

# WOMAN GEOGRAPHER FORGED FROM FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES IN THE BRAZILIAN NORTHEASTERN DRYLANDS

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## Abstract

The article follows the paths of Mrs. Maria Geralda, a geographer forged from first-hand experiences in the so-called "sertão" (drylands in the Northeast of Brazil). It highlights, mainly, her stay in the state of Ceará, very expressive for the construction of her professional profile. In Ceará, she experienced dividing herself between the institutional academic life and the political militancy based on geographic knowledge. It also focuses on the places of her comings and goings around the world. Maria Geralda sensed, from the sea, the need to better understand the "sertão", her other passion. She used to claim that the construction of the geographic knowledge and the causes of its subjectivity result from a transposition of an image of objects, practices and spatial processes, and consists in the coherent selection of certain elements considered relevant, to the detriment of others. This pathway she didn't tread alone. Each year, those who approached her formulations and guidelines grew in number. More than a homage, the text is the expression of affection, tenderness, and admiration.

**Keywords:** Homage, Trajectory, Geographic Knowledge.

## Resumo / Résumé

### GEÓGRAFA FORJADA A PARTIR DAS VIVÊNCIAS E EXPERIÊNCIAS NO SERTÃO

O artigo percorre os caminhos de Maria Geralda uma geógrafa forjada a partir das vivências e experiências no sertão. Destaca, principalmente, o seu período cearense, muito expressivo na construção de seu perfil profissional. No Ceará vivenciou a experiência de se dividir entre a vida acadêmica intramuros e a militância política fundada no conhecimento geográfico. Enfoca também lugares de suas idas e vindas mundo afora. Maria Geralda, intuitiva, a partir do mar, a necessidade de melhor compreender o sertão, sua outra paixão. Afirmava que a construção do conhecimento geográfico e as causas de sua subjetividade decorrem de uma transposição de uma imagem de objetos, de práticas e de processos espaciais e consiste na seleção coerente de determinados elementos considerados como pertinentes em detrimento de outros. Esse percurso ela não seguiu sozinha. Crescia a cada ano os que se aproximavam de suas formulações e orientações. Mais que uma homenagem, o texto é a expressão de carinho, afeto e admiração.

**Palavras-chave:** Homenagem, Trajetória, Conhecimento Geográfico.

### MUJER GEÓGRAFA FORJADA A PARTIR DE EXPERIENCIAS DE PRIMERA MANO EN LAS TIERRAS SECAS DEL NORESTE BRASILEÑO

L'article suit les parcours de Maria Geralda, une géographe forgée de ses expériences dans le sertão. Il met en évidence, principalement, sa période au Ceará, très expressive dans la construction de son profil professionnel. Au Ceará, elle a vécu l'expérience de se diviser entre la vie académique intra-muros et le militantisme politique basé sur la connaissance géographique. Il s'intéresse également aux lieux de ses allées et venues à travers le monde. Maria Geralda a senti, depuis la mer, le besoin de mieux comprendre le sertão, son autre passion. Il a affirmé que la construction du savoir géographique et les causes de sa subjectivité résultent d'une transposition d'une image d'objets, de pratiques et de processus spatiaux et consistent dans la sélection cohérente de certains éléments jugés pertinents au détriment d'autres. Elle n'a pas suivi cette voie seule. Chaque année, ceux qui se rapprochaient de ses formulations et de ses lignes directrices grandissaient. Plus qu'un hommage, le texte est l'expression d'affection et d'admiration.

**Mots-clés:** Hommage, Trajectoire, Connaissances Géographiques.

## INTRODUCTION

I'm talking about a unique geographer, producer of her own geography. She broke the boundaries of the distorted world with lines establishing limits, borders and barriers. Maria Geralda is that kind of geographer, assiduous in the halls of major events and a wanderer in the territories inhabited by national minorities, eager to free themselves from the chains imposed by institutionalized states. She travelled peacefully through the countryside of Brazil, opening trails in the Caatinga, Cerrado (Brazilian Savannah) and Amazonia. She got to know different countries, with their languages and dialects. She made herself to be understood and tried to interpret the concrete cultural manifestations that embedded the political and the economic aspects of each people.

