

The Myth of the Land Without Evil and the Tupinambá People

O mito da Terra sem Mal e os Tupinambá

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ABSTRACT:

In dialogue with recent authors and based on readings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chronicles, this article presents a critical reflection regarding the postulation put forth by Alfred Métraux, Pierre Clastres, and Hélène Clastres, namely, the existence of a narrative (myth) of the Land Without Evil among the ancient Tupinambá people. In doing so, it develops a critique of their theses on three levels: methodological, historical, and political. First, it demonstrates that Pierre and Hélène Clastres maintained a methodologically essentialist and anti-historical orientation, made possible by Curt Nimuendaju (1914) and inaugurated by Alfred Métraux (1928), a path that anthropologically treated the Tupi-Guarani as a unified whole, disregarding diverse peoples' ethnological and historical specificities. Subsequently, this article argues that Clastres's underlying theses, namely, a confrontation between *morubixabas* and *pajés/karaíbas*, are historically unfounded as expressions of the conflict between the religious and the political, society and the emerging state. Finally, this article refutes the thesis that Tupinambá migrations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries occurred despite colonial occupation, driven by internal conflicts within Tupinambá communities (society *versus* state), allegedly resulting in the search for the so-called Land Without Evil. Ultimately, this article seeks to describe a domain of Tupinambá thought, its relationship with death and the dead (fundamental to their physicalist cosmology), and to resituate the Tupinambá migrations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries within the context of anticolonial resistance among native peoples.

KEYWORDS: Land Without Evil; Tupinambá Thought; Indigenous Migrations; Colonization.

RESUMO:

Em diálogo com autores recentes e com base numa leitura das crônicas dos séculos XVI e XVII, o artigo apresenta uma reflexão crítica da postulação, por Alfred Métraux, Pierre Clastres e Hélène Clastres da existência de uma narrativa (mito) da Terra Sem Mal entre os antigos Tupinambá. Nisso, desenvolve uma crítica às teses clastrianas em três níveis: metodológica, histórica e política. Trata-se, primeiramente, de mostrar que os Clastres se mantêm metodologicamente numa orientação essencialista e anti-histórica, possibilitada por Curt Nimuendaju (1914) e inaugurada por Alfred Métraux (1928), trilha que unifica

antropologicamente o conjunto dos Tupi-Guarani, desprezando as especificidades etnológicas e históricas de seus diversos povos. Em seguida, argumenta que são historicamente infundadas suas teses básicas, a saber, a do confronto entre *morubixaba* e *pajé/karaíba*, como expressões do conflito entre o religioso e o político, a sociedade e o Estado em vias de aparecer. Por fim, opõe-se à tese de que as migrações dos Tupinambá nos séculos XVI e XVII ocorrem a despeito da Ocupação Colonial, pois seriam movidas pelo conflito interno às comunidades tupinambá (sociedade *versus* Estado), do que resultaria a procura da assim chamada Terra Sem Mal. Enfim, trata-se neste artigo de demarcar um campo do Pensamento Tupinambá, sua relação com a morte e com os mortos (fundamental à sua cosmologia fisicalista), e reinscrever as migrações tupinambá dos séculos XVI e XVII no cenário de resistência antiescravista e anticolonial dos povos nativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Terra Sem Mal; Pensamento Tupinambá; Migrações indígenas; Colonização.

For Carla Damião,
who turned borders into thresholds.

I. *Eppur si muove*: Bartolomeu Meliá's criticism of Curt Nimuendaju and Alfred Métraux

In a seminal article on the Guarani peoples' search for the Land Without Evil (*yvy marane'ỹ*), the anthropologist, ethnographer, and linguist Bartolomeu Meliá (1990, p. 33) warns that this expression is "as revealing as it is enigmatic".¹ Although it had been recorded as an ethnographic concept by Jesuits who practiced catechesis among the Guarani people as early as the seventeenth century, the Land Without Evil received its first (or, to date, most important) formal introduction from Curt Unkel Nimuendaju (1987), in his book *The Legends of the Creation and Destruction of the World as Foundations of the Religion of the Apapocuva-Guarani* (published in 1914).² Therefore, in order to clarify Meliá's point, it is necessary to provide some context regarding Nimuendaju. He begins his book by reporting experiences among the Guarani of a "religious movement [in the nineteenth century] that to this day [implicitly understood to be the beginning of the twentieth century] is not completely extinct":

