and movements

Discussing the work of focus groups and stages of experience, based on research and extension, from using the cartography of social action, we present in this section an account of the experience with the Rede Fitovida in Rio de Janeiro.

Rede Fitovida emerged from the 1st Popular State Meeting of Alternative Health Therapies, held in Petrópolis (RJ), in April 2000. This meeting was planned by a physician from the city of Campos dos Goytacazes (RJ), an agronomist from the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro and a popular educator from Queimados (RJ). Working with herbal medicine, they began to be concerned, from 1998, with mapping other groups in the state that also worked with plants, aiming at articulating meetings to strengthen these groups and to exchange experiences.

At these meetings, some groups recognize themselves with a certain identity that entails a homemade knowledge of producing medicines and cosmetics, establishing a network then followed by a charter laying down the principles and commitments, in 2001, and naming themselves Rede Fitovida. Today, between 400 and 500 people are part of the network, of which about 50 are herbalists and mateiros (an individual who, due to a long experience in dense forests, works as a guide for other people). The initiative started with 108 groups of which only 50 has left, and they are spread in 25 municipalities in the five official regions of Rio de Janeiro (Sul Fluminense, Norte Fluminense, Região Serrana, Baixada Fluminense and Região Metropolitana).

Urban and rural groups, many of them active since the 1980s, were divided according to localities that were at first municipalities, but that subsequently were made part of specific regions by better expressing a common identity and favoring the structure of Rede Fitovida. It began with the five official regions, seven now based on a self-identification attitude of the groups. Each region holds its “regional shares”, an annual meeting held in the first half of the year, and the “state share”, in the second. And every three years, Rede Fitovida promotes the “great meeting”; there were held eight of them so far.

In 2010, were established the Casa de Memória da Rede Fitovida in Belford Roxo (RJ), after the project was selected in a public notice launched by the Ministry of Culture. Back in 2004, the group asked the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute to use the research methodology of the National Inventory of Cultural References to get full-fledged registration as a material and immaterial heritage and cultural asset to Casa da Memória. Was expected that the project would finally be completed and approved in 2021, after a presidential act delayed any possibility of conclusion. The Rede is now looking for legal registration of its cultural assets of immaterial nature, legitimizing the knowledge and practices of the groups participating in it. Unfortunately, all other activities have been suspended since March 2020 due Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1 is an artistic representation of the Network, and Figures 2 to 4 show moments of some of these meetings.

Figure 1 – Rede Fitovida Art



source: UFRRJ (2017).

Every practice of this nature is deeply rooted in a material *object* and determined *territory* (village, neighborhood, urban spot, culturally differentiated geographical region, or set of territorial segments). In this case, the *backyard* of groups and masters, considered as *cultural references*, are highlighted. To create an inventory and biocultural protocols the “exchange” of recipes had a paramount role, and seven cultural assets, common to the entire Rede Fitovida, was adopted as criterion: (i) agents of traditional knowledge, (ii) cultural references, (iii) homemade medicine, such as tea, syrup, ointment, soap and garrafada (a combination of medicinal plants and alcohol), (iv) the place (Casa de Memória da Rede Fitovida), (v) cultural spaces (backyards, community gardens, forests and drying rooms), (vi) kitchens (which can be made in houses or a build a mobile one) and (vii) celebrations (to meeting and share).

According to interviews carried out between 2015 and 2021, Rede Fitovida is not mostly made of herbalists, mateiros and midwives, these represent only a minority. In consultations and voting at meetings, the term “agent” was the most cited and the main choice for self-definition, because it is not the holder, but the one who passes and shares knowledge. Other expressions (herbalists, mateiros and midwives) are saved to refer to great masters and ancestry, the “references” of Rede Fitovida. Therefore, the “cultural good” for Rede is the people, hence the “agent” as its primary denomination, heritage and foundation. Since 2013, through inventory and biocultural protocols, the social movement have called themselves “agents of traditional knowledge in medicinal plants” and defined their role as “a traditional community that organizes itself socially, culturally and spiritually to reproduce traditional knowledge and practices with inherited medicinal plants”. According to an IPHAN researcher, it is the first traditional community to “self-inventariate”, to carry out an unprecedented experience that provided a learning context, new models and the inventory methodology for IPHAN.