Geralda, like all of us, built her science in the dynamic everyday life of a restless geographer. The history of geography since its beginnings, continues to motivate its followers. This science expresses the daring of its intrepid and bold makers in constant struggle with the unveiling relations among and between society and nature. Acting at different scales, geographic science has trodden a long way. Maria Geralda's paths and trails seem endless. Leaving the region of Montes Claros, in Minas Gerais, she broke immediately the isolation by treading multiple territories. Made a place to herself in the world by creating an outer-to-the-Earth stand point, as an objective and external universe. According to (HAESBAERT, 2017, p. 14) "the place is a creator of connections, affection, identities, in short, differences." Geralda broke distances, making the Earth to seem small in the face of her eagerness to explore territories and discover places. She made this extraordinary dynamic available to those imbued with the need for articulation between different people, subjects or actors, making them ever closer. For that, she used all possible means, like notes, letters, phone calls, e-mails and, only lately, surrendered to her cell phone. On this journey through the dry hinterlands ("sertão") of Minas Gerais to its regional capital, Montes Claros—socioenvironmentally a portion of the Northeastern semi-arid region. Maria Geralda arrives in Rio Branco, the capital of Acre, where she acquires research experience in the quest to understand the Amazon, with its exuberance equatorial forest. The encounter of the city with the forest results in a continuous advance of the urban fabric, while the forest keeps being destroyed with the cutting of gigantic and secular species. Then, the removal of the tree remains and the preparation of the land for the expansion of the city. This accentuated process of intervention in the context of the nature and the increase in different forms of land use and occupation will be constant, whether in the surrounding forest of Rio Branco, in the vast Cerrado of Goiás or in the encounter of the "sertão" with the beach, in the municipality of Icapuí, in the state of Ceará.

## WORDS SEARCHING MEANINGS FOR THEMSELVES

Writing about such a polyvalent, creative and motivated person requires the understanding of what it means to become a professional and understanding the complexity of the interweaving that shapes geography and geographers. I try to express from my experience my perception of this colleague and friend. Maria Geralda de Almeida: a contemporary woman. She had no difficulty with time and space, those fundamental elements that mark our existence. She was not ruled by standards, had a very peculiar way of talking to people, didn't discriminate against anyone, didn't belittle herself in any situation. Shrewd and very intelligent, every now and then, she disconcerted her opponent with an apparently slow reasoning, built on a metric that corresponded to the right measure to make the most of the power and effect of each word. She calmly constructed her questions and did not express annoyance, even though she was upset. This apparent coldness used to bother, and bothered a lot. Different? Yes. Indifferent? Never.

Maria Geralda was her own fashionista. He used to present herself always jovial, even when she took on her natural silver hair and acquired a touch of sophistication. She used to surround herself with friends and research fellows, especially the younger ones, who attended her training courses, received guidance and organized their study groups and participated in events. The most affectionate were received at the always cheerful meetings in her apartment. Geralda lived intensely in the midst of an organized rush. Involved with so many obligations, she was sure she could be in many places simultaneously, thus circumventing time. She did this with exceptional mastery. She didn't just get to places. She used to arrived and soon occupy the spaces, expressing the size of the respect and

importance she could impose. Her frail stature grew, assuming enormous proportions. She was always awaited by a kind of honour guard, who accompanied her and used to group around her. At events, meetings or chat groups, she never seemed to be in a hurry. Time, well, she seemed to be able to bend it, stretch it out. I have no record of Maria Geralda saying that she was late, that she would have to leave an event or a debate. She used to issue her opinions whatever the circumstances. She used to like an argument, to contradict certainties. She could become enormous during the debates when sowing curiosity around, fostering researches, theoretical innovation, and new methodological paths capable of guaranteeing scientific maturation.

Always calm, she always found time to visit her friends in the places she travelled all the time. In every corner, in Brazil or abroad, a list of friends has been carefully recorded in her notebook. Even more. When a friend travelled from Brazil to abroad and vice-versa, she used to send notes, asking for support for the travellers, introducing them to people, organizing a network of affection and solidarity. This fabulous ability to sustain her national and international network of friends made Geralda a very special person.