¹ According to Cristina Pompa (1998, p. 62), Bartolomeu Meliá's research and work, beginning in the 1980s, marked a new era in ethnographic and anthropological studies on the Guarani and, therefore, the Tupi-Guarani peoples, in the wake of Pierre and Hélène Clastres's significant influence throughout the previous decade. Meliá's thinking expresses a new methodological orientation of a "historiographical nature." Accordingly, his work constitutes the "most careful research on Guarani ethnohistory, research that is based primarily on the careful analysis of the Jesuits' first documentation." Before passing away in 2019, Bartolomeu Meliá had lived with the Guarani of Paraguay since 1969 (with a hiatus between 1978 and 1989, when he went into political exile in Brazil due to expulsion by the Stroessner dictatorship), both as an anthropologist and as a Jesuit priest, characterized by pastoral work and political activism.

² This is a fundamental work in the birth of academic interest in "Tupi-Guarani thought" (treated as a unified whole), based on a rich ethnography produced among the Apapocuva-Guarani people of the Central-West region of the State of São Paulo between 1905 and 1907. The discussion conducted in this article does not question the ethnography (nor could it), but rather critically discusses the more comprehensive conclusions, which are also of a philosophical nature, that he (and others, including Métraux and Pierre and Hélène Clastres) draw from it.

Pajés, inspired by visions and dreams, became prophets of the imminent end of the world; they gathered followers in greater or lesser numbers and set out, amid ritual dances and magical chants, in search of the “Land Without Evil” [...]. Only in this manner did they hope to escape the looming perdition (Nimuendaju, 1987, p. 8-9).

Nimuendaju’s exclusively, or tendentiously, religious interpretation of the concept of the Land Without Evil continues in the following chapters (on cosmogonic narratives and *pajé* rituals), receiving a thematization of its own in Chapter V, in which Nimuendaju (1987, p. 107) inquires as to the motive that drove the expansion of the Tupi-Guarani peoples along the “Brazilian” coast until the sixteenth century: “Might the remarkable expansion of those hordes (*sic*) along the sea, observed at the beginning of the sixteenth century, be attributed to warlike causes, as is commonly supposed, or to religious motives?” Generalizing the conclusions of his own ethnography of the Apapocuva-Guarani to the other Guarani peoples and even to the ancient Tupinambá people, he concludes with the following hypothesis:

The driving force behind Tupi-Guarani migrations was not their military force of expansion, but [...] probably a religious motive [i.e., the mythical-prophetic search for the Land Without Evil]; their abilities as warriors merely enabled them to carry out their plans, to a certain extent. The twentieth century did not dawn for the Tupi of the coast. For this reason, I have decided to share what I heard from their relatives, the Guarani of the South (Nimuendaju, 1987, p. 108, my comments in brackets).

Having provided this backdrop, I can now more clearly state the objective of Meliá’s article. Arguing against what he considers to be a certain bias in Nimuendaju, which tends to reduce the Land Without Evil to a prophetic-religious myth, he aims to show various possible philological and historical meanings behind the expression Land Without Evil, as well as the diverse motives behind their search for it. In summary, Meliá develops the thesis that the meaning of the Land Without Evil, “is not univocal and probably includes several levels of understanding, just as it presupposes multiple historical moments” (Meliá, 1990, p. 33).

Meliá argues in philological, historical, archaeological, and ethnographic terms that the traditional Guarani conception of the Land Without Evil, the search for which undoubtedly explains their migrations (on which point he does not disagree with Nimuendaju), combines ecological conditions that favor the planting and harvesting of traditional horticulture, hunting, fishing, and gathering (practices that do not depend solely on soil fertility, but are also connected to topography, climate, and flora) with ethical and cultural aspects that are intrinsically related to favorable community coexistence and religious fruition; taken together, these elements are synthesized in the expression *tekoha*.³ In other words, as Meliá

³ “As an expression that has been witnessed since ancient times and is common among the present-day Guarani people, their land is identified with *tekoha*. However, the semantics of *tekoha* run less along the line of economic production than along the mode of cultural production. *Teko* is, according to the meaning provided by Montoya in his *Tesoro de la lengua guarani* (1639: f. 363 s), ‘state of existence, way of being, system, law, culture, norm, behavior, habit, condition, custom...’ Accordingly, *tekoha* is the place where there are conditions that allow for the Guarani way of being. The land, conceived as *tekoha*, is, above all, a socio-political space” (Meliá, 1990, p. 36).

insists, it is not constituted solely by ecological and economic factors, “but also [and inseparably] socio-political and religious ones” (Meliá, 1990, p. 34, my brackets). Thus, alongside ecological and economic aspects, a “third dimension of land [for the Guarani people] is that of being a habitable space. The Guarani people are villagers. There is a community and a house where their social and political life is concentrated. The land becomes fully human when there is a house and a courtyard” (Meliá, 1990, p. 37). Without any essentialization of the term, Meliá suggests that the Land Without Evil, for the Guarani, thus consistently represents the unstable and provisional *tekoha*.