According to the leadership of the Rede, the search for this legal legitimacy has been positive for the construction and definition of Rede itself and in terms of self-awareness and identity. What motivated the leadership to go look for registration in IPHAN was the rejection

of becoming a “public pharmacy”, which represents only an alternative health practice regulated according to the Ministry of Health and the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency criteria. It would certainly make it impossible to maintain Rede’s popular guidance and community bonds, and to protect against any attempts to appropriate its medicines and knowledge by large companies and pharmaceutical laboratories, especially by Brazilian multinationals.

In addition, Rede’s groups have constant disagreements with state-led regulations which often impose a narrow concept of “trading” that even prohibits part of its commercial activities. For Rede Fitovida, there is not only “trading” in its activities, but “donation through contribution”, a distinct and more complex exchange practices through contributions from the general public according to unequal monetary payment capacities and also different types of compensation (not necessarily monetary exchange).

Therefore, Rede Fitovida’s process of becoming an association was the form to continue to resist the modernizing attacks by the State and the interests of large pharmaceutical and cosmetics companies. The cartography of social action has enabled the subject of action to have a voice through its territorial knowledge, preserving group memory, elaborating a common identity, understanding how constraints operate and the open possibilities available to their activities, actions and projects. The results have formed dossiers, biocultural protocols, registration as intangible heritage, new recipes, species and knowledge in medicinal plants and, finally, spaces for exchanges of all kinds and social interventions (vegetable gardens, kitchens, backyards and markets, as well as events and seminars).

Figure 2 – Photos of Rede Fitovida (Grupo Saúde nas Mãos do Bairro) in the Rio Comprido neighborhood – Turano Community, Rio de Janeiro, RJ – exchange of knowledge, backyard and kitchen – 2017



source: Luis H. L. Ribeiro, Apr. 2017. Private collection.

Figure 3 – Photos of the Rede Fitovida – Memory House in Belford Roxo, RJ – 2017



source: Fieldwork, Luis H. L. Ribeiro, May 2017. Private collection.

Figure 4 – Photos of the state sharing of Rede Fitovida in Conservatório, RJ – 2018



source: Luis H. L. Ribeiro, Apr. Private collection.

Concluding remarks

In the 1990s, new subjects and technical possibilities had emerged to map the speeding up of the modernization process illustrated, in turn, by land expropriation and disputes over the use of territory between hegemonic agents (State and major capitalists) and counter-hegemonic strategies (represented by traditional peoples and communities, organized and spontaneous social movements). In this context, one can highlight the USA's *critical cartography* and Brazilian's *social cartography* premises at the forefront of disputes over spatial representations in social struggles. We focus mainly on the *cartography of social action* first proposed by Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro et al. (2001) which was taken here both as a principle of method and a methodological tool.

Since its initial proposal, this cartographic method has been improved and developed in two primary ways: monitoring experiences carried out within schools and working with

focus groups and social movements, whether they are organized or spontaneous. We present in this article some research findings from the cartography of social action within the scope of Rede Fitovida's focus groups that gathers, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, agents of traditional knowledge in medicinal plants.

Beyond the quality of not predefining the subject of action and the types of action to be valued, we highlight two major contributions of this cartographic method: (i) to focus the analysis on the action and on the subject of this action to grasp the underlying meanings behind it, and (ii) in the open possibility of working with struggles for the use of territory by more diffuse subjects in urban contexts, and not only in those happening in occupied lands.

Reading the inseparability between memory and project, body and culture, society and territory, the cartography of action is a problem, a do-doing with popular groups and bases in which the subject of knowledge can become the subject of action. If the *activity* confirms what is already known, reinforcing a more functionalist view of the world, *action* in turn is defined in searching and discovering what does not even exist: "there is only a libertarian potential in action, and not in activity" (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 24).

The method of cartography of social action proposed by Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro runs a dialectical and dialogical approach that is dedicated to everybody and committed to the *banal space*, a used territory by society (Santos, 1999). It promotes a bottom-up reading of the world, based on everyday and collective life, and uses a dialectical perspective to unravel socio-spatial inequality, scarcity, poverty, and many obstacles imposed on life, actions and popular projects. Likewise, the cartography of social action also dialogically brings permanence and possibilities of growing and learning to light, giving other modes of collective existence and uses of the territory a voice.

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Section editor

Fernanda Padovesi Fonseca

Received: July 28, 2021
Accepted: 18 March, 2022

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