

# Photographicity: the Human Landscape in the Poetic Imaginaire of Círio de Nazaré in Belém do Pará – Brazil

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## **Abstract**

Photographicity is, resembling humanist photography, geographicity in poetic images, photopoems. The stages for this essay are the enactments and performances of Círio de Nazaré festivities in Belém do Pará. In order to identify and make this photographicity real, we first focus on the development of humanist photography as inspiration. Second, we deal with the geographicity or the singularity of human life in relation to the mode of spatial existence based on social practices. Finally, we turn to poetry from the Amazonian aesthetic poetic imaginaire through the concept of semiotic conversion understood as the symbolic change in the cultural context. Methodologically, the photographicity of Círio de Nazaré will be built on the intersection of humanistic photography, geographicity and poetry. From this intersection, the objective is to expand and encourage humanist geographical analyses in human landscapes.

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## INTRODUCTION

In photographing a given event, we realize how expressive and dynamic its movements are. This is because a photograph, despite revealing to us a scenario and a moment, urges us to imagine landscapes and instants of an imminent becoming. A photograph, then, is not simply a frozen image of space-time; it is also movement.

A religious festival, for example, enhances these movements. The religious seems to frame ever more performances, rites, pious and carnivalesque scenarios in a single space-time, considering that sacred and profane, since the earliest times have acted in common accord. These are the new orders of the symbolic, crafted at the time when new landscapes are being created or readapted. The *Círio de Nazaré*, in the metropolis of Belém, is a fantastic experience for the geographer-photographer, a subject we call a photogeographer, for we agree with Reis Junior (2014) when he writes that the photogeographer, even if not a professional geographer, contributes to the science of the landscape and what it demonstrates of the relationships established between nature and culture.

Belém, the capital of the state of Pará, founded on January 12, 1626, has become one of the most important and significant Brazilian *hierometropolises*—reinterpreting, on a metropolitan scale, the term developed by Rosendahl (1999)—built on the symbolisms and imaginaires surrounding the mythical Christian figure of Catholicism, Our Lady of Nazareth (Nossa Senhora de Nazaré). Since the appearance of Mary in 1793, relationships of singular religious belonging have been built upon the city, referenced by numerous works such as Alves (1980; 2005) who characterizes the *Círio* as a dense fusion of faith, devout carnival, drama, joy, and keen feelings during the festivities. The urban structure and organization where the festival's performances unfold clearly depend on the symbolisms and the imaginaires that lend it support. There is no organization or dynamic of the religious in urban culture without this utopian drive, be it visionary or spiritual.

Though the festivities may be brief, experiencing this ambience of the religious life of the city allows us not only to observe the faithful in search of their private, concrete world but also to witness their desire to reach a world beyond, the world of celestial figures. Thus, in the metropolis of Belém and its streets, where

the pathways disseminate various enactments around the sacred, the religious mystique is renewed, projecting, in the images of the *Círio*, the devotional essence of its people.

In the context of the reach of this simultaneously concrete and imaginal world, photographicity will be built methodologically on the triangulation between humanist photography, Dardelian geographicity (2011) and the aestheticizing poetic imaginaire, considering João de Jesus Paes Loureiro's (2015) concept of semiotic conversion as a starting point. However, despite the neologism photographicity, we do not intend to present epistemological results. We propose, rather, from this intersection, to reflect on the importance of geographic space in its various apparent forms, while all of this emerges to our eyes, before, during, and after the photogeographer triggers their camera.

The photographs and their images, which we will maintain in black and white, respecting the monochromatic period representative of humanist photography, will be our documental support. When captured in their authenticity, they constitute primary elements of research. That is, they instrumentalize perception, comprehension, and geographic reflection because they connect the production of ideas, as argued by Gomes and Ribeiro (2013). In this sense of a methodological cluster of ideas, photographicity takes shape, inclined to demonstrate a form of multidisciplinary intelligibility, representative of the organization of geographic space, or rather, of the subjects in that space, actively building it.

Photographicity, in this essay, comprises a methodology of access to the *Círio de Nazaré* festivities as an integral human landscape. Its procedures involve cultural elements in their permanence, transformations, and full adaptations of humanism, thus the strategy of intersecting humanist photography, geographicity, and poetry. The *Círio de Nazaré* is poetry in movement and geography in action, moving between two worlds: the earthly and the imaginal.

We have, then, the first part of this essay, in which we lay out the paths to be taken. In the second part, we will compare humanist photography to the notion of geographicity, examining their interfaces. Subsequently, we will present the central idea of photographicity, how it was conceived and constituted, by means of images and the imaginaire surrounding the *Círio de Nazaré*. Lastly, we will present our final considerations.

### *Humanist photography and some interfaces with geographicity*

(...) humanist photographers, whose creative epicenter was Paris, exalted life – and peace –, producing images of anonymous people in daily urban life. The photos were closer to capturing the human essence than the objective images of the press (AVANCINI, 2011, p. 58).

