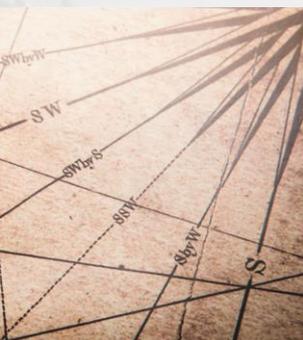


HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL IN RIO DE JANEIRO SAMBA SCHOOLS THEMES

Aspectos históricos e geográficos do nordeste brasileiro nos enredos das escolas de samba do Rio de Janeiro

Aspectos históricos y geográficos del nordeste brasileño en los temas de las escuelas de samba de Río de Janeiro

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to analyze how the historical and geographical aspects of Brazilian Northeast region are presented in the plots of the samba schools of the special group of Rio de Janeiro. Thirteen historical and geographical plots about the Northeast, presented between 1999 and 2022, were analyzed. The procedures adopted consisted of bibliographic research on the history of the ES and the evolution of their plots, as well as on the Northeastern, and the realization of documentary research (from the survey of the synopses of the plots, the Abre-Alas notebook, the lyrics of the sambas and the images of the parades). For the analysis, 14 plots were selected from the 34 belonging to the period of the research that referred to some aspect of the Northeastern reality, or of some state or city in particular. It is concluded that the narratives and images presented in the plots analyzed here do not differ from the representations that have historically been made of the Northeast in several other areas, in which its characteristics (geographical, social, economic, cultural, etc.) are portrayed as particularly striking when considered in relation to other regions of the country. Beyond reductionisms and stereotypes, the region is also represented as a space of resistance and resilience - of nature and of the Northeast itself - and possessing a cultural identity that manifests itself through music, crafts, religiosity, and cultural manifestations.

Keywords: Northeast; Samba schools; Historical and geographical themes.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar como os aspectos históricos e geográficos do Nordeste brasileiro são apresentados nos enredos das escolas de samba do grupo especial do Rio de Janeiro. Foram analisados 13 enredos de caráter histórico e geográfico sobre o Nordeste, apresentados entre os anos de 1999 e 2022. Os procedimentos adotados consistiram em uma pesquisa bibliográfica sobre a história das ES e a evolução dos seus enredos, bem como sobre o Nordeste, e a realização de pesquisa documental (do levantamento das sinopses dos enredos, do caderno *Abre-Alas*, de letras dos sambas e das imagens dos desfiles). Para a análise, foram selecionados 14 enredos dentre os

<http://periodicos.apps.uern.br/index.php/GEOTemas/index>

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Article History

Received: 24 april, 2023

Accepted: 06 august, 2023

Published: 18 september, 2023

34 pertencentes ao período do recorte temporal da pesquisa que faziam referência a algum aspecto da realidade nordestina como um todo, ou de algum estado ou cidade em particular. Conclui-se que as narrativas e as imagens apresentadas nos enredos aqui analisados não diferem das representações que historicamente têm sido feitas do Nordeste em várias outras áreas, em que suas características (geográficas, sociais, econômicas, culturais etc.) são retratadas como particularmente marcantes quando consideradas em relação a outras regiões do país. Para além dos reducionismos e estereótipos, a região é também representada como espaço de resistência e resiliência — da natureza e do próprio nordestino — e possuidora de uma identidade cultural que se manifesta por meio da música, do artesanato, da religiosidade e das manifestações culturais.

Palavras-chave: Nordeste; Escolas de samba; Enredos históricos e geográficos.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo se presentan los aspectos históricos y geográficos del Nordeste brasileño en las tramas de las escuelas de samba del grupo especial de Río de Janeiro. Se analizaron trece argumentos históricos y geográficos sobre el Nordeste, presentados entre 1999 y 2022. Los procedimientos adoptados consistieron en una investigación bibliográfica sobre la historia de la SE y la evolución de sus tramas, así como sobre el Nordeste, y la realización de una investigación documental (estudio de las sinopsis de las tramas, el cuaderno *Abre-Alas*, letras de las sambas e imágenes de los desfiles). Para el análisis, se seleccionaron 14 tramas entre los 34 pertenecientes al periodo de la investigación que se referían a algún aspecto de la realidad nordestina en su conjunto, o de un estado o ciudad en particular. Concluimos que las narrativas e imágenes presentadas en las tramas aquí analizadas no difieren de las representaciones que históricamente se han hecho del Nordeste en varios otros ámbitos, en los que sus características (geográficas, sociales, económicas, culturales, etc.) se presentan como particularmente llamativas cuando se consideran en relación con otras regiones del país. Más allá de reduccionismos y estereotipos, la región también es representada como un espacio de resistencia y resiliencia -de la naturaleza y del propio nordestino- y como poseedora de una identidad cultural que se manifiesta a través de la música, la artesanía, la religiosidad y las manifestaciones culturales.

Palabras clave: Nordeste; Escuelas de samba; Temas históricos y geográficos.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Samba Schools (SS) are important popular culture institutions and they play a relevant role in the constructions of diverse representations about Brazilian Society. Within this context, the samba themes – or samba plots (in Portuguese: *samba enredo*¹) can be understood as narratives that contribute to the creation or diffusion of discursive and imagetic representations of several aspects that characterize Brazilian reality.

One of the most common motives used for the elaboration of such narratives is the Northeastern Region in Brazil. Hence, whether it is about the entire region, or even a state

¹ The words in italic mean that the original language – Portuguese – was chosen to remain in the original text. It is an option by the original author. Translations will not appear.

or city, or specific aspects, this part of Brazil can be seen as a passive set to be transformed into a carnival theme. Its nature, history, culture and its locals can be represented through colors, formats and types. They are represented through a ludic perspective about the society and the dynamics of space production.

This article aims at analyzing how historical and geographical aspects of Brazilian Northeastern Region are represented by Rio de Janeiro Special Group Samba Schools themes. The discussion in this work is the result of a broader research carried out between 2020 and 2022. It approached the discursive and imagetic representations about the Northeastern Region in Brazil represented in the years 1999 and 2020 (DANTAS, 2022).

The starting point to understand the ways that Brazilian Northeastern Region is represented in SSs carnival themes was the reading of themes synopsis - *A peleja poética entre Rachel e Alencar no avarandado do céu* (by ss União da Ilha do Governador) and *O salvador da pátria* (by ss Paraíso do Tuiuti²) presented during the carnival of 2019. They had the Northeastern state of Ceará as space reference. Through the study of these samba themes, we identified several elements that characterize the geographical reality, both for the state that is being honored, as well the very Northeastern region. There are elements occurring on both samba theme proposals. They are also present in different cultural manifestations.