Meliá’s careful description, briefly outlined here, is intended to show that the Land Without Evil is composed of diverse yet concrete characteristics; the motive behind the search is not solely or specifically religious, as Nimuendaju tends to describe it; nor is it a “last resort” (Clastres, 1978, p. 62). The driving force behind the search would exert itself when any of these aspects (ecological, economic, or socio-religious), which inevitably spread to the others, caused a crisis in community life, which is inseparable from the land where the Guarani live. The crisis would thus effectively be the cause of migration. The recognition of an always-possible crisis is supported by a cosmological thesis (which is also economic and ethical) that is profoundly anti-metaphysical and fundamental to Guarani thought, namely, the “instability of the land.” “The earth is supported by a fulcrum that could totter and fall at any moment. Fragility and instability continually threaten the Guarani universe. Destruction is always on the horizon” (Meliá, 1990, p. 39). Therefore, the Guarani understand themselves to be always on the move.⁴

The foundations of this consciousness—which, according to Meliá, symbolically takes on a religious dimension (though not necessarily in the prophetic-religious sense)—are found in the experience of exhaustion of land (a natural result of their agricultural techniques), of floods and fires, of community unrest and religious disagreements, of conflicts with other native peoples, and... of colonial aggression. This last form of *mba’e meguã* (bad or evil thing) concludes a cycle of Meliá’s argument, as historical variations are added to the variety of meanings behind *yvy mara’ẽ*.⁵ Colonization could not be an indifferent aspect of a migratory practice driven by repeated situations of instable existence and the, equally repeated, search for land suitable for the production of community life (in the sense of *tekoha*).

⁴ That the Guarani people are villagers who are deeply connected to their land (*tekoha*) and are “always on the move” is a productive contradiction, which takes on a highly dialectical character and blurs the fixed distinction between sedentary and nomadic (which, in historiography, is often called semi-nomadic, but not semi-sedentary). The Guarani people demonstrate a keen understanding of the historical, perishable, and mutable condition of social existence and its relationship with nature. I owe this observation to Nilo Aragão.

⁵ “[It was] with the arrival of the Spanish and their herds that this first Guarani space was profoundly disturbed and modified. The predatory behavior that colonial societies had always demonstrated, both in terms of deforestation and hunting, was seen by the Guarani as an irreparable evil. [...] The destruction was of such alarming proportions that it left no alternative [but] to flee to more distant forests” (Meliá, 1990, p. 40).

Rather, it would impose itself as a new condition of the migratory movement, with the establishment of a different historical form of land use, founded, beginning at that time, on a system of ownership through what became known as *encomendas*. In a larger text, Meliá (*apud* Pompa, 1998, p. 63) indicates that there has historically been a semantic change in the expression *yvy maraneĩ*. In Montoya's *Tesoro de la lengua guarani* (1639),

It appears translated as “untouched soil, which has not been built upon”; and *ka'a maraneĩ* appears as “hill where no wood has been removed or chopped down.” These meanings indicate an ecological and economic use, which is substantially distinct from the religious and mystical meaning of “*tierra sin mal*” with which the expression *yvy maran eĩ* reappears among contemporary Guarani people.

According to Cristina Pompa (1998, p. 63),

It suggests here the existence of a process of historical transformation that led to a semantic shift in the Guarani language, from ecological to mystical. This presupposes something never considered before: the possibility that Tupi and Guarani groups may have “rethought” their systems of signification and “transformed” their cultural universe as a result of the cultural impact of the colonizing and evangelizing West.

Thus, according to Pompa's interpretation, what Nimuendaju's ethnography describes regarding the Apapokuva-Guarani people of the early twentieth century would express, for Meliá, this new, different historical significance of the Land Without Evil, which is now undoubtedly mystical, prophetic-religious.

Eppur si muove.