## HER LIFE: FRAGMENTS

Living, to be and to express her presence in the world consciously, taking and being part of everything, sharing with everyone, it is not easy. The complexity of the contemporary, post modern or post industrial world, cannot ignore the countless societies around the world where the notions of modern or industrial do not integrate the complexity of the collective imagination. Time is a fundamental variable as it becomes scarcer, as daily tasks increase. As reminded by (SANTOS, 1997, p. 40) the concrete time of humans is the practical "temporalization", movement of the world within each one and, therefore, particular interpretation of Time by each group, each social class, each individual. Geralda managed to find time, to take care of everything.

Her life has been a back and forth journey, a long and rushed flight among airports in Brazil and around the world, or by car on her way to Redonda (a locality the municipality of Icapuí, Ceará), a place that seemed to be profoundly connected to her for some kind of charm. How much I miss this tireless, questioning, sweet, gentle and supportive woman, professor, and friend! Maria Geralda is certainly doing another one of her laps around the Earth. There remains the consolation of awaiting her return. It is this delusion that nurtures the feeling that we have not lost her, that she is still somewhere, somehow, in Redonda or Fortaleza. It could also be in Goiânia or Aracaju. Maybe in Myanmar or Ethiopia. This trailblazer woman yearned to travel the world, discover what was new, make records and build narratives. This mixture of research and adventure led to her first journeys: Montes Claros, Belo Horizonte, Rio Branco, Bordeaux, Aracaju, Fortaleza, Paris, Quebec, Barcelona, Milan, Goiânia. I'm just remembering the customary ones. Imagine the flows—certainly endless and difficult to handle. Her geography has been built on the way, on the road, on the strangest flights, with stopovers and connections all over the world. This geography was discussed, shared, divided. How not to remember (DUPUY, Lionel, 2005, p. 23) when tells us that Jules Verne's work therefore has a didactic vocation: his ambition is namely to teach Geography (the capital letter is voluntary) and to share his taste for science and technology.

The same can be said of Maria Geralda, without forgetting her rejection on the certainties of others—she was specialized in raising doubts, throwing out whys. That temper of her bothered and at the same time enriched, preventing us from a boring routine. She was often angry. At the end of the cocktail parties, we could see her there, satisfied, laughing, talking, joyful. Her restlessness enriched her Geography, increasingly rooted in the cultural approach, having become a respected scholar, surrounded by students and admirers wherever she went or settled.

## AND GERALDA ARRIVES TO FORTALEZA

We met in Fortaleza. Soon I could capture her for the Local Chapter of the Association of Brazilian Geographers (acronym AGB). She joined the others and became one more activist for the Geography we were building, beyond the walls of the University. We were a good number of fellows,

we had a tough agenda accomplish and a list of claims that cut-crossed Geography trough different horizons: academic, educational, citizenship. We questioned the curricula of the Geography undergraduate, elementary and high school courses, the quality of the performance of our professionals in the classroom, in the professional practice in State-run departments, in companies or official agencies, among others.

Maria Geralda embraced our flagship, became the director of our Chapter. In the UFC's Geography Department, she created the Tutorial Education Program (acronym PET), and her extreme dedication and high-standard approach resulted in an awarded best-in-Brazil Program and, from its ranks, excellent professionals emerged.

Her presence enlivened the life of our Department. We exchanged texts, books, with some minor, casual and non-persistent misunderstandings and, thus, we guaranteed a healthy work environment. Of course, she was a "battle horse" and enjoyed a lot a good controversy, facing everything fearlessly.

Later, Maria Geralda was elected to the national board of AGB. Proactive and with a strong hand, her management was crowned with success. The same happened with the presidency of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Geography (ANPEGE).