The epigraph above opens the way for interfaces. We believe there are convergences between humanist photography and geographicity, because one can see in them a phenomenological synthesis of the human essence in its spatial existence, with the exaltation of territorialized life in space. Humanist photography and geographicity address the same things, for both have as their central objective human beings and their relationships to the environment in which they live. For Holzer (2016), for example, geographicity has a direct connection to daily life, much as, in our view, the issues that concerned humanist photographers did.

Considered a school of photography, humanist photography was born in the 1930s in France, specifically in the city of Paris. It reached its height between 1945 and 1950, extending into the 60s. It received this denomination for its strong and incontestable inclination toward the human being in both the professional and the affective frame. All its representatives shared an essentialist and

lyrical vision of man supported on the idea of a universal human nature (MAILLET; DENOYELLE; VERSAVEL, 2006).

Régis Debray (1993) asserts that this school was ostensibly French and Parisian and contributed to the construction of a national iconography. What the humanist photographers had in common was their interest in human beings immersed in their habitual life, as previously mentioned. They captured scenes from ordinary people's lives, both in their simple existence, full of joy, as well as of hardships and injustices resulting from economic woes; thus, photography was used as a reaction to the atrocities of the years of war. Another proximity that should be considered is the publication of *L'Homme et la Terre*, by geographer Eric Dardel (2011), a work of great relevance for humanist geography, which occurred following World War II, at the peak of humanist photography.

Moreover, according to Debray (1993), a national ethnography or anthropology of proximity was practiced, the focal point of which was the social life of the subject. Human beings are considered invisible, their jobs and daily life, the rituals, the celebrations of cultural traditions, political manifestations, picturesque figures and couples, portraits of artists and intellectuals (Figure 1) were introduced (AVANCINI, 2011). In this context, while humanist photography centered on people in their environment, it focused acutely on the most disadvantaged, clarifies Paviot (2019).

Figure 1 - Photo A: The brothers, rue du Docteur Lecène Street, Paris, 1934. Photo B: The carpenter in rue Saint Louis in Isle, 1947.



Source: Doisneau (2014-2020).

One could wonder, then, if humanist photography is not a way of revealing geographicities by means of an image and even the imaginaire that an image holds, by deepening the existences of the being-in-the-world, “(...) starting from the postulate that the logical unit of existence is neither space, nor time, nor society; it is the human person, it is the individual taken in his phenomenological relation to the world” (LÉVY, 1997, p. 28, translated). After all, humanist photography and humanist geography resemble each other in their shared interest in their subjects’ actions and their choices in society, in their space-time, considering value systems, preferences, beliefs, etc. Geographicity and, in this context, photographicity, therefore, can be understood as human beings’ modes of existence and destiny.

The environment-subject pair, this inextricable relationship, was primordial for humanist photography just as it is for geographicity. Humanist photographers highlighted both the private and public life of human beings’ actions as they built their spaces; indeed, they made great use of depth of field perspective to capture the environment and the human motif being photographed, because both

were part of a whole. As Pidner (2017, p. 310, *author’s emphasis*) indicates, in discussing geographicity in landscape-photography, “What is visible in the detail reveals the subject photographed, and that is also the landscape, but equally refers to the *invisible* spatial context in which those subject-bodies are inserted and with which they experience their spatial practices”. Paviot (2019) further spotlights some affective values captured by the humanist eye of the photographer: tenderness, optimism, poetry, nostalgia, naiveté, humor, generosity, beauty hidden in reality, and permanence behind change.

Humanist photography took place in the same period as the height of document photography, the latter directly linked to the informative press. In discussing these two technical moments, or rather, two cultures in relation to their mediaspheres, the graphosphere and the videosphere, Debray (1993) lists a series of qualities of humanist photography, compared with what he denominates humanitarian photography, as follows in Chart 1.

**Chart 1** - Some fracture lines between two cultural moments of photography.

<b>HUMANIST PHOTOGRAPHY</b>	<b>HUMANITARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY</b>
Authentic, honorable.	Moving, highlighting disease, hunger, values.
Part of the Graphosphere.	Part of the Videosphere.
Has a rich cast: work, love, play, friendship, celebrations, infancy, spectacles.	Its subject is imposed, in the manner that beauty is through fashion photos.
Belongs to the universe of artwork.	Belongs to the universe of documents.
Poetic scoop or genre photo.	Journalistic scoop or photojournalism.
The work is signed.	The work is credited.
Typographical edition, geared to books, albums, newspapers.	Televisual, with no depth of field, collective or individual.
Through cinema and poetic realism, humanist photography supports the performing arts (on stage or in the street).	Direct, literal, and somewhat dry.
The visual is under verbal control and the caption is incorporated into the photo.	The verbal is under visual control with a caption under the photo.
The individual is not isolated but rather inserted in their place in the group, family, city.	Man is removed from himself. The individual is a body without a history.
Humanistic face like that of an urban landscape, with an ample background.	Urgency gives individuals meaning, in the face of desolation and lack of values of their own.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Debray (1993).