The study followed bibliographical and documental research. The bibliographical research focused on authors that analyze the history of samba schools and the evolution of their themes (AUGRAS, 1992; BRASIL, 2015; LOPES; SIMAS, 2015; FERNANDES, 2001), as well as about the Northeastern Region in Brazil (AB'SABER, 1999; ALBUQUERQUE JR., 2011; ANDRADE, 2005; BERNARDES, N., 1999; BERNARDES, D., 2007). The documental research involved the identification of the theme's synopsis, the notebook *Abre-Alas*, the samba school themes and the images of the parades found on the website of Samba Gallery (Galeria do Samba) and the Independent League of Samba Schools (Liga Independente das Escolas de Samba – LIESA). We chose the historical and geographical samba themes presented by the Special Group SSs. We understand that they approach aspects of geography or historical events related to the states, capital cities or any city in the Northeastern Region (DANTAS, 2022).

From this context, this work selected 14 themes among 34 themes within this research time frame that had any reference to any aspect of the Northeastern reality as a whole or any

² The original names of the samba schools remain in the original language – Portuguese. In this case, the italics will not appear be chosen.

Northeastern state or city. Then, this study moved to the reading of the theme's synopsis. Next, it approached the parades script presented in the notebook *Abre-Alas*. Finally, it watched the images and videos of the parades to identify and delimitate the geographical and historical elements that defined the representations of the region, cities or states.

2 THE CARNIVAL SAMBA THEMES AND THE REPRESENTATIONS OF SEVERAL BRAZILS

The importance the SSs possess within Brazilian cultural scenario is not only related to the evidence they get every year through audiovisual spectacular parades at the Marquês de Sapucaí sambódromo³. It is also related to the relevance the samba themes have as tools of diffusing the most diverse themes. Then, we can state that the themes are fundamental elements that strengthen the SSs identities. Along with the musical genre, the samba themes and another seven criteria (allegory and ornaments, drums, front commission, costumes, harmony, and flag-bearer and her escort) are the elements that integrate the judgment carried out every year and define the winner of the Samba Schools contest⁴.

In the first part of this section, we present brief considerations about the development of the SSs. Then, we explain about the evolution of samba themes and how they contribute to the creation and/or affirmation of a discourse on several aspects of Brazilian reality.

2.1 Considerations about the evolution of Samba Schools

The current samba schools inherit traditions established by several popular manifestations that are characteristics of carnival festivities between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. About the elements that contributed to the origins of SSs, Lopes and Simas (2015, p. 108) state that those schools derive “from a universe that encompasses diverse references: from carnival ranches (before – pastoral

³ A massive venue in Rio de Janeiro where the carnival parades take place every year.

⁴ Since the first contest in 1932, until 2023, the winners are: Portela (22 titles); Estação Primeira de Mangueira (20 titles); Beija Flor de Nilópolis (14 titles); Acadêmicos do Salgueiro (9 titles); Império Serrano (9 titles); Imperatriz Leopoldinense (9 titles); Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel (6 titles); Unidos da Tijuca (4 titles); Unidos de Vila Isabel (3 titles); Unidos da Capela e Unidos do Viradouro (2 titles, each); Acadêmicos do Grande Rio, Estácio de Sá, Prazer da Serrinha, Vizinha Faladeira e Recreio de Ramos (1 title, each).

and Christmas); from the drumming, both profane and religious; and from the popular music at the time⁵”.

The first SAs in Rio de Janeiro have their origins related to several street carnival groups belonging to the central areas of the city. Among those groups, we highlight: the street carnival group *Deixa Falar*, one of the founders of the SAs created in the neighborhoods of Estácio and Catumbi; the street carnival group Estação Primeira, it originated the SA Estação Primeira de Mangueira; and the street carnival group Osvaldo Cruz, it originated the SA Portela (FERNANDES, 2001; LOPES; SIMAS, 2015).

The first official contest occurred in 1932, idealized by the journalist Mario Filho and sponsored by the newspaper *Mundo Esportivo*. It had 19 samba schools (FERNANDES, 2001; LIRA NETO, 2017; LOPES; SIMAS, 2015). According to Lira Neto (2017, p. 245), the contest was ignored by the majority of Rio de Janeiro newspapers. Still, according to the author, “on that 7th of February in 1932, the Rio de Janeiro samba schools competed for the first time, having all their associates – drums, dancers (*passistas*), singers, composers – in a big carnival parade”.

The first SA contest organized and promoted by the public government occurred in 1935⁶. Now that the festival becomes official, the “formal relation between the public government — the City Hall of the Federal District – and the Samba Schools is also official. The representation of the latter is now made through the Samba Schools Union SSU (*União das Escolas de Samba – UES*) –, organized and founded in 1934” (SILVA, 2007, p. 9). On behalf of the SAs, there was the need of affirmation and social legitimacy, most importantly considering the connection to the African-descendant population of the city. Concerning the State, the SAs were seen as a possibility of discipline on several popular cultural manifestations of the city.

The consolidation of the competition among the SAs was fundamental to amplify the importance of the schools as *Carioca*⁷ popular culture manifestations. It prompted the incorporation of a set of innovations: the approach samba themes had started to be relevant, as well as they had to correspond directly to the historical theme, and the other elements are also related to the contest judgment. Within this context, the theme: *Teste ao Samba*,

⁵ Quotations between quotation marks are translated from the original. The author of the text used Portuguese language. The translation in English is a responsibility of the translator.

⁶ According to Fernandes (2001, p. 90), “The first official contest among samba schools, occurred on a carnival Sunday, the 2nd of March in 1935, at Praça Onze Square, was triumphantly won by *Portela*, then named *Vai Como Pode*, presenting the samba theme “Samba taking over the world”.

⁷ Original from the city of Rio de Janeiro

presented by ss Portela for the carnival in 1939, is considered to be “the first reference of a complete dramatization of a samba school parade, from the first to the very last samba dancer, according to the proposed samba theme” (SIMAS; FABATO, 2015, p. 16).

In the 1940s, the political consequences of the New State and the 2nd World War in the everyday life made the SSs to compose samba themes exulting Brazilian nationalism. From the carnival in 1946, the presentation of samba themes involving nationalism elements became institutionally obligational during the contest. Eventually, the samba themes could no longer be chosen freely, but directed to reflect the approached themes (LOPES; SIMAS, 2015; SIMAS; FABATO, 2015).

The 50s and the 60s can be considered as the decades that presented most changes. It was the time when the samba school Acadêmicos do Salgueiro provoked a transformation on the themes presented so far, as well as other aspects of the parades. Having the samba theme: Debret (*Viagem pitoresca através do Brasil – Debret*), in 1959, the school took to the sambódromo “a theme about the works of French artist Jean-Baptiste Debret, showing with great visual effects, the everyday life of African-Brazilians during the transition between Portuguese Colony and Brazilian Empire” (LOPES; SIMAS, 2015, p. 99–100). In the following years, the school continued investing on characters that did not feature in the country’s official history. It highlighted the themes on *Quilombo dos Palmares* (1960), *Vida e obra do Aleijadinho* (1961), *Chica da Silva* (1963), *Chico rei* (1964), *História da Liberdade no Brasil* (1967) and *Bahia de Todos os Deuses* (1969).