The multiplicity of meanings of Land Without Evil (which, for Meliá, is not solely prophetic-religious, as for Nimuendaju, although, like everything else among the Guarani, it takes on religious symbolism), its multiple forms of access, which, in Nimuendaju's work, are “marked by a pronounced mysticism and, in the dance that accompanies them, hold their ritual symbol” (Meliá, 1990, p. 44), and its historical variation (with the advent of colonial invasion and the resulting transformations in the Guarani symbolic universe) all lead Meliá to an important methodological questioning of Nimuendaju's thesis. This questioning also, and more strongly, addresses the work of Alfred Métraux (1979), *The Religion of the Tupinambás and their Relations with those of Other Tupi-Guarani Tribes* (published in 1928).⁶

Nimuendaju supposes that there is a “continuum” in the ancient and modern Guarani people that would justify an ethnological retrospective and a general theory of migration, extending to all Tupi-Guarani of all times, based on the ethnography of certain migratory movements of the modern Guarani. Thus, what in Nimuendaju was a hypothesis, is treated by Albert Métraux as historical proof. To this end, Métraux reads the old texts, which report migrations of various Tupi and Guarani tribes, in an Apapokuva key, or if one prefers, in Nimuendaju's key [...] (Meliá, 1990, p. 45).

⁶ Following Nimuendaju, another fundamental work of research on “Tupi-Guarani thought” since the beginning of the twentieth century, taken up again by scholars from Brazil (for example, Florestan Fernandes) and France (for example, Pierre and Hélène Clastres).

Thus, for Meliá (who recognizes a distinction between Tupi and Guarani in the passage above, refusing to treat them as a unified category), the historical, ethnographic, and archaeological observations do not allow him to agree with two universal generalizations sought by Nimuendaju and treated as scientific proof by Alfred Métraux (who, taking Nimuendaju a step further, extends this categorization to the Tupinambá of the “Brazilian” coast): the Guarani of before and now (fundamentally, pre- and post-colonization) and “the Tupi-Guarani” of all ethnicities. According to Meliá, Nimuendaju imagined a “Tupi-Guarani of all times” (which, admittedly, suggests a reaffirmation of the old notion of “peoples without history”).⁷

II. “Nature” without history: The supposed religious search for the Land Without Evil by the Tupinambá people

The interpretative path inaugurated by Nimuendaju and Métraux⁸ would go on to influence two important works on the Tupinambá people, namely, *Society Against the State* by Pierre Clastres (2003) and *The Land-without-Evil: Tupi-Guarani Prophetism* by Hélène Clastres (1978).

The former, published in French in 1974, in the titular essay, extends Métraux’s interpretations and methodological positions, arriving at the thesis of a supposedly autonomous prophetic-religious system in conflict with a likewise supposedly political system. In this gesture, Pierre Clastres (2003, p. 230) mobilizes categories that are completely foreign to Tupinambá culture (prophets, gods, earthly paradise, also following Nimuendaju and Métraux in this aspect), in order to put forth the thesis of a conflict between, on one side, “a slow emergence of political power,” when “something was beginning to surface that could have become the State,” with “a process that aimed at establishing a chieftainship whose political power was not inconsiderable” (pg. 214). and, on the other side, “an awakening, an uprising, that was directed against the chieftainship in a sense, if not explicitly; for, in any case, it had destructive effects on the power of the chiefs” (pgs. 214-215).

This uprising would be based on the “fiery preaching of certain men [i.e., the *karaíba*] who went from group to group [from village to village] inciting the Indians to forsake everything and launch out in search of the Land Without Evil, the earthly paradise” (Clastres, 2003, p. 215, my brackets).⁹ Thus, the

⁷ Starting with Nimuendaju, “by articulating ethnographic data on the modern Guarani people with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources [implicitly understood to be chronicles], Métraux [...] attempted to reconstruct the condition of Tupinambá culture from the colonial era, presupposing a substantially shared identity between the two societies” (Pompa, 1998, p. 44, author’s brackets). In other words, Métraux returns to the “Tupi-Guarani of all times,” which Meliá rightly attributes to Nimuendaju, and based on this, he seeks—in his own words—to fill supposed gaps and resolve possible misunderstandings in chronicles from the first two centuries of colonization.

⁸ Nimuendaju’s hypothesis, based on a particular ethnography, universalizes his conclusions for the Tupi-Guarani peoples as a whole; Métraux took Nimuendaju’s recent ethnography on the Guarani people of western São Paulo as the basis and “historical proof” (in Meliá’s words) for his interpretation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chronicles that discuss the Tupinambá people of the Brazilian coast.