Maria Geralda is the synthesis of this process, of the way in which her paths were internalized in the continuous multiplication of places of living and experiences and the consequent personal and professional improvement. Geralda knew how to deal with differences and understood the dynamics of each place where she settled or stayed for short periods. Dealing with people and institutions requires the ability to adjust and incorporate essential values in training for the labour world, where accumulated knowledge is not enough for competent training. That "something else" comes from the institutional culture and its tendency to strongly influence its members. Maria Geralda built an enviable trajectory. The accumulation of experiences acquired in her varied path is significantly transformed when she joined, as a professor, the Department of Geography at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). It was 1987 when I was elected national president for AGB, a position I assumed based on the excellent ground work of the Fortaleza Chapter. That same year I defended my PhD thesis with the Department of Geography at USP (University of São Paulo). At that time, there were many issues that claimed the participation of the geographers. I highlight those linked to training and professional recognition from the milestone established by the rules and regulations for the geographers professional activities, those linked to the constant requests for assistance in organizing social movements. Speeches alluding to the need to protect nature were frequent, hence the issues related to protecting the environment. By that time, a certain contempt for nature was common, often conceived as an enemy for the city, an obstacle to its growth. Most of the residents seemed indifferent and demanded little from the public power in this regard. Nature and city did not converse. The University gradually became aware of its social role and became involved with movements for the defence of nature. UFC's Department of Geography was one of the most active. The successive destruction of huge areas of mangroves resulted in mobilizations that attracted the attention of local and state press. During that same period, all the country and all of us from the UFC's Geography Department and AGB were discussing about the preparatory themes for the 1988's National Constituent Assembly. In the heat of this discussion, a civic awakening after the dictatorship period, made the ordinary citizen to feel very excited. The political awareness of our performance as social subjects lacking rights demanded the continuous deepening of geographic knowledge and social role. At the same time, we felt the need to know and recognize the actual state of the production process in the countryside and in the city, and seek theories capable of improving our presence in the classroom and contributing to the strengthening of social movements that were organized and mobilized with different fight flags. The fight was hard and that is why it is very important to resort to the lesson of (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 48) when stating that it is actually the effort of the remembering that offers the best opportunity to make "memory of the forgetting".

Not to forget, we remember Maria Geralda's entry into our Department and the way in which she was promptly welcomed and embraced by everyone. She immediately noticed the guiding dynamics based on group work. Ideas were bubbling and, Immediately, the newcomer for the UFC's Geography has become one more engaged in the projects to make feasible to the Geography of Ceará to become nationally relevant. With the PhD thesis approved, I got involved in organizing a specialization course to be offered by our Department with the title "NORTHEAST: a regional and environmental matter". The project has been approved in all the academic levels. The faculty was top notch, bringing together

professors from Ceará, the Northeastern region and from all over Brazil, among them, Roberto Lobato Correa, with UFRJ, Dieter Heidemann, with USP, Manuel Correia de Andrade and Paulo Henrique Martins, with UFPE, among others. According to the members of the first class, the level of the course was equivalent to a MSc one. We had as candidates, professionals from several states and from the countryside of Ceará. The contribution of the specialization course in training local and regional staff was exceptional. Several professionals, today recognized in different postgraduate programs in Geography, come from the specialization courses held by us.

Concerned with increasingly involving Professor Maria Geralda in the Department's activities, we invited her to coordinate the specialization course. This activity has been carried out with extreme dedication. In a short period of time, following what other professors had already done, Maria Geralda was elected director for the Fortaleza Chapter of the AGB. The change in the professor's professional profile was noticeable after her arrival at UFC. It undoubtedly made her to gain experience and acknowledgement. His stay in Fortaleza meant the necessary stop to her to structure her full potential and reorient her professional practice. This collective experience contributed to her continuous improvement. In Fortaleza, Maria Geralda had a group advancing continuously. This integration qualified her to compose the Board of Publications with the National AGB and to assume the presidency of ANPEGE.

In short, Maria Geralda, after a reasonable journey, made of Fortaleza her safe harbour. In Ceará, she connected the sea and the hinterland. Here, she discovered Redonda Beach, in Icapuí. The professional was no longer the same. With the institutional culture of our Department, she enjoyed, along with the others, the notoriety and recognition of the so-called "the guys of the Geography in Ceará". There were many of us-me, Maria Clélia Lustosa Costa, Vanda Claudino Sales, Eustógio Wanderley Correia Dantas, Luiz Cruz Lima, Pedro Capibaribe, Isorlanda Caracristi, Cláudia Granjeiro, Paulo Ramos, Francisco Fontenelle Meira, Carlos Augusto Amorim Cardoso, Maria de Fátima Rodrigues, Maria by Fátima Almeida and many others. Our presence was frequent in the main events of the Brazilian Geography.