The distinctions presented by Debray (1993) are reinforced by the fact that humanist photography set its focus on the hope of a better world. Even in a time of social upheaval, human

figures maintained their dignity. These humans were not abandoned as bodies with no history, separate from the world. Photography captured humans carved into a family, a social class, a

place, an event and, therefore, they had identity (Figure 2). Humanist photographers were considered peace correspondents, they held great respect and empathy for their peers,

rejecting voyeurism and sensationalism, and had an optimistic view of human beings (MAILLET; DENOYELLE; VERSAVEL, 2006).

Figure 2 - Photo A: Baron William and his footman, Paris, 1955. Photo B: The tramps' cats, Paris, 1950.



Source: Doisneau (2014-2020).

If humanist photographers intended to reveal the poetics hidden in the heart of the most banal reality or help us experience the wonders of daily life (MAILLET; DENOYELLE; VERSAVEL, 2006), then it becomes essential to this essay to capture a double meaning, imagetic and poetic, of the festivals as a sensory form of experiencing the *Círio de Nazaré*. Precisely because the “poetic realism”, as humanist photography is known, is considered a blend of social realism and poetry of the quotidian. In this sense, geographicity and poetry blend with humanist photography to give photographicity a “body and soul”, a way of capturing through photography, what Dardel (2011, p. 30) expresses when addressing landscape: “[...] a union, a convergence, a moment experienced, an internal connection, an ‘impression’, that unites all the elements”.

We move on, then, to the “poetic scoop” of which Debray speaks, making use of the lens of the photogeographer.

### *Geographicity and the semiotic conversion of the poetic imaginaire into photopoems*

An active city is not an inert space, but a space that moves, a space that lives (DARDEL, 2011, p. 14).

An active city means that it is human in different shapes and degrees. A city is idealized by people according to their intentions and motivations. This is a crucial issue in understanding the photographicity of the *Círio de Nazaré*, in Belém do Pará. It is during the *Círio* that Belém pulses in living and active poetry and images. We refer to this merging of the photographic eye with poetic creation as *photopoems*. This creation brings to mind the “*santinhos*” (little saints), long-popular leaflets of prayers alongside images of patron saints. However, it also evokes modern images, multiple digital screens, like a sort of *infosphere* (following the perspective of Debray), in the expansion of social networks. Each photopoem requires a representation of photographicity

capable of registering this snapshot in the enlargement of the reverence imagined therein. The photographic eye dynamizes devotional geographies in poetic forms, even in snippets of text.

From the frantically human pulse, breaking radically with the repetition of ordinary days, in sinuous construction and performative bricolage, one perceives a dual exercise, of compression and expansion, of collective faith

and of festivity. The festival is now universal, inscribed by UNESCO as an element of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013 and deserving of safe guarding. This makes the human pulsation a multiscale projection (both local as well as global) of the festival's representations in the liturgy of images. We observe this performative return of the Saint and her procession to the Basilica (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Our Lady of Nazareth in performative return to the Basilica.



Source: authors' image bank (2014).

What do we have in the alignment of the crowd, the palanquin draped in streamers, and trees above on a higher plane? A play of indistinct space and time, where stages are built and performative images are reproduced in these scenes and scenarios as a festival. Space-time is impelled and played to more subtle spheres during the celebrations. The taper, in its simplicity and liturgical expression of the paschal candle, in common ecclesial time and in the mystical space of a historic Amazonian capital, finds in Nazaré a Great Ritual Taper.

In the *Círio*, the commonplace world, or the empirical world of sensory perceptions, and the imaginal world (CORBIN, 1976), or the intermediate world, the interworld, where the archetypal figures are, the "subtle bodies", meld together. The reach of the imaginal is not pure fiction. Despite being directly inaccessible, it is real in the sense that it is maintained by traditions in its "visionary or spiritual utopias" (WUNENBURGER, 1979; 1985; 2002a; 2002b; 2003). The *Círio* is a variation of these two interconnected themes of utopian worlds because they are symbolic motifs feeding on the mythical-prophetic imagination or religious images of the other world.

On the frontier of the tangible world, where human activity is inserted, and the imaginary world, opening its symbolism to the freedom of spirit, we find here the interior, primitive geography, where original spatiality and the profound mobility of man draw, trace paths to another world (DARDEL, 2011, p. 8).

This is an important phenomenological content of Dardel's (2011) geographicity: revealing the apparent and hidden symbols of the Earth, its essences; after all, to him, the world is writing that must be deciphered, seeking to account for the continuity or reinterpretation between things and the fusion of man and Earth (RAFFESTIN, 1987; LÉVY, 1992). Geographicity is a complementary attitude between science, personal observation, and poetics (HOLZER, 2016); elements that need to walk hand in hand. Thus, the concrete world related to the *Círio* and the imaginal world that fuels it, are not distant from one another; between the two lies a tenuous and surmountable frontier fed by the visionary or spiritual utopias (Figure 4).

Figure 4 -Performative scenes fed by the spiritual utopias.



Source: Authors' image bank. Photo: authors (2014).