⁹ In a simple way, so that the reading can continue, regarding the Tupinambá people, the chronicles distinguished between *pajés* (*paie, pa’i*) and the *karaíba*, limiting the medical, pedagogical, and cultural activities of the former to the village, whereas

supposed (and quite questionable) anti-hierarchical sentiment of the Tupinambá would manifest itself in a “religious” preaching, led by “prophets” (as Nimuendaju, Métraux, and Pierre Clastres interpret the Tupinambá *karaíba*), who, in seeking the Land Without Evil, would prevent the “possible emergence of the State among the Tupinambá” through the “destruction of society” (Clastres, 2003, p. 215).¹⁰

In sixteenth-century chronicles, which describe the classic moment of Tupinambá culture (at the height of their cultural and territorial expansion and before the genocide perpetrated by European colonizers), there is nothing that indicates any opposition between *morubixaba* and *karaíba*. Quite the contrary, the rituals conducted by the *karaíba*, known as *karaimonhanga*, are associated in solidarity with war efforts, conducted by the *morubixaba*. According to Florestan Fernandes’s interpretation (1952, p. 16),

Tupinambá war encompasses the rites that prepared and followed the organization and execution of war expeditions, the armed clash, the return operations, the treatment of prisoners of war, and their final use for ritual purposes.

Specifically, Tupinambá warfare has always been entirely ritualistic (which, in my opinion, does not mean religious). It begins with the assembly of warriors, which is absolutely ritualized; participants are separated by sex and age, with demarcated places for members and spectators and the use, by the former, of tobacco, *petyma* (Thevet, 2018, p. 231; Cardim, 1978, p. 200). It continues with the *karaimonhanga*, which must confirm or decline the decision, when favorable, of the assembly of warriors (Thevet, 2018, p. 233, n. 6); the same role is played by the collective interpretation of dreams, carried out when the “troop” is already close to the village to be attacked (Thevet, 2018, p. 217; Staden, 2008, p. 103, 106), as well as attentive listening to the occurrence of bird songs of good or bad omens (Thevet, 2009, p. 139-140; Gândavo, 1995, p. 109; Léry, 1961, p. 139); ritualistic behavior continues on the battlefield, as when the future prisoner is immobilized and taken to the village (following strict ritual rules) and in all the rigorous procedures that prepare and culminate in the well-designed and repeated anthropophagic ritual (Thevet, p. 243-251; Gândavo, 1995, p. 26-28; Léry, 1961, p. 175-184; Cardim, 1978, p. 113-119).

The interpretation of the Tupinambá people’s beliefs, narratives, and ritual practices based on the ethnography of a twentieth-century Guaraní group (by Nimuendaju, Métraux), in Pierre Clastres,

the latter did not have a village, circulating between multiple villages (even among enemy villages, such was the respect they enjoyed). This is a purely descriptive difference, which fails to encompass the ethnological and anthropological richness of the roles of these distinct figures (*pajé* and *karaíba*) in Tupinambá culture.

¹⁰ Regarding the attribution of the *karaíba* as prophets, the following should be noted: in the Torah, a prophet is one who sees and speaks before all others, due to their critique and condemnation of a present reality that is imperceptible to others. For this reason alone, prophets are able to speak about the future (in the dual sense that the future becomes the object of their discourse and that the future is the place from which they speak); in Christianity, prophet has taken on a meaning closer to a person who issues prophecies, anticipatory discourses. Pierre and Hélène Clastres’s use of the term is closer to the former sense, as their speculation revolves around the thesis that the Tupinambá *karaíbas*’ prophetic position regarding the “destruction of society,” situated against their supposed discourse on the Land Without Evil.

results in a thesis that I consider entirely unfounded, producing what he refers to as a “political anthropology,” whose categories, when referring to the Tupinambá, are completely unrelated to what we can affirm based on the only written records we have about them. These records are chronicles, which, despite the “theological” basis of their interpretations,¹¹ materially describe, in a rich manner, the social praxis and customs of the Tupinambá communities of the “Brazilian” coast. (As has become academically accepted, I work with the assumption that it is possible to distinguish the descriptions made by the chroniclers from their own interpretations.) Therefore, Pierre Clastres’s interpretation, closely following Métraux’s, goes against the grain not only of sixteenth-century “theological” (in the sense described by Hansen) interpretations, but also of the only information to which we have access regarding the Tupinambá. “We are faced,” according to Ronaldo Vainfas (2022, p. 52), “with a philosophical interpretation of native mythology situated in the field of political philosophy,” which to me suggests the lack of a historiographical basis for Clastres’s thesis. Here we no longer have an “anthropological discussion” (Hansen), but rather Clastres’s political philosophy replacing the old “theological” (also according to Hansen) position of sixteenth-century chroniclers, attributing to Tupinambá culture problems and categories that are external to it.