Another project with the participation of Maria Geralda was the CAPES/COFECUB. I sent the project and we got approval. We partnered with Cearah Periferia, a civil society organization with a recognized role in the housing policy sector. This project allowed the participation of many of our professors to study their PhD, post-doctoral internship or scientific missions, in France. We received many French professionals in our Department who, in addition to the research provided for in the missions, participated in events, meetings with our professors and students, establishing rich exchanges of experiences. This agreement, renewed several times, was the beginning of our internationalization process, even though we still do not have a strictu sensu postgraduate program.

Maria Geralda was enthusiastic about activities that gave a special dynamism to the initiatives developed. It was certainly from her experience in Ceará that she imprints a new tier in her career. It was, without a doubt, the contact with our institutional culture in formation, which would result in a fertile Department in the creation and development of projects, with an enviable Postgraduate Program.

Fortaleza does not appear in Brazilian Geography just because it held the III National Meeting of Geographers, in 1978. Although, this milestone has been essential. Collective work, even with some obstacles, manages to overcome limits and overcome difficulties. Maria Geralda immediately understood the essence of what was intended to be built and actively participated in improving the Department's proposals and in her mission regarding the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge. She devoted herself to this project and immediately captivated several students who came to know her strict and exigent methodology, without losing her tenderness.

## **BOARDING GATE, PORTE D'EMBARQUEMENT, PUERTA DE EMBARQUE**

One of the characteristics of Maria Geralda's character was her eagerness to discover and to explore new places. She looked like a person with no domicile. She loved to travel, acquire new experiences, discover other cultures, new landscapes. In the UFC Geography Department, in addition to her involvement in different projects, she improved the art of travelling. She made her colleagues to



follow her, venturing together around the world. Maria Clélia Lustosa da Costa, Valmir Lima, Zenilde Baima Amora, Francisco Tabosa were regular companions. The practice of travelling, so important to our profession, was exhaustively explored in all its possibilities. To travel for the geographer is to practice their science. These are always field assignments that require notebooks, pencils and pens, maps, letters, readings and photographing equipment. The geographer's trip, even on vacation, for tourism, always results in work and rich learning. On these trips, Maria Geralda improved her choice for Cultural Geography. Whenever the groups organized by Maria Geralda arrived from a tourist destination around the world, culture and landscape used to gain colour and meaning in her narratives. Updating was constant.

Her most recent studies approached Agrarian Geography and Geography of Food. These are researches linked to her long trajectory in approaching Cultural Geography and her acuity and refinement, guiding her look to make the most of the experiences obtained in her travels, alone or in groups. So say the culturalists—you only know a place when you taste what is eaten there. Hence her passion for international and Brazilian cuisines.

In addition to living with Maria Geralda as a co-worker and friend, we used to meet very often in the daily work of the Department of Geography, in the weekly meetings of the Fortaleza Chapter of AGB, in occasional evenings to update on late activities, especially those institutional ones, and the social ones as well. We had the healthy habit of getting together for different activities: cinema, theatre, concerts and visits to each other's homes. It's been wonderful. Times have changed, but we kept feeding this habit. The city has grown a lot, making it difficult for us to carry out our solidarity exchanges outside working hours. We compensated for this with our meetings in the Department's kitchen, a kind of informal professors' room—hot coffee, tea, ice water, cake, rapadura (a candy made of sugar cane, also know as panela in other Latin-American countries) in different flavours, sweet and salty cookies. In this space, Geography multiplies and takes on different shades—it is our free territory—where conversations flow during breaks, on the way back from the restaurant where we used to have lunch or even when we could make time for a quick break.