Raffestin (1987) perceives this in Dardel's thought in observing that there is no rupture or discontinuity between myth and symbols, between religion and logic, because, Dardel, he says, pursues a totality. Furthermore, the mythical space does not mean a confusion of places, because it is conditioned by a hierarchy of values that start from a center. As geographicity is also a poetic attitude, its literary expression lends necessary support to photographicity. This idea is renewed here in with the proposal of the photopoems presented subsequently.

### *In photopoems, the photographicity of João Loureiro's Círio.*

In the book *Amazonian culture: poetics of the imaginaire* (2015), João de Jesus Paes Loureiro addresses what he calls the "aestheticizing poetic imaginaire" present in the Amazonian cultural system.

João de Jesus Paes Loureiro. Poet, prose writer, and essayist. Professor of Aesthetics and Art. The universality of his poetic work is built on symbols of the Amazonian world – culture, history, imaginaire – propitiating a cosmovision and a unique reading of the contemporary world. In a dialogue with the main literary sources and trends of present times, Paes Loureiro creates original work, almost a poetic summary of sensory understanding of the world through

Amazonian sources, in which the myth reveals itself as a metaphor for the real.

Creatively, he says, the Amazonian man navigates a sort of *sfumato*, a mist that blends the real and the unreal flowing into a unique reality. In this fusion, the poetic vibrates and involves the entire Amazonian cultural atmosphere. Loureiro (2015) proposes, then, the concept of semiotic conversion in the sense of a passage "[...] through which functions are realigned and expressed in another cultural situation. The semiotic conversion means the chiasmus of symbolic changes in a cultural relationship at the moment in which a transfiguration occurs" (LOUREIRO, 2015, p. 61).

There is no better way to present this semiotic conversion of the aestheticizing imaginaire than by using his poems. In them, human and environment, alive, are in movement, captured by the natural ocular machine of the poet and taken to the brain where they are processed and transformed into an intellectual abstraction. The imaginative power of the poems illustrates the aestheticizing imaginaire of/in the *Círio*. The poet pursues the symbolic dimension of a specific culture. He brings our attention to and uncovers the mist that pervades the layers of realities built on the staged paths of the festivities. His symbolic language is a path between the real and the unknowable, which also becomes real.

In the exchange between poetry and

photographicity – as a photopoem– one complements the other and the *sfumato* provides the texture of the *Círio*. The performative spaces brim with the festive potentiality of faith in rites and registers of the imagination. Human and humanism become metaphors. Loureiro's *Círio* is phenomenologically, at the same time, existential and natural. Human beings and nature merge, producing spaces and territories in each place it is enacted.

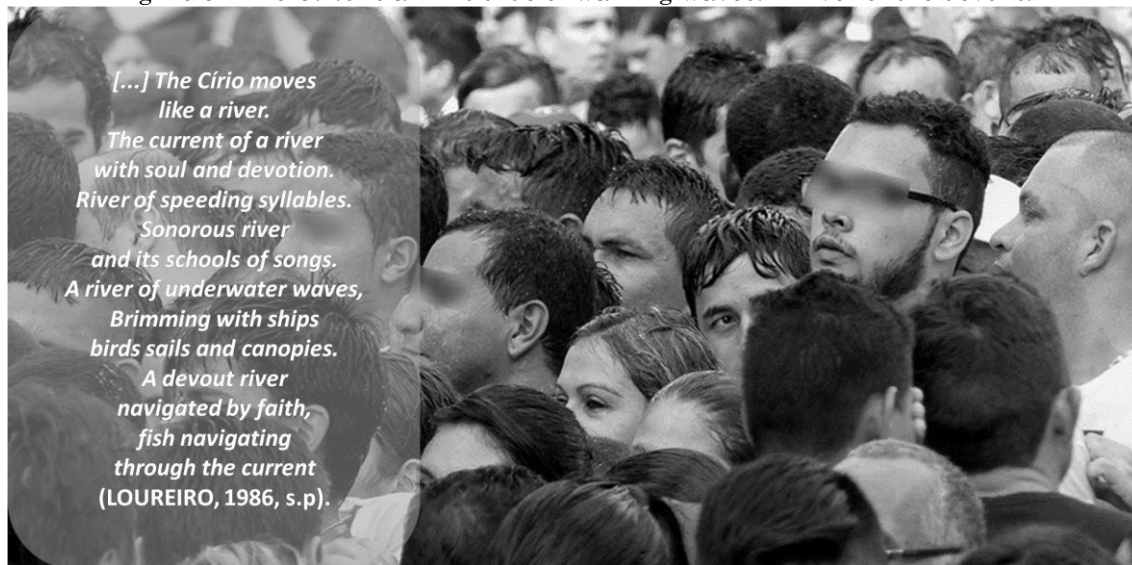
While not a geographer, though we may treat him as such based on his personal or vernacular geography (MONNET, 1999; COLLIGNON, 2005; CLAVAL, 2010), Loureiro's poems have a geopoetic character, because they shed light on the spatial "novelty differential" by means of a poetic and existential geography. As Lévy (1992, p. 29, translated) states, "What could be more normal, for an art of expression, poetry, which is meant to create new images, set our imagination ablaze and renew our perception, than to leave an original mark?" The search continues, then, for the "geopoetic scoop", composing the text of visual poetry.