When the civil-military Dictatorship in Brazil was established in 1964, the SSs turned back to “reassure the discourse of the new officiality, provided through a growing process of political polarization, therefore, without and possibility of consensus” (SILVA, 2007, p. 63). At that time, the themes started to exult aspects connected to the construction of the ideal “Modern Brazil”. It had themes of exultation for the “Great Brazil” (SILVA, 2007)⁸, or else with themes denominated the “white-slate”⁹ (SIMAS; FABATO, 2015).

⁸ About the relation the Samba Schools had within the cycles of the military dictatorship, Silva (2007) emphasizes how political power influenced on the theme choices the school took presented. Thus, the author states: “Even more emphatic is the official response, that asks that the SSs turn their ideals towards the *currentness of the country*, even more directed to the *actual progress of the country*, therefore having a *more constructive meaning* on their themes and allegories. *The Great Brazil* designed by the samba themes focuses on the dislocation of time of the *historical past* discourse into the *near future*. More precisely, the discourse approaches the *present*, but is stuck in the *near future*, floating on the latent ambivalence of the expression: *actual progress*. “It deals with the progress given by the reality, but not by the very reality and its immediate contradictions” (SILVA, 2007, p. 72, author’s mark).

⁹ Despite the fact that there is no conception for the expression, we can understand, based on the works of de Simas and Fabato (2015) that the white-slate samba themes have no criticism on the characters or historical moments. It is connected with a dominant discourse/speech.

During the late 1980s, other transformations took place to consolidate the SSs' parades as great spectacles (the "biggest show on Earth", as the media started to name it). It was then that the themes started to diversify (coincidentally, the same historical moment that the dictatorship started to lose its repression power). Even with the maintenance of themes consolidated during the last decades, new lines of themes emerged, such as "the abstract themes; other examples of themes approached everyday aspects of life; new ones assumed a critical position towards national policy; even old themes that revisited historical themes in an ironic and irreverent manner" (SILVA, 2007, p. 58).

The inauguration of the Sambódromo Marquês de Sapucaí and the creation of the Samba Schools Independent League SSIL (*Liga Independente das Escolas de Samba – LIESA*), both happened in 1984, can be appointed as central events for the current configuration of the SSs. Souza (2017) highlights that the construction of the Sambódromo meant for the SSs the accomplishment of a specific venue for the parades, as Matos (2005) reinforces that this venue expresses the party space with excellency. The creation of the SSIL represented the organizational milestone for the production of the spectacle, especially due to the "final and administrative rationalization of the contest". Also, "its creation started a dispute against Riotur for the direction of the party" (SOUZA, 2017, p. 37).

About the themes, the movement of amplification of the range of options presented by the SSs during the parades was consolidated in the 1990s and on the first two decades of the 21st century. The whole structure of the parades also had changes: size of allegories, size of the wings and other sections. Time, judges and a broader visibility were given by the tv broadcasting.

About the modernization of the spectacle, Simões (2019, p. 296-297) highlights the vertical growth the parades had, resulting in "an evolution both quantitative as qualitative of the allegories sizes and their visual elements, ornaments, and several costumes". Beyond the visual dimension of the spectacle, the change also occurred on the musical, dramatical, (dramatization and acting even more frequent) dancing (choreographies) aspects. It "generated a pot of signs and possibilities of relations that configure the carnival parade as an artistic language" (SIMÕES, 2019, p. 297).

Facing so many transformations in the SSs, since their origins until today, from the perspective of the themes, this work consider the importance of such carnival institutions as vectors of valorization and diffusion of the ideal of Brazilianness. However, it is not about a homogeneous, but a heterogenous country through the expression "watercolors of Brazil". They are shown through the themes that urge aspects of culture, geography, history,

ethnic formation, cuisine, among other elements of different regions of the country (RAYMUNDO, 2020).

The valorization and the urgency of several aspects of different regions, states and cities in Brazil have become pieces of themes of interest by the SSs. When analyzing the diverse representations of Brazil in the carnival themes, Gomes, A. H. C. (2020) exemplifies two predominant perspectives. One of them shows Brazil from big national themes. Another perspective is marked by more regionalized elements. Whether through a totalitarian point of view of the country, or through demonstrating the diversity of the regions, the carnival themes contribute to the construction and/or re-affirmation of representations about what Brazil is and the very Brazilianness.

2.2 The school samba themes and their representations of Brazil

In the literature on the history of the SSs, the presentations of the themes, whether national and/or regional, can be understood as a way the institutions used to reach greater legitimacy in society, as well as taken as an advantage, by the State, as a strategy for the construction of patriotism ideology (AUGRAS, 1992; LOPES; SIMAS, 2015; SIMAS; FABATO, 2015). The SSs have for the construction and/or consolidation of different and diverse representations and meanings about the country.

Several studies point out that in the universe of themes acknowledged as having a “nationalist” or “Brazilian” character, the reference to aspects of Brazilian regions is highly frequent. Augras (1992, p. 34) highlights that, along the path of “obedience to nationalist purposes, the samba themes never cease to worship the ‘figures’ of Brazilian history. However, the great character of Samba is, truly, the very Brazilian nation, exulted by every carnival institution”.

According to Lopes and Simas (2015, p. 100), the adoption of the themes exulting patriotism, was in harmony with the “patriotic boastful nationalism of the governmental discourse; and the affinity was natural, in a time when the world of samba aimed at mobility and acknowledgment and the government needed mass support to carry out their projects”. Following the understanding, Simas and Fabato (2015, p. 18) express that the SSs have “increasingly been taken by political leaders as channels of propaganda for the pedagogy of the exultation of patriotism. The themes and the samba songs worked as tools for the masses of population to have civic training”.

Some themes have notably, throughout the decades, proposed the representation

of a general scenario of the geography and history of Brazil, as well as its regions. Discussing the origins of the SSs and the musical genre – samba theme – Raymundo (2019; 2020) states that the search for the construction of a Brazilianness was one of the principles that have guided the formation of these carnival institutions. For the author, among the “topics of greater poetic range for samba themes at the samba schools in the city of Rio de Janeiro, there are those who present ‘watercolors of Brazil’ – they express panoramic themes [...] from different regions of the country, as well as ‘national heroes” (RAYMUNDO, 2020, p. 124).

It is within this context of representation of Brazil, from elements highlighting its diversity (natural, historical, economic, social and cultural) that the Northeastern Region emerges as a source for the development of a multiplicity of themes throughout the decades. The bibliography about the history of the SSs or about the samba themes (AUGRAS, 1992; BRASIL, 2015), has the first references about a theme on a regional reality. It dates from the 1940s. In 1948, the SS Império Serrano and Estação Primeira de Mangueira presented, respectively, the themes *Castro Alves* and *O Vale do São Francisco*.

During the following decades, other themes related to the Northeastern Region were introduced by several samba schools. About the geographical regional references, research carried out by Augras (1992) on the samba themes between the years of 1948 and 1975, identified that the states of Bahia and Pernambuco were the main references.