## TRAVELLING WITH MARIA GERALDA

Travelling with Maria Geralda was a privilege. Emília, my wife, and I enjoyed her company on three memorable trips. They were excellent opportunities of great richness and also to establish greater intimacy. Always in a good mood and willing, she used to show herself a facilitator in the art of sharing experiences and seeking for the good life. We had some points in common—organization and respect for schedules, for instance—which made it much easier to get along and it allowed us to enjoy our trips to the fullest. We shared three different destinations: Turkey, Agen (in France), and Mexico. There is no similarity among them regarding the trips preparation and their accomplishments. They were formidable trips that brought us closer and closer. Our maps facilitated displacements and enriched our routes. By the way, I would like to illustrate my writing with this beautiful below:

### THE MAP

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.  
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges  
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges  
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.  
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,  
drawing it unperturbed around itself?  
Along the fine tan sandy shelf  
is the land tugging at the sea from under?  
Elizabeth Bishop,

## TURKEY

Me, Emília (my wife), and Maria Geralda spent long days in Turkey, in 1997, exploring Istanbul and its surroundings, and the countryside, arriving in Cappadocia. We did tourism at a time when Turkey was not “in fashion”, like today. We took part in a French excursion group, just the three of us as Brazilians. We travelled with a Turkish company, called Marmara, and the emotions started in Paris. The ticket informed that we would board at Charles De Gaulle Airport. Arriving there, at the time of check-in, we were guided to a sector where we took a bus that drove us to a huge warehouse, where passengers, and there were many, were piled up. In the end, everything worked out, although we have got worried. The visa to enter the country would only be granted on the spot, that is, in Istanbul, upon arrival, which caused us great concern.

On the first day in Turkey, still in Istanbul, talking to people, they discovered that we were two geographers and a pedagogue (Emília, my wife). Until the end of the trip, a battery of questions and doubts placed us in a prominent place. Even without knowing all the lyrics to the song, i.e., we were not specialists in Turkish Geography, we had to sing it like Frank Sinatra. Emilia helped us a lot with that.

Geralda, with her attentive care and meticulous responses, garnered everyone's sympathy and friendship. In Ankara, in the Goreme Valley, in underground cities or in troglodyte dwellings, we tried to explain what we saw, despite the strength with which the landscape, habits and customs, sharpened our curiosity.

Turkey turned out to be an extraordinary experience. Istanbul, an uncontested metropolis, a veritable junction of different worlds, in addition to being the place where Europe and Asia meet, confirms its reputation as an exceptional tourist centre. Historically cosmopolitan, this city brings together different worlds, it is a museum where present, past and future mix different temporalities. Tradition and modernity coexist in all its manifestations. Magnificent palaces, temples and museums lead to reflection on the socio-spatial differentiation, so marked in the multiple characteristic territories of the city. A riot of colours and aromas make Istanbul attractive and pleasant. In the Anatolian Plateau, we visit Ankara, the country's capital. It is an administrative city with a commercial centre of excellent regional expression. In the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, the well-organized exhibition of objects facilitated the understanding of the process of occupation of this region. The highlight of the trip was undoubtedly Cappadocia, especially the Goreme Valley with its landscapes eroded by wind and water. There are many temples, monasteries and troglodyte dwellings. The softer rocks make it easier to dig and build restaurants, hotels and inns inside. We visited underground cities, one of them with an almost imperceptible entrance, in the middle of a village street. The richness of the handicraft caught our attention. Carpets richly worked in silk or wool threads or even woven ceramics, and small sculptures carved in the rock, lent a pleasant appearance to the small towns and villages. At meals we tasted almost everything. Imagine olives, cucumbers and tomatoes for breakfast.

The experience was excellent. Geralda seemed cut out to accompany and be accompanied. Everything went smoothly. We delight ourselves with the memories and... "saudade" (Portuguese word to express the feeling of missing someone or something) increases, just as it reminds us (BOSI, 1983, p. 27) when saying that one of the most exciting aspects of this theme is the social construction of memory.

## AGEN (FRANCE)

Our trip to Agen has been an event of great proportions. We went to attend the wedding of Marie Serres, niece of the famous philosopher Michel Serres. Agen is a town in New Aquitaine, in the Department of Lot-et-Garonne, in southwestern France.