Hélène Clastres’s work has an ironic advantage: it shows the fragility of the prophetic-religious interpretation of Tupinambá culture (centered on the search for the Land Without Evil) by taking the thesis of the contradiction between the “political” and the “religious,” previously stated by Pierre Clastres, to a level in which the autonomization of the “religious” would explain, *per se*, the migratory movement of Tupinambá communities, even after colonization, and even despite it; and also by seeking to argumentatively confront the theological position of Christian chroniclers that the Tupinambá people have no religion (Thevet, 2018; Léry, 1961; Cardim, 1978; d’Abeville, 1975).

Despite refusing *ex verbis* the thesis that “religious discourse [...] [can] remain immutable when society changes,” thus renouncing the idea of reconstructing “the past of the Tupi-Guarani people from what is known today” (as Nimuendaju and Métraux explicitly do), proposing, consequently, to “retake history from its beginnings” (Clastres, 1978, p. 12-13), Hélène Clastres (1978, p. 54) ends up reaffirming, through her results, the methodological stance she criticizes: “That no transformation of this kind [between the Tupinambá of the sixteenth century and the Guarani of the twentieth century] occurred is what we intend to establish: despite the disturbance brought about by the European conquest, a

¹¹According to João Adolfo Hansen (2010, p. 90), “none of the sixteenth-century discussions about Indigenous peoples is anthropological [...] they are all theological.” This is because “the universality of their God [of Christians] makes every difference a distant image of Him” (Hansen, 2010, p. 88). Thus, it is always a matter of interpreting Tupinambá culture in terms of a culture that is the image of God (Christian, European culture), based on this principle of universal identity, finding the differences of Indigenous peoples, differences conceived as savagery, barbarism, and/or “gentility” that allegedly needed to be corrected by catechesis.

remarkable continuity is deciphered.” In other words, her conclusion is the same as Nimuendaju’s and Métraux’s, thus reaffirming the object of Meliá’s criticism: the presupposition of a unified and permanent Tupi-Guarani being, whose “essence” is immutable. Therefore, according to her, the prophetic-religious nature of migrations was in no way due to the colonial experience:

The belief in the existence of an abode of immortality, accessible here and now, is an indisputable fact of Tupi-Guarani culture. It is therefore an original dimension of their culture: not only because this culture owes nothing to white people, that is, it cannot be understood in terms of a “colonial” situation that precedes it, but also because it is situated in societies that, far from being oppressed, were, upon their discovery, in full expansion (Clastres, 1978, p. 56-57).

She subsequently affirms, “If, later on, colonization plays any role [in migratory movements], it is simply that of a catalyst: the nature and significance of prophetism are not at all modified by it” (Clastres, 1978, p. 62, my brackets). “Nature” here is implicitly understood to be without history...

Regarding these prophetic-religious migratory movements’ supposed precedence over (and independence from) colonization, driven as they were by a so-called traditional search for the Land Without Evil, it is worth emphasizing that, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chronicles, at no point does this term appear in their descriptions of Tupinambá customs. The long-awaited land of the ancestors, a place of endless pleasures, was considered a posthumous locus reserved for fearless warriors who were dedicated to war in defense of the community, to go, after death, in a territory physically described as “beyond the mountains,” where agriculture would take care of itself, and their time would be filled with song, dance, and *cauim* (a traditional drink made from fermented manioc) together with other respectable deceased community members. That the land of the ancestors is physical and yet posthumous does not entail any contradiction for the physicalist, immanentist, and anti-metaphysical cosmology of the Tupinambá people.¹² In these descriptions of traditional narratives, with the *karaíba* as spokespersons, there is no reference to the search, in life, *hic et nunc*, for a land free from work, disease, and death. As a narrative transmitted and reaffirmed by the *karaíba* in pre-war rituals and part of the ever-renewed preparation for the next war event initiated by the village in question, there is nothing “prophetic” (or, as Métraux also proposes, “messianic”) about it; rather, it was intended to