We now take a fresh look at João Loureiro's

work, in a sequence of seven compositions in *photopoems* (Figures 05 to 11), aware that this projection technique of the humanist photographic regime has plenty of room to expand on other fronts of cataloguing and contemporary analysis of the geographic science.

Figure 5 associates the poem "*The Taper*" to a hub of procession followers, dense and teeming, like fish in the "current of a river with soul and devotion", a "school of songs" carried by the "underwater waves". A devout river, incapable of being fully understood only in terms of the millions of visitors in the procession. We know that other *Círios*, in the countryside of Pará, before and after the Belém October, attest to this capture of the collective body "navigated by faith". However, the current captured in the local snapshot synthesizes this first humanist scale. There is no *Círio do Nazaré* festival without collective connection. Individuation is apparently exclusive to the Saint in the palanquin, though this is only the impression of the inattentive eye that sees/senses the whole without observing the details.

Figure 5 - The *Círio* is a multitude of walking waves. A river of the devout.



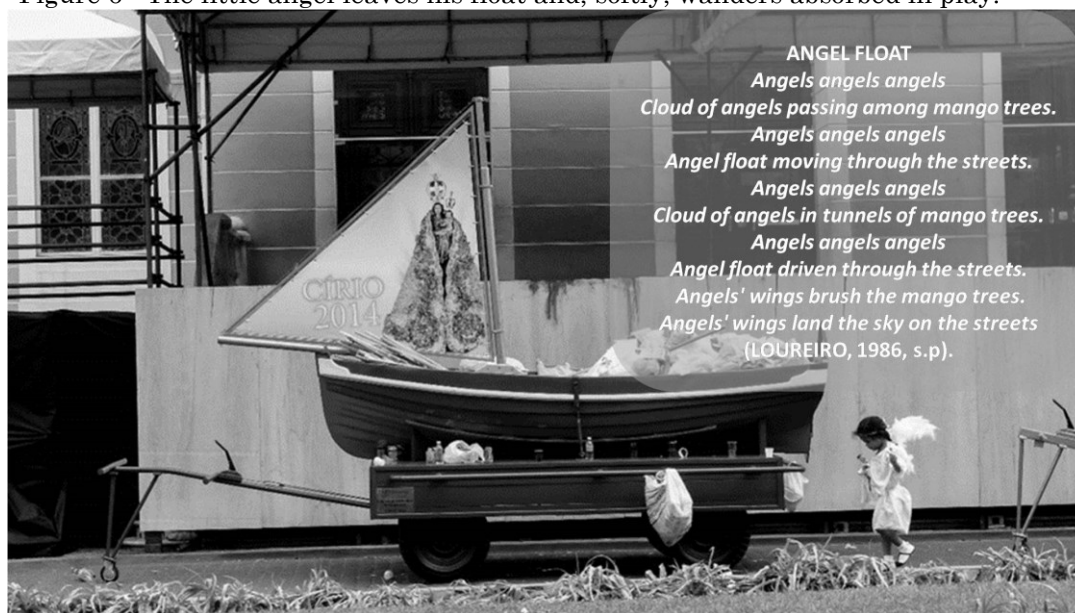
Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

Next (Figure 6), one perceives the spotlight, the angelical figure of the float/boat, the center of this collective crossing in the representation of children in their purity and divine ideality. Oftentimes these small beings are chosen, positioned on these moving altars, to hide and reveal the multitude of angels – in the words of

the poet, a "cloud of angels passing..." – as though these little celestial beings were a perfect representation of our views and yearnings. On the "wings of landing angels", the Saint suggests alternative devotional access, such as playing and taking a stroll before the next procession.



Figure 6 - The little angel leaves his float and, softly, wanders absorbed in play.