We travelled in a car borrowed by Vanda Claudino Sales, who was studying for her doctorate in Paris at the time. Geralda enjoyed the quality of highways driving quickly and safely. I was still suffering from the consequences of an accident, unable to drive. The trip was beautiful. We stop in Limoges, known worldwide for its porcelain, where we had lunch and bought souvenirs.

The wedding was beautiful and extremely tasteful. The service, impeccable, followed the norms of an efficient ceremonial and, by the same time, making the guests to feel at ease. Emília and I had met

Marie Serres, introduced by Maria Geralda. After the religious ceremony held in a chapel from the 11th century, arriving at the family castle, the Brazilian Samba invaded the atmosphere. The pressure on the three of us was enormous. They wanted, almost demanded, for us to dance like the Samba professional dancers in Rio de Janeiro. We were like three wood sticks shaking in the hall—a poor representation of our country's culture.

I need to highlight the expression of the bride's family name, the elegance of the guests and the grandeur of the party. As the family's small castle could not accommodate everyone, large and comfortable tents that the French call 'serres' were set up. Huge tables and a stage fit, where friends of the bride and groom staged parodies, provoking laughter in the audience. An impeccable service offered appetizers, food and drinks, all with excellent taste and quality. It should be noted that Marie Serres, mediated by Maria Geralda, carried out social work in São Luis, Maranhão, Brazil. It was only for a short time, six months I believe. It was enough to fall in love with the country and Brazilian music. The party had the musical coverage by a band from Toulouse, made up of Brazilian musicians. Samba reigned before dinner was served. The impeccable table with a beautiful floral arrangement, and a set of seven places and seven glasses for each guest, a total luxury, and enormous novelty for Brazilians, Geography practitioners. Emília and I were accommodated at a table for special guests. We stayed alongside interesting, refined and educated people. Michel Serres's brother, a professor in India, sustained the conversation throughout dinner. This cultured and refined atmosphere, as well as being stimulating, lasted into the night. Michel Serres, always friendly, came to greet us. We had the opportunity to remind him that we had talked to him in Paris, at the Petit Palais, when we acquired his book "The Natural Contract" and stood in line for autographs. When we said we were from Brazil, he forgot the queue and started a conversation. A true intellectual, famous and humble. The same friendly and elegant man was there, in front of us, talking about the joy of meeting Brazilians at his niece's wedding party.

The big star of the night, after Marie Serres and Michel Serres, was Maria Geralda. She was invited to sit at the table where the parents of the bride and groom were, as well as the illustrious philosopher, as well as a cousin of the bride. They did everything to get Geralda to marry their relative. For those who knew this special guest well, it was not surprising that she had a seemingly endless conversation with the insistent possible date... No romantic engagement at all, however.

## MEXICO (2009)

I've met few people with the ability to lead and put everyone around them to develop an activity like Maria Geralda. She had extraordinary expertise in this subject. She accepted all invitations and loved to participate in events and, at the same time, encouraged friends and students to accompany her. Always very organized, Maria Geralda would set up a meeting and right at the beginning directly say: Hi 'you little thing', what's your name again? The person who had been pointed out would used to respond doubtfully, and immediately, Geralda would amend: It's you indeed. You will look for the event brochure so that we can discuss the program and evaluate our participation. The other person she would say: "You will do the complete survey on the tickets, check the transport companies, look for the most convenient prices." She would address other participants and continue: "You will take care of the hotels, survey prices and reservations, and so on, and so forth. She would continue, indicating and distributing tasks among the members of the meeting, all interested in participating in the events, which were carefully presented in details by Geralda. The errands would continue and so, by the end of the meeting, everyone would have had received some activity so that someone would take care of putting together the texts, another would rent transport, another would telephone to collect information from official bodies, companies or NGOs. Geralda could do all this so confidently and firmly that no one reacted negatively. Everyone, happy and satisfied, would complain on how they would cope with the tasks imposed and assumed and... in the end, everything worked out.

