

**International Symposium *Circulation of ideas and history of geographical knowledge: hierarchy, interactions and networks*, Rio de Janeiro, 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014.**

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The Regional Conference of the Commission of the History of Geography, part of the International Geographical Union, took place in the historic building of the Rio de Janeiro Federal University (UFRJ), at the *Praia Vermelha* campus, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014. Thanks to the involvement of a team of local members of the Brazilian Network for History of Geography and Historical Geography (*Rede Brasilis*), led by Sergio Nunes Pereira (Fluminense Federal University [UFF]), the 54 participants from Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, United States, India, Spain, Switzerland and France, shared an especially nice working period during the conference.

Firstly, it is important to highlight the *multilingualism* characterizing meetings such as this: lectures and dialogues with the audience alternated between Portuguese, Spanish, French and English. Despite all the struggles presented by the lack of simultaneous translation, a joint effort was made by the Commission aiming to refute any linguistic predominance and, therefore, to promote the use of a number of scientific idioms based on the location of each one of the periodical conferences organised by the aforementioned Commission. Given it is imperative to express the world in different ways, geographical knowledge should be at the core of this process, whose political effects should still be seen in a world scale.

Unable to summarise all the work presented, we will limit our task to outlining some thematic and methodological points, which seemed to us more significant and representative of most papers presented by the researchers who attended the conference of the History of Geography Commission of IGU.

At first, the call for papers, inspired by the idea of circulation of knowledge, pointed to a gradual withdrawal from traditional narratives focused around the positivist notion of a linear and progressive development of the geographical science, a perspective often limited to a national gaze (almost always nationalist) relating to some “National Schools”. This way of conceiving the history of discipline was responsible for its confinement within academic and university circles, which as a

consequence, led to forgetting the more general role cast by Geography in our ways of conceiving space, images of the world and modernity. Along the same lines, we do not restrict ourselves to the history of ideas in an “internalist” sense: on the contrary, we are progressively more interested in the social process, through which knowledge is elaborated. As the title of the conference suggests, the concept of network is understood from now on as the central element of History of Geography, which incorporates conceptual and methodological tools of sociology of science. Often, such a concept draws near to circulation, and a great part of the dialogues were addressed to experiences of international scientific cooperation as well as cultural transfers, analysing advantages and challenges related to translating ideas and knowledge between different geographical spaces.

Another fundamental tool in order to understand circulation of production and knowledge is the analysis of their locations. As a diverse international bibliography has been revealing, space takes over scientific construction, and places of production are considered remarkable agents in this process.

Therefore, it is about placing science in its place and contexts, which may result in a range of places (either institutional, university or beyond university), in which one can find scientific agents, editors, intellectual societies, political and militant circles...In general, this allows us to understand the inextricable connection between politics and the geography of knowledge. Studying these places of production may provide a number of social, economic, cultural and ideological experiences: after all, even if the planet is more and more globalized, subjects of scientific knowledge are still based and situated in their habits, languages and customs.

Many presentations also approached criticism of imperial maps, as well as the question of the constitution of colonial knowledge, or at least produced in colonial context. Usually, the history of cartography occupies a special place among such approaches: although we recognise the relevance of photography, painting and cinema, maps still appear to be considered the main spatial representation means of Geography *par excellence*. Through critical contributions, aiming at deconstructing production contexts and hierarchies, the history of cartography may contribute to the current urge of having different ways of telling the history of geography. In any case, we observe an appreciation of images as a source of information for the study of geographical knowledge production and its circulation.

Regarding external activities, participants at the colloquium had the chance to visit the Botanical Gardens in Rio de Janeiro (<http://www.jbrj.gov.br/>), as well as the *Biblioteca Nacional* (National Library) (<http://www.bn.br/>), where its rich mapping and manuscripts collection could be much appreciated. This exhibition was especially organised for participants of our conference;

however, soon after the *Biblioteca Nacional* decided to open it to the general public. (<http://www.bn.br/acontece-bn/agenda/2014/12/geo-grafia-escrita-leitura-terra-livro-raro>).



**19 Dezembro 2014: Visita na Biblioteca Nacional**

**19 Décembre 2014: Visite à la Bibliothèque Nationale**

**19 December 2014: Visit to the National Library**

After the final meeting, the aforementioned Commission reinforced its commitment to carry themes of History of Geography further to the next conferences of IGU – notably, Moscow in 2015 and Beijing in 2016, as well as to regional independent conferences, which have, up to this point, achieved notable success. With regards to Moscow 2015, an additional call was made for a common session combined with the Political Geography Commission, following the pioneer experience in August 2014 in Krakow. Inspired by the famous article by Piotr Kropotkin *How Geography Ought to Be* (1885)<sup>1</sup>, the new joint session will question (political) Geography as a tool for peace.

Moreover, following the example of the 2013 Manchester Conference, a session of the History of Geography Commission will take place in 2017 within the XXV History of Sciences, Technology and Medicine International Conference, in Rio de Janeiro. The main goal is to

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<sup>1</sup> P. Kropotkin, “What Geography ought to be”, *The Nineteenth Century*, 18, pp. 940-56. A Portuguese version of this text was published in *Seleção de Textos*, edited by AGB, n.13, March, pp.1-9, 1988.

encourage a significant participation of geographers interested in history of sciences, particularly in the history of their own discipline.

To conclude, if in 1891, while writing a project together with the German geographer Albrecht Penck, Élisée Reclus wrote that “by our alliance we could escape from this dishonourable and awful impasse of ‘French science and German science’, which you can feel it in your heart”<sup>2</sup>, we may now say that we joined our efforts for a history of a cosmopolitan geography.

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<sup>2</sup> E. Reclus, *Correspondance*, vol. III, Paris, Schleicher, 1925, p. 101.