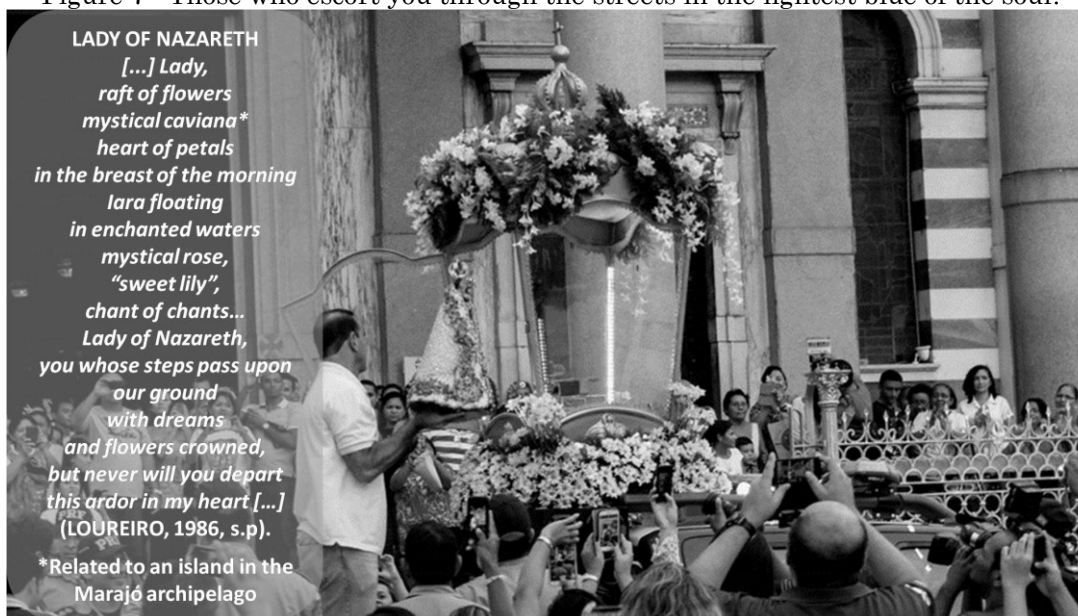


Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

And the procession has its beginnings as a suspended garden. The following *photopoem* (Figure 7) portrays the moment the Holy Image is placed in the palanquin. The Our Lady of Nazareth is observed with affection and concern by the devout in this risky transfer. Transition of the fixed to the flow, “raft of flowers” awaiting

“Tara floating in enchanted waters”, in a passage “with dreams crowned”. An expression that also denotes the equilibrium between feeling that one is protecting her and of feeling protected by her. Hence, the only true protection is the certainty of her infinite message: “but never will you depart this ardor in my heart”. Departure and arrival blend into a single ritual.

Figure 7 - Those who escort you through the streets in the lightest blue of the soul.

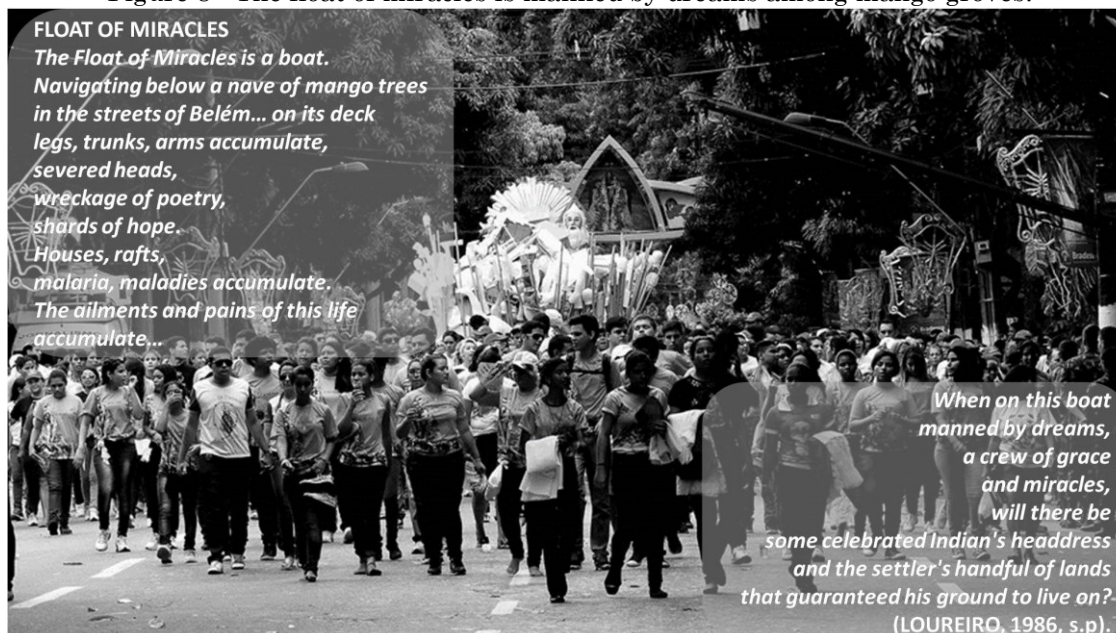


Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

Avenues decorated with mango trees form the special scenario of the procession, a way of representing the fruitfulness of that holy revelry. Figure 8 marks the arrival of the float of miracles with its swarms of guardians on the front line and its diversity of wishes made, like

promises of new times: “severed heads, wreckage of poetry, shards of hope”. Everything the boat carries represents simultaneously the most intimate dreams of individual life and the collective will to overcome in the face of life’s injustices.

Figure 8 - The float of miracles is manned by dreams among mango groves.