Both Augras (1992) and the bibliography this research used (BORA, 2018; BRASIL, 2015; GOMES, A. G., 2016; LOPES; SIMAS, 2015; RAYMUNDO, 2019, 2020), as well as specialized websites (Galeria do Samba e LIESA), identified several references on themes that evoked the Northeastern Region between the 1950s and 1990s. We point out that the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s have distinguished the following themes: *Uma romaria na Bahia* (Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 1954); *Quilombo dos Palmares* (Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 1960); *Casa grande e senzala* (Estação Primeira de Mangueira, 1962); *Relíquias da Bahia* (Estação Primeira de Mangueira, 1963); *Glórias e graças à Bahia* (Império Serrano, 1966); *Leão do Norte* (Império Serrano, 1968); *Bahia de todos os deuses* (Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 1969); *Yayá do Cais Dourado* (Unidos de Vila Isabel, 1969); *Terra de Caruaru* (Unidos de São Carlos, 1970); *Nordeste, seu povo, seu canto, sua glória* (Império Serrano, 1971); *Festa para um rei negro* (Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 1971); *Bahia, berço do Brasil* (Em Cima da Hora, 1972); *O Rei de França na Ilha da Assombração* (Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 1974); *Dona Santa, rainha do Maracatu* (Império Serrano, 1974); *Nos confins de*

Vila Monte (União da Ilha do Governador, 1975); *Os Sertões* (Em Cima da Hora, 1976); *O mundo de barro de Mestre Vitalino* (Império da Tijuca, 1977).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called “Northeastern themes” continued to be the center of interest by several carnival institutions. They are: *O que é que a Bahia tem?* (Imperatriz Leopoldinense, 1980); *O Velho Chico* (Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel, 1982); *Brasil: devagar com o andor que o santo é de barro* (Unidos da Tijuca, 1983); *A visita da nobreza do riso à Chico Rei, num palco nem sempre iluminado* (Caprichosos de Pilares, 1984); *Caymmi mostra ao mundo o que a Bahia tem e a Mangueira também* (Estação Primeira de Mangueira, 1986); *Jorge Amado, Axé Brasil* (Império Serrano, 1989); *Atrás da Verde e Rosa só não vai quem já morreu* (Estação Primeira de Mangueira, 1994); *Marrom da cor do samba* (Unidos da Ponte); *A esmeralda do Atlântico* (Estação Primeira de Mangueira, 1995); *Mais vale um jegue que me carregue, que um camelo que me derrube lá no Ceará* (Imperatriz Leopoldinense, 1995); *O Reino Unido Independente do Nordeste* (Império da Tijuca, 1996); *Linda, eternamente Olinda* (Portela, 1997); *Ei, Ei, Ei, Chateau É Nosso Rei!* (Acadêmicos do Grande Rio, 1999); *A São Clemente comemora e traz Rui Barbosa para os braços do povo* (São Clemente, 1999); *Barbosa Lima, 101 anos do Sobrinho do Brasil* (União da Ilha do Governador, 1999).

3 “BRAZIL WITH AN S IS THE NORTHEASTERN NATION”: DISCOURSE AND IMAGES ABOUT REGIONAL HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY IN SAMBA THEMES

For a better understanding of the Northeastern Region and the elements that contribute to its identity construction, this bibliographic research is based on reading the works of Albuquerque Jr. (2011), Andrade (2005), Bernardes, N. (1999) and Bernardes, D. (2007). As a starting point, we understand that the Northeastern Region or simply Northeastern is the result of a social and historical construction, related to the very process of formation of Brazil (BERNARDES, D., 2007).

The Northeastern cannot be seen as a region featured by its similarities, but as a region whose peculiarities derive from a geographical diversity and diverse historical processes, resulting from a number of social and natural dynamics. The Northeastern constitutes a large portion of the national territory whose image was historically built, through a process that exposes distinct ways how our society relates to their own space. Ultimately, they contribute to the definition of multiple regionalities.

It is not possible to separate the construction of the Northeastern from its inter-relation with the process of formation of Brazil (BERNARDES, D., 2007) – some elements are fundamental for the comprehension of how this region faces the social-spatial dynamics from other regions and the county itself. Then, the Northeastern has, according to Bernardes, D. (2007, p. 41), “crystal-clear meanings that evoke a series of images, both for its geographical characteristics, as well as for its cultural, social and economic features”. The author still declares that the Northeastern “has not always existed since the beginning, and the conceptions about its characteristics, or even its geographical limitations have suffered transformations through time” (BERNARDES, D., 2007, p. 43).

In his classic book “The land and the man of the Northeastern” (*A terra e o homem no Nordeste*), Andrade (2005) distinguishes that the Northeastern of Brazil can be characterized through a diversity of factors, especially physical domains and its spatial organization. These elements, in an inter-related manner, contribute to the conformation of natural and humane landscapes. So, the author acknowledges four regions: a Mata, o Agreste, o Sertão e o Meio-Norte¹⁰.

What we now know as the Northeastern had its outlining started with the construction of the Lusitano Colonial Empire since the first decades of colonization (16th century). From populational movements occurring the cities of Olinda and Salvador, the penetration into the country’s territory started. It moved towards spaces, so far unknown – the Agreste and Sertão. That movement into unexplored areas aimed at finding “land where cattle farming was possible. It was highly important to have animals that could ‘work’ – cattle and horses – at the sugar mills and supply for the developing urban centers” (ANDRADE, 2005, p. 183).

This work selected 14 samba themes from the carnival between the years of 1999 and 2022. They depicted historical and geographical elements of the Northeastern (Picture 01).

Picture 01 – Researched samba themes

SANBA SCHOOLS	THEME	YEAR
Acadêmicos do Salgueiro	<i>Salgueiro é sol e sal nos quatrocentos anos de Natal</i>	1999
Imperatriz Leopoldinense	<i>Brasil mostra a sua cara em... Theatrum Rerum Naturalium Brasiliae</i>	1999
Unidos de Vila Isabel	<i>João Pessoa, onde o sol brilha mais cedo</i>	1999
Imperatriz Leopoldinense	<i>Cana-caiana, cana roxa, cana fita, cana preta, amarela, Pernambuco... Quero vê descê o suco, na pancada do ganzá</i>	2001
Acadêmicos do Grande Rio	<i>Os Papagaios Amarelos Nas Terras Encantadas do Maranhão</i>	2002

¹⁰ Different types of desertic landscapes in Brazil. No translations are used. The original names in Portuguese will appear in this work.

Estação Primeira de Mangueira	<i>Brazil com Z é pra cabra da peste, Brasil com S é nação do Nordeste</i>	2002
Estação Primeira de Mangueira	<i>Das águas do São Francisco, nasce um rio de esperança</i>	2006
Beija-Flor de Nilópolis	<i>São Luís – O poema encantado do Maranhão</i>	2012
Portela	<i>E o povo na rua cantando. É feito uma reza, um ritual.</i>	2012
Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel	<i>Pernambucópolis</i>	2014
Portela	<i>De repente de lá pra cá e 'dirrepente' de cá pra lá</i>	2018
Paraíso do Tuiuti	<i>O salvador da pátria</i>	2019
União da Ilha do Governador	<i>A peleja poética entre Rachel e Alencar no avarandado do céu</i>	2019
Unidos de Vila Isabel	<i>Gigante Pela Própria Natureza: Jaçanã e Um Índio Chamado Brasil</i>	2020

Source: Samba Gallery (1999-2005); Liesa (2006-2020).