With the organization of our trip to Mexico to participate in the Congress of Americanists, the process took place like that. I only found out that I was dealing with one of Maria Geralda's doctoral students when we arrived in Mexico City. The delicacy and professionalism with which ticket prices were handled, flight and times scheduled, plane seats... through e-mails or phone calls, gave Emília and



me the certainty that the company hired by Maria Geralda was excellent. I got everything right and the trip was great. Going to Mexico was a super right decision. We participated in an event of international recognition that went through time maintaining its former researchers and attracting newer ones. It was also super interesting to visit the event's headquarters, held at the Ibero-American University, a prestigious teaching institution located in Santa Fe, the famous financial district of the Mexican metropolis, with its modern and sumptuous buildings that caught the attention of visitors. The Santa Fe campus is a successful model of modern, functional architecture. Generous spaces, comfortable and well-equipped classrooms and auditoriums. The topography of the land was taken into account which resulted in a beautiful and harmonious set. It is worth remembering the fact that the main library has more than 400,000 books and magazines.

In Mexico City, Geralda was surrounded by attention and affection from her advisees and friends. We had agreed that we would take a car trip through the hinterlands of the country. There were four of us, with Normand, a Canadian geographer who joined us. We made a geographic journey par excellence, a true fieldwork in the sense of (CLAVAL, 2013). “provides the geographer with a guarantee of the authenticity of the data with which they work; allows you to apprehend the structures of the studied space and the divisions that characterize it.”

The itinerary was carefully designed and was meant to take in Guadalajara and even reach the western coast of the country bathed by the Pacific Ocean. On the way to Guadalajara, we privileged a route that went through part of the famous cities of the mining cycle around the silver business. Then we head to La Manzanilla, a Pacific beach. On the way back to Mexico City, the highlights were the cities Mazamitla and Morelia, the first one, dedicated to winter tourism. A geographer doesn't walk around, he does fieldwork. Maps, camera, paper and pencil in hand and loads of curiosity. Geralda was, without a doubt, the most curious. She would ask everything. Our route has been excellent. Thankfully, Emilia also liked it, having become involved with our interests. Leaving Mexico City, we head to Queretaro, located about 200 km north-west of the capital. We discovered a magnificent country, with a diversity of landscapes and cultural traits that were manifested in the cuisine, in the architecture with strong Spanish influence. It is a country where a varied collection mixes the built heritage, its typical costumes, the delicacy and cordiality of its people. Geralda wanted to go to the markets soon. She was right. She immediately went into the corridors where a riot of colours and odours revealed fruits and spices. We always bought something. On the way back, coming from the Pacific, new surprises either in the sequence of beaches, colder and greener mountain landscapes. The grandeur and beauty of the buildings in the historic centres continued to draw our attention. The churches are richly ornamented in an opulence dominated by the use of silver. This mix of tourism and work is a constant source of motivation for new ventures. The trip was wonderful: we made contact with the people, we ate regional dishes, we tasted fruits, street food and we talked with people who always received us with kindness, regardless of their social status!

Travelling with Maria Geralda has been a privilege. We have kept strong bonds of affection and a lot of complicity.

I am sure that Maria Geralda was and continues to be an example of a citizen of the world. She always felt free and at ease anywhere, taking advantage of her friendliness.

## CONCLUSION

She used to be interrogative, starting a conversation with strangers. She's built many friendships. She used to massage her friends' egos with flattering words. She could always find a way to call or send messages of congratulations, condolences or sorrow to her relatives and friends. She never forgot my birthday or Emilia's.

She had a special talent to chose the right gift. And it wasn't about the price or the prestige that gift would represent. It was about the appropriateness. Everything she offered had been acquired with a very special care. Thus, the gift was impregnated with meaning, and that was spectacular. She could carry in her mind a matrix of her friends tastes and preferences. There were many books and texts that she brought me, from her visits to book stores around the world. She loved having at home a variety of exotic flavours discovered during her travels. I remember the salty dehydrated crickets—delicious. One

time she served me a sunny-side up egg, seasoned with orange juice, salt, and other condiments. She was always smiling and jovial. She also got upset, of course she did, very often. She tried to avoid a hassle as much as possible. However, when she got angry, she used to trail all the pathway through it. She was fully aware about her rights, which nourished her determination.

What is the whereabouts of Maria Geralda? This time she's taking too long to come back...

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