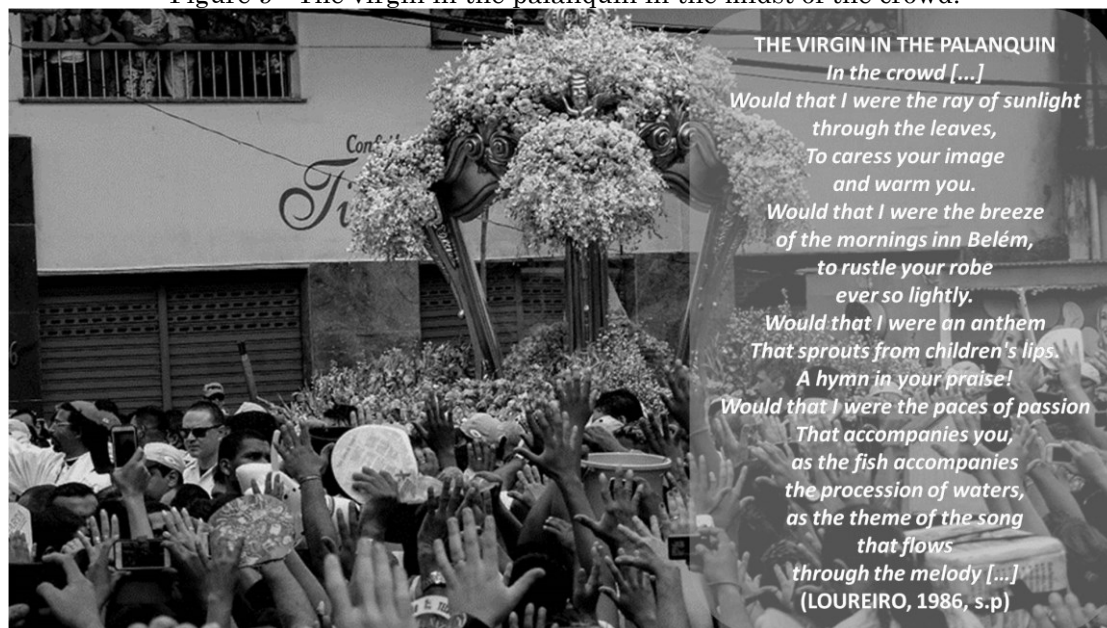
Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

On this boat “will there be some celebrated Indian's headdress and the settler's handful of lands that guaranteed his ground to live on?” The doubt is certified by identifying among the devout the “caboclo” strengthen the youth that marches ahead, guiding and leading the holy ship.

Figure 9 is the external projection of the city within. Housed in wood and glass, flowered like a spring time crown of the baroque forest of

Belém that shelters innumerable wishes. Says the poet, among so many longings... “Would that I was the ray of sunlight... Would that I was an anthem that sprouts... Would that I were the paces of passion”. However, the yearning can only be achieved through Grace, the mediating grace of the Saint, like “the theme of the song that flows through the melody”. There is no direct, causal, mechanical relationship in the devotion.

Figure 9 - The virgin in the palanquin in the midst of the crowd.



Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

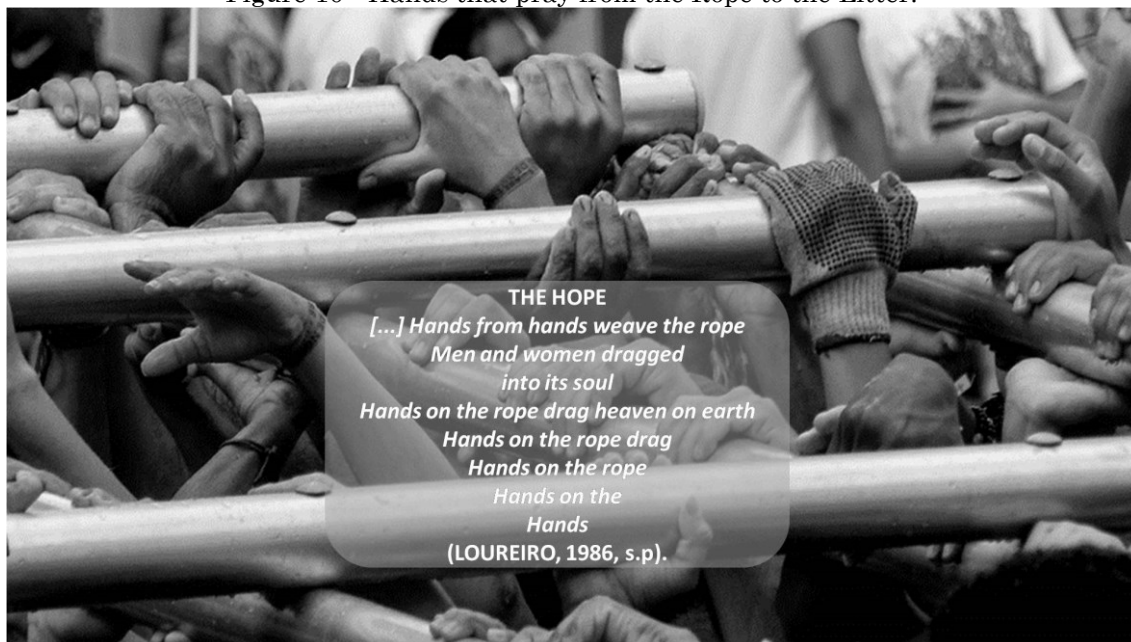
And denying that direct causal relationship reaffirms the greater possibility of divine intervention, interwoven in the set of defining

bonds. Figures 10 and 11 demonstrate, in the image of the rope/litter (bars) and in the concentration of the devout for the Motor-

pilgrimage, a play of techniques that spotlight the collaborative aspect. Thus... the photopoems can also move the humanist center of