During the process of selection, we considered themes that depict both a particular state, as well as the entire region. It is based on the understanding that this category of samba themes aims at encompassing several geographical and historical aspects that represent the singularities of a state of a city.

About the spatial cut contemplated in the samba themes, we perceive three big groups. There are themes that approach the Northeastern in the context named “Brazilian Watercolors” (RAYMUNDO, 2019; 2020). We mention the samba themes by the samba schools Império Serrano (2004), Estação Primeira de Mangueira (2019) and Unidos de Vila Isabel (2020). Using the terminology used by Raymundo (2019, 2020), the themes used by Estação Primeira de Mangueira for the carnival years of 2002 and 2006 can be considered as examples of “watercolors” about the whole region, for they approach several aspects within the nine Northeastern states.

There are also homages to capital cities from the Northeastern such as Natal (Salgueiro, 1999), João Pessoa (Vila Isabel, 1999) and São Luís (Beija Flor, 2012), as well as to the states of Maranhão (Acadêmicos do Grande Rio, 2002), Bahia (Portela, 2012), Pernambuco (Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel, 2014) and Ceará (União da Ilha, 2019). Finally, there are the themes that approach historical moments of the region, for example: the themes of Imperatriz Leopoldinense (1999 e 2001), Portela (2018) and Paraíso do Tuiuti (2019).

About the general framing of the samba themes, we tried not to have a strict classification regarding whether they are historical or geographical. Thus, it is possible for this study to observe that every theme presents representative elements from both approaches. We, most importantly, aimed at the aspects that guided the construction of these representations within several regional frames.

Among the researched themes, the Northeastern is represented through dualistic perspectives that mark their humane and natural landscapes. From the perspective of a natural scenario, the regional reality is highlighted, according to Andrade (2005, p. 35), “sometimes as the land of droughts – from colonial times until now. This critical situation draws the attention from governments’ budgets; sometimes as the land of great carnivals that enrich half a dozen people regardless of the majority of the population”. About the human aspects, the author declares that the Northeastern is seen “sometimes as an extremely under-developed part of the country due to its low *per capita* income; or it is seen as the land of libertarian revolutions which is mentioned by the national poet Manuel Bandeira in his poem *Evocação do Recife*” (ANDRADE, 2005, p. 35).

On one side, there is the representation of a coastline Northeastern, marked by the presence of Mata Atlântica¹¹ and by the tropical wet climate; on the other side there is a semiarid Northeastern having Caatinga¹² vegetation and a tropical semiarid climate. Such realities express, respectively, the sub-regions of Zona da Mata “having a “hot and wet climate and two very well-defined seasons”; and the Sertão, “also having a hot, but very dry weather [...] there are, occasionally, since the colonial times, periodical droughts”, according to Andrade (2005, p. 37). The perspective of Ab’Saber (2003) classified the great landscape domains of Brazil: “the coastline portion being the domains of ‘forested’ sand dune seas; and the dry Sertaneja¹³ portion taken as the ‘domains’ of semiarid inter-upland depressions”.

The most recurrent representation of the Northeastern Zona da Mata appears in the historical approaches having the state of Pernambuco as reference (Olinda and Recife). In this universe, the greatest highlight lies on the relevance that sugarcane economic activities had, most notably during the Dutch times of domination, in the 17th century. The samba themes *Brasil mostra a sua cara em... Theatrum Rerum Naturalium Brasiliae* (Imperatriz Leopoldinense, 1999), *Cana-caiana, cana roxa, cana fita, cana preta, amarela, Pernambuco... Quero vê descê o suco, na pancada do ganzá* (Imperatriz Leopoldinense, 2001) and *De repente de lá pra cá e dirrepente de cá pra lá* (Portela, 2018), all of which were developed by the carnival producer Rosa Magalhães¹⁴, represent the above-mentioned approach.

¹¹ Vegetation in Brazil that stretches along Brazilian coastline.

¹² A semiarid climate in Brazilian Northeastern.

¹³ Belonging to Sertão.

¹⁴ In his doctorate work, Bora (2018, p. 254) draws the attention to the interest of the carnival artist Rosa Magalhães by Northeastern themes. The author says: “The theme of the samba school Portela in 2018 revisits the same thematic universe that the artist walked through in the gresilense parade of 1999: the Dutch presence in Brazilian Northeastern, in the 17th century. Northeastern chords, in the carnival designs of de Rosa Magalhães,

Analyzing the artistic works the Rosa Magalhães, Bora (2014) distinguishes the elements presented in the theme of the samba school Emperatriz Leopoldinense for the carnival of 1999, when the idea of a “tropical Northeastern” was reproduced based on the artistic and scientific mission financed by Maurício de Nassau and lead by Albert Eckhout and Franz Post. About the nature aspects, the author still indicates that, in the theme, “Animals (flying, aquatic and terrestrial) and plants (flowers, fruits and vegetables in general) took over the Parades of Samba in happy, light and colorful costumes and allegories. They were inspired from Pernambucanos festivities: *caboclinhos, maracatus and reisados*” (BORA, 2014, p. 282).

The landscape of Zona da Mata is again represented by Rosa Magalhães in the theme of 2018 developed by samba school Portela. Its narrative had, as a strong thread, the trajectory of migrants coming from Europe to Pernambuco in the 17th century, then dominated by the Dutch¹⁵. In the sector “The wonderment of Northeastern lands through the eyes of Maurício de Nassau”, the samba school Portela represented diverse figurations of the Northeastern landscapes through the Dutch perspective, both in the wing “Northeastern Landscape” (Figure 01A) and in the wings “*Avuantes*”, “*Bode*” and “*Caranguejo-Uçá*”. In addition, she also illustrated the economy of that time through the costumes “Dry lands and fertile lands” (Figure 01B) and “The sugarcane crop” (Figure 01C); wings that, according to the theme, represented that “the dry land would slowly turn into fertile land, growing splendid plantations that helped to establish a new economic cycle of the Brazilian colony” (LIESA, 2018, p. 65). The Sector was summarized in the allegory “The Dutch prince in the tropical lands” (Figure 01C)¹⁶.

are quite common [...]. According to her, the paternal Northeastern roots (Raimundo Magalhães Júnior was born in Ubajara, in the state of Ceará), have always captivated her, arising a natural interest for sertanejos, folkloric and indigenous themes”.

¹⁵ Through the story of the them, the carnival institution states: “Lover of arts and science, the eyes of the prince wonder with the landscape of the region prompting him to invite artists capable making them everlasting through the lines of their paintbrushes. Through paintings and engravings of masters such as Frans Post and Albert Eckhout, the exotic Northeastern fauna and flora become known by the Europeans. In a description left by Post, the Armadillo, an animal he portrayed, was *‘type of pig with an armor, tasteful to eat, tastes like chicken’*” (LIESA, 2018, p. 58, marks by the author).

¹⁶ “The car is an allegory of the Armadillo, native animal in the region of the state of Pernambuco. It was depicted in the drawings of Frans Post. It is a good example of how the fauna of the region, exotic before the eyes of Europe, enchanted Maurício de Nassau. The prominence, over the animal’s head, represents exactly the Dutch prince. The allegory moves open and close the armor of the Armadillo. It alters the shape of the animal along with the revelation, and the compositions of a splendid sugarcane crop” (LIESA, 2018, p. 73).

Figure 01 – Elements from Zona da Mata landscape in the parades of SS Portela (2018).



Source: (A) Portela (2018); (B e C) Liesa (2018).

The representations of the sugarcane economy society were present in all of the 3 samba themes. We emphasize two themes: the conflicting coexistence of two worlds — the European and the Indigenous —, and the Northeastern and its aspects of tropicality, exuberating the nature and the wild animals. In the samba theme the samba school Imperatriz Leopoldinense (1999), the carnival artist Rosa Magalhães came up with a fusion of human types diversity painted through the Dutch artistic mission.

Still about the parade of the samba school Imperatriz Leopoldinense, Bora (2014, p. 282) states that the “Brazilian types (indigenes, Africans, *mulatos* and *mamelucos*) were exulted and the allegories converged wild nature and erudite culture”. Also, according to the author, the main message was that “the Dutch experience in Pernambuco was meaningful for a mixed, happy, beautiful and profoundly noble Brazil — were it the Dutch or the jungle nobility” (BORA, 2014, p. 282).

Once *Cachaça* (Brazilian original alcoholic spirit distilled from sugarcane) is the main theme of the parades in 2001, the representation of sugarcane Northeastern was one of the elements present in the narratives of Imperatriz Leopoldinense samba theme (BORA, 2014; LEITÃO, 2019). The inspiration for the theme, according to Leitão (2019, p. 301), comes from “lyrics from *emboladas* (Northeastern RAP) sung by *cambiteiros* in the mills of Northeastern since the beginning of the last century. They were hired to transport sugarcane on animals’ backs. To make their tasks a little less hard, they would number, through verses and rhymes, several types of sugarcane from different regions”. Defined by Bora (2014, p.

282) as a “Northeastern sugarcane crop song”, the theme portrayed the story of sugarcane and sugar since Asia and Europe, through the conflicts between the Moors and the Crusades, the rodeos, the Mediterranean commerce, when in Brazil, to present the carnivalized way of the “sugarcane, patriarchic, slavery, and hybrid society, in the words of Gilberto Freyre” (BORA, 2014, p. 283) (Figure 02A).

Figure 02 – Economy and society from the 17th century in the parades of Imperatriz Leopoldinense (2001) and Portela (2018).



Source: (A) Liesa (2001); (B and C) Portela (2018).

The strong influence by the economic sugarcane Pernambucana society was also present in the third wing sector of the Portalense parade in 2018. There, sugarcane was represented in the wings “The sugarcane wealth” and “Sugarcane turns to gold” (Figure 02B). the final act of this wing sector had an allegory named “Famous Recife” (Figure 02C). It showed “the architecture of Recife administrated by the Dutch, emphasizing houses built in the colonial style. The cattle and the horses ornamented, connected to the landscape, allude to the elements of regional culture” (LIESA, 2018, p. 74).

The representation of the Northeastern semiarid natural landscape elements is recurrent in the themes, not rare as the amalgam that provides unity to the regional space. According to Andrade’s assertion (2005, p. 37), “the element that, most sensibly, marks the landscape and worries men is the weather, through the pluvial regime and externalized by the vegetation”. Bernardes, N. (1999, p. 69), analyzes the areas of caatinga in Northeastern inland. He points out that these areas are subjected to “distinct pluviometry conditions and the soil covering those lands shows sensible differences due to their geological constitution”.

Within this context, the images linked to the singularities of the Northeastern landscapes are connected to the Caatinga vegetation, the dry landscape and the “cracked ground” – consequences from the droughts season. The parades of the samba school Paraíso do Tuiuti, in 2019, and Unidos de Vila Isabel, presented in 2020, reinforce these images (Figure 03). The representation of the landscape during the droughts is marked by the use of hot and earthy colors both for the costumes, as well as for the allegories.

Figure 03 – Semiarid landscapes in the parades of Paraíso do Tuiuti (2019) and Unidos de Vila Isabel (2020).



Source: (A) Gorosito (2019); (B) Dias (2020).

in the carnival parade of 2019, the ss Paraíso do Tuiuti used the droughts as its starting point to narrate the Saga of “Bode loiô” in the state of Ceará in the first decades of the 20th century. The description of the front wing float, named “The Journey across Sertão” (Figure 03A), shows the several references used to illustrate the phenomenon of the droughts and the sertaneja landscape¹⁷.

The following year, the ss Unidos de Vila Isabel represented the dry semiarid landscape of the northeastern in a samba theme that honored the sixty year-anniversary of Brasília. The narrative structure showed the influence that migration from the Northeastern region had for the construction of the federal capital city in the second half of the 1950s. within this context, the image of “candango” is described in the justification for the samba theme as the workers “coming attracted by the possibility of a new beginning and new opportunities” (MEMORIAL DA DEMOCRACIA, [s. d.] *apud* LIESA, 2020, p. 66).

¹⁷ “In the xylography style, the images represent, in black and white, the delusion derived from starvation in an **arid landscape**. However, it still generates life. On the other hand, **Elements from the sertaneja flora are presented in hot colors**. A profusion of human mandacarus parades under the allegory that brings at the last module, an image inspired on the painting “Retirantes”, by Vitalino [...]” (LIESA, 2019, p. 258, author’s mark).

In the sector 4 of the parade, the diverse elements surrounding the imaginary of the northeastern semiarid landscape, such as Caatinga and droughts, were represented in 5 out of 8 wings (“*Alma nordestina-candanga*”; “*Vidas secas e severina*”; “*Candango não perde a fé*”; “*Nobres sofredores candangos*”; “*Carcará vermelho da seca*”). They were also central themes in the allegories “*Mais um Silva pau-de-arara*” (Figure 02B). In the description of the allegory, the samba school highlights that “Silvas and Severinos shaping the Brasília-girl, carrying in the memory, the landscape of the sun-dried world, and in the luggage, a will and a prophecy of a Brazil full of goodwill, to be carved by clay-colored-like candango hands” (LIESA, 2020, p. 87).

Based on the examples, we can verify that both Caatinga and the “drought” are permanently evoked in the themes. As references, they use images of an inhospitable landscape shaped by the harshness of the climate and the asperity of human conditions. Within this context, we emphasize that the current imaginary is not a privilege for those that do not live in this part of the country, but for those that live in the northeastern territory. Nazaré (2019, p. 132) states that “Even with migrations, unsettlements and hybridisms happening across time, some images communicate with individuals. They serve as substrate and parameters, as well as questioning and conflicts”. In the themes analyzed by this work, the association of the phenomenon of droughts to social difficult issues (hunger, poverty, migrations etc.) is evident. The sertaneja reality ultimately becomes a summary the very region from a cultural, social-economic and natural perspective (DANTAS, 2022).

However, not only these sertaneja landscapes are used as references in the themes. Coastline landscapes are also represented, both for their natural and human aspects. In different parts of the themes studied, the Northeastern seacoast and the sertão are both distant and dichotomic as well as close and complementary to each other.

In the homage paid to the state of Ceará, in 2019, the ss União da Ilha do Governador joined both Sertão and the seacoast. It was based on the works of writers – José de Alencar and Raquel de Queiroz. The “Sertão do Cariri” was the special cut chosen to illustrate the geographical diversity of the state. Its landscapes were then described in the section “*Sertão arretado de bom*”: “Ceará ornamented by the bushes of Caatinga or immense plains that dilatate through infinite horizons, **washed by green angry seas**” (LIESA, 2019, p. 185, author’s mark).

This relation of distance and proximity between Sertão and the seacoast is particularly emphasized by Silva (2006, p. 46) when he analyzes the city of Fortaleza: “it is a semiarid metropole, that in the state of Ceará pours out the Sertão into the sea. [...] the

city of Fortaleza reveals and contains, within its urban reality, the mix between Sertão and the seacoast". The Cearense seacoast was highlighted in the parade of the ss União da Ilha in the wings "*Camarão cearense*", "*Cirandas*", "*Jericoacara*" e "*Canoa Quebrada*", as well as in the third allegory, "*A procissão marítima de São Pedro*". It presented the...

[...] belief of Cearense highlighting the main sea procession of the state: The Party of Saint Peter of the Fishermen in Fortaleza – homage to the patron saint of the fishermen. The procession of boats and rafts unites, every year, thousands of believers thankful for the blessings during the fishing season. A great vessel leads other rafts during a sea procession of worshipping for the saint Apostle. At the top, a figure representing the Chapel of Saint Peter of the Fishermen. It is located on Beira-Mar Avenue in the city of Fortaleza. (LIESA, 2019, p. 197).

The simultaneous representation of the Northeastern seacoast and Sertão aspects was not only represented in the theme about Ceará. There are other themes that paid homage to states and cities, such as about the city of Natal (Salgueiro, 1999), João Pessoa (Vila Isabel, 1999) and São Luís (Beija Flor, 2012), as well as the homages for the states of Maranhão (Acadêmicos do Grande Rio, 2002), Bahia (Portela, 2012) and Pernambuco (Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel, 2014).

The themes exulting any state or city were recurrent in the parades. They constituted a modality named "*enredos CEP*" (BATISTA, 2017; LUCAS, 2020). It is a modality of theme sponsored and dealing specifically with a geographical space – a city, a state or a country" (LUCAS, 2020, p. 140). It has been widely used by the SSs during the last decades, especially as means for the institutions to raise budgets/sponsorship (public/private) for the development of the themes.

By choosing this type of theme, the SSs also contribute to promote and prompt the publicizing of the honored places. They can be a resource for public government to stimulate and publicize these areas as tourism destinations. Following this understanding, Batista (2017, p. 18) affirms that "narrating a city, state or country during the Carnival means promoting the local area into a nationwide tour destination, exulting its local culture and warming up the economy". It is a strategy that has been widely used by public governors through their marketing and communication agents to publicize the city through the parades broadcastings by Globo TV".

The narratives are commonly structure from a sequence of sub themes starting at the story of the occupation and foundation of these places. It then moves to aspects related to culture, personalities and tourism attractions. This kind of structure aims at adjusting the

themes to the interests of the narrative and the presentation for the judges, as well as sponsors.

In the themes of the Carnival of 1999 about the city of Natal and João Pessoa, the SSs Salgueiro and Vila Isabel used that formula to develop their stories into the sambódromo. It was sponsored by the city halls and states governments (ESCÓSSIA, 1999, *online*). The story of the 400 year-anniversary of Potiguar Capital (capital city of Natal) was narrated from the period of the occupation by Portuguese colonizers (Figure 04A), bringing the Dutch domination and offering a vision of its first inhabitants (the Potiguaras). It then moved to the influence of the World War 2 in the history of the city (Figure 04B), paid homage to Câmara Cascudo (Figure 04C) and showed tourism attractions (Figure 04D), parties, cuisine and gastronomy.

Figure 04 – SS Salgueiro parade in 1999 honoring the city of Natal.



Source: Parade... (2017).

Although the sponsorship still has some influence on the way the samba theme develops, the final choice about the narrative structure is responsibility of the carnival artist. Therefore, the way the homage to a city of state can occur through different perspectives.

Twice, the state of Maranhão (Grande Rio, 2002) and its capital city – São Luís (Beija Flor, 2012) were honored at the sambódromo Marquês de Sapucaí. In both cases, the narratives involved a strong historical presence of the state and the city, the “enchancements” mentioning mythical or historical figures were incorporated to popular imagination (Ana Janssem, Agotime, Touro Negro Coroado etc.), as well as the representation of the architectural patrimony of the city of São Luís (Figure 05A).

Figure 05 – Parade honoring the states of Maranhão, Bahia and Pernambuco.



Fonte: (A) Platonow (2012); (B) Rodrigues (2012); (C) Perez (2014); (D) Liesa (2014).

During the homage to the state of Bahia, made by the ss Portela in 2012, all of the samba theme narratives were designed based on diverse festivities in the state (Figure 05B), whereas the samba theme of the ss Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel about Pernambuco in 2014, was based on folklore manifestations (Figure 05C and 05D). For the justification of the samba theme for the carnival in 2012, the ss Portela emphasized how much those festivities not only were part of the history of Bahia, but also shaped the identity of the state. In the notebook *Abre-Alas*, these elements were evident.

The state of Bahia is a party throughout the year. The folklore manifestations, from diverse origins, proliferated. Thousands of people storm the streets to celebrate, sing and dance. Apart from being extremely popular, these parties are part of a religious syncretism and the mixture of sacred and profane elements. The entire faith of Bahia people is manifested through the cycle of popular festivities, from celebrations of *candomblé orixás* – when every *Terreiro* in the city hit their drums and their followers (*filhos-de-santo*) dance, until the catholic parties – most of the times they end up having a profane meaning. (LIESA, 2012, p. 75).

To honor the state of Pernambuco in 2014, the ss Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel appealed to the memory of the carnival artist Fernando Pinto¹⁸ - born in the state of Pernambucano – to build its narrative. The samba school used the carnival artist perspective in its samba theme, in the wings and allegories, several aspects of the culture of the state of Pernambuco. According to the justification for the samba theme:

¹⁸ Fernando Pinto was a carnival artist SS Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel in the year 1980, and between 1983 and 1988. He won the carnival parade competition in 1985 presenting the samba theme “*Ziriguidum 2001, carnaval nas estrelas*”, and vice-champion in the years 1980, 1984 and 1987, presenting the samba themes “*Tropicália Maravilha*”, “*Mamãe eu quero Manaus*” e “*Tupinícópolis*”.

[Fernando Pinto] walks through Pernambuco culture visiting its folklore - *Folia de Reis*, *Caboclinho*, *Cavalhada*, *Boi Bumbá* earn tropicalist characteristics under the scope of the carnival artist. The religiousness, present in the rituals of *Xangô*, *Reisados*, Wake Up People Procession, *Pastoril* and the New Jerusalem outdoor plays. The journey through the Carnival, where *Maracatu's* characters, giant puppets, *Papangus de Bezerras* and the *Caretas de Triunfo*, come to life to the sound of drumming and *frevos*. The singing, dances, rhythms rise and manifest to the sound of *Manguebeat*, *cirandas*, *fandangos*, *pife* orchestras, *xote*, *xaxado* and *baião*. Mysteries, legends, fascination rise, amulets for protections, *carrancas* and more mysteries (LIESA, 2014, p. 13).

Regardless of how a city or state are honored, we understand that these samba themes create great expectations amongst locals and places, and even among those who do not follow the parades. These homages, according to the understanding of Bezerra (2018, p. 144-145), also functions as a strategy by the SSs. Once “there is good acceptance by the locals or the cities being honored, that tends to strengthen the popularity of the SS and can motivate some people to get to know and personally watch the parades of Rio de Janeiro samba schools”.

The Northeastern History and Geography were also approached from the beginning of a perspective of a more totalizing overview of the region. The themes of 2002 and 2006 by ss *Estação Primeira de Mangueira* express this sort of perspective. Both narratives, showed historical, geographical, economic and social cultural elements. They were the basis for the presentation of a great regional mosaic. Following this chain, the conceptions present in the themes *Brazil com Z é pra cabra da peste*, *Brasil com S é nação do Nordeste* and *Das águas do São Francisco, nasce um rio de esperança*, primarily focused on the treatment that the region had from its very diversity.

Although the Mangueirense theme had a distance from more successful themes this work analyzes, it did not avoid making references to those elements that have become common when referring to the Northeastern region. Both the synopsis and the lyrics of the samba theme had those references. They occurred through allusions to characters and expressions traditionally related to the Northeastern. That was particularly evident during the parade opening. It brought the marriage between *Lampião* and *Maria Bonita*. It had extras acting as *cangaceiros* and migrants, and the opening wing all white with 48 horses ridden by peace *cangaceiros* (Figure 06A).

In the second sections of the parades, Mangueira aimed at representing the region from multiple aspects. It adopted a more optimistic vision about citizens from the

Northeastern region. It was first represented by its first inhabitants (in the wing “*Índios donos da terra*”); the arrival of Africans (wing “*Negros africanos*”); then successive groups of invaders (Dutch and French) – in the theme they were nominated as “*os cabras da peste*”; finally, the allegory named “The fortress” (Figure 06B), building the narrative that showed how the Northeastern lands were disputed among native and invaders.

Figure 06 – *Estação Primeira de Mangueira* Parade (2002).



Fonte: (A) Sabino (2016); (B, C e D) Compacto... (2020).

Other sections of the parade versified about myths and beliefs (the legend of *boitatá*, *caipora* and *ipupiara*, the Sebastianism, *carrancas* etc.). There were also those sections whose allegories represented popular parties and festivities, diverse religious manifestations (Figure 06C), culinary expressions, handicraft and human types. The last part of the parade proposed an inversion of a traditional view of the Northeastern region. The SS defined the theme as “The returners” (Figure 06D) to affirm that “The Northeastern is the future of our country... its greatest richness is the emotion of being a *Sertanejo*, utterly creative and having adventurous blood running through their veins... The saga of a singular population, as well as rich, wise and a true colorful popular history” (ESTAÇÃO PRIMEIRA DE MANGUEIRA, 2002, *online*).

The same historical, geographical and cultural references were used as inspiration for Mangueira to accomplish its watercolor about the São Francisco River in the parade of 2006. The samba school crossed the river from its spring in the state of Minas Gerais,

through its courses in the Northeastern – Bahia and Pernambuco, until its outfall between the states of Alagoas and Sergipe. The school returned to many elements presented in the carnival of 2002, focusing on the presence of the first inhabitants (Figure 07A), legends, religiousness, culinary and handicraft (Figure 07B).

Figure 07 – Estação Primeira de Mangueira Parade (2006).



Source: (A) Liesa (2006); (B) Bucco (2006).

Both parades by *Mangueira*, as well as the other parades analyzed showed a diverse and multicolored Northeastern, especially when representing popular culture elements. The carnival artists replaced the earthy color shades by a diversity of colors and shapes to show the richness of diverse regional cultural manifestations.

When analyzing several samba themes by Rosa Magalhães, Bora (2018, p. 258) highlights that, according to the carnival artists above mentioned, “the handicraft and the popular northeastern *folgedos nota de rodapé* offer a lesson on how to use colors: “they use colors with much more liberty than the Europeans – we study that in college. This is wonderful and interests me even more”. When incorporating such nuances in the parades, the Northeastern presented is no longer the space marked by bitterness of the droughts and the semiarid climate of *Sertão das Caatingas*. It then rises as a strong sociocultural identity space, constantly reaffirmed through several practices and experiences of its social groups.

CONSIDERATIONS

The carnival samba themes have contributed, in the history of the SSs, both for the creation as well as for the diffusion of the representations of several aspects that characterize Brazilian reality. It builds and consolidate aspects of identity and speeches by several social groups, as well as reverberate the speeches derived from the same groups.

About the Northeastern region, we verify the interest that samba schools have to depict several regional aspects.

Within this context, the narratives and the images presented in the themes and analyzed the by this study do not differ from the representations that have historically been done about the Northeastern. Its features (geographical, social, economic, cultural etc.) are considered to be particularly remarkable in comparison to other regions of the country.

Several times, the Northeastern reality would be the expression of dualities strongly crystalized where modern and archaic coexist. About the aspects of geographical landscapes, the seacoast Northeastern is frequently associated to beauties and an ideal of paradisiac nature, perfect for tourism activities. It has been commonly represented in the samba themes exulting states or cities. On the other hand, the Sertanejo Northeastern is represented as a land of droughts, misery and starvation. From a historical point of view, this duality is expressed from the contrast between the sugarcane productive Northeastern (Seacoast) and the cattle-farming Northeastern Sertão.

The reductionism and stereotypes associated to droughts, starvation, or paradisiac beaches of Northeastern region, among other topics, have commonly been mentioned. However, this study points out that this geographical and social cultural reality is not reduced to these elements only. In this context, the region is also represented as a space of resistance and resilience – the nature and the very Northeasterner –, the existence of a cultural identity translated through music, handicraft, religiousness and other cultural manifestations.

In the exultation of “being a Northeasterner” idealized in the samba theme of Mangueira in 2002, the search for regional valorization took it to the subversion of a perspective in a land of strong emigratory movement. The migrant figure was replaced by the “emigrant”, a movement of “returning”, on which the verses of the samba theme “*pau de arara, nunca mais!*”, were proclaimed.

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