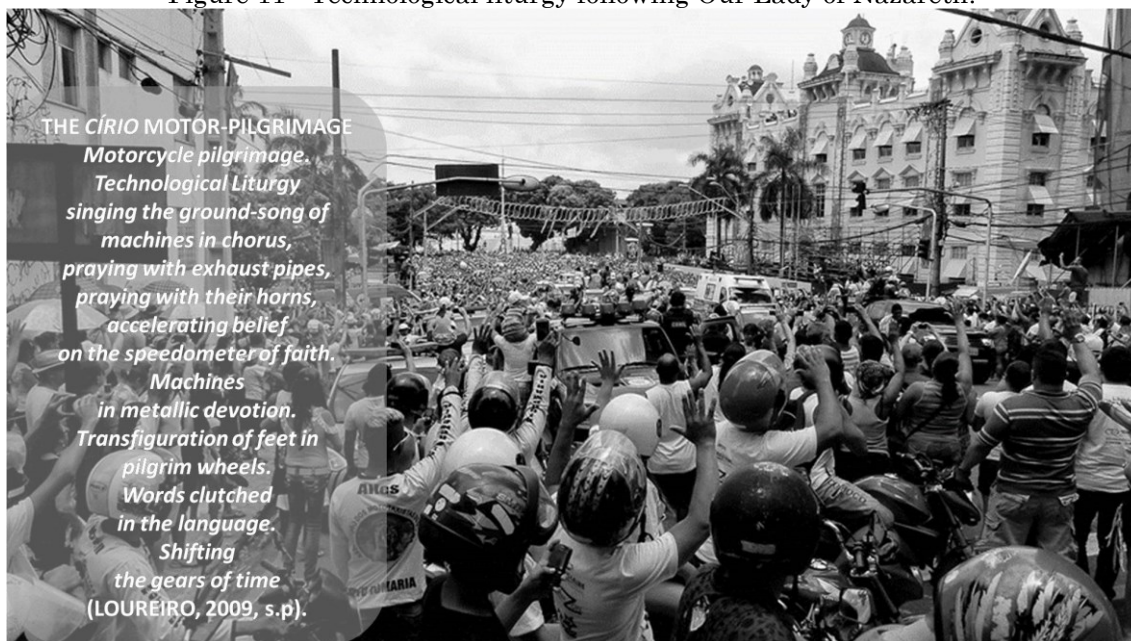
observation: from the traditional sacred to the profane, promptly endorsed in new dimensions of sacredness.

Figure 10 - Hands that pray from the Rope to the Litter.



Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

Figure 11 - Technological liturgy following Our Lady of Nazareth.



Source: Authors' image bank (2014).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We return to Dardel (2011) to reveal the poetics, both imagetive and literary, that we have just presented. For the geographer mentioned, the rigor of the science loses nothing by trusting its message, its narrative, to an observer who knows how to admire and select a just and

luminous image. Could this observer be a photographer? Furthermore, could they be a photogeographer interested in the power of an image to show the diversity of relationships that exist between people and the world?

For Costa (2014), photographs and images, in general, do not freeze a given space-time. On the contrary, they allow us to recognize the

movement that is at the same time individual and collective of the history and geography of the world. They are a way of situating images of the past, present, and future in the increasingly cybernetic profusion in which they are created, to preserve their content and their interpretative power.

Indeed, according to Bertrand (2014), by associating Geography and Photography, a science and a technique, and allying them to poetry, which reintroduces the world to us by re-creating it, we make an effort to capture in the depths of the landscape what lies behind it.

Photographs together with poetry, are transmuted into photopoems, therefore, gain in color, density, consistency, and depth. After all, we are dealing here with languages, ways of communicating events and eventualities. Languages, which, by becoming more direct, by interfacing with art, speak “without difficulty to the imagination” (DARDEL, 2011, p. 3).

Photographicity, in this context, is geography in action, geography open to the spoken (the sentiment-word), of one who with a camera in hand seeks to reveal the human condition in the context of its openness and poetic intentionality. Photographicity of photopoetics in photopoems. Everything is present in that instant, in the here and now, expressing the past and the future through the present, which remembers, yearns, and realizes. Because the present is the only moment in which man experiences reality (BACHELARD, 2007). Geographicity of the world in a poetic framed instant.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Raimundo Freitas Arag o carried out fieldwork, collected and analyzed the data, took the photographs and wrote the first considerations regarding the article. Christian Dennys Monteiro de Oliveira supervised the research, organized the presentation of the photographs in photopoems, wrote and reviewed the article. Tiago Vieira Cavalcante contributed to the theoretical-methodological construction, wrote and revised the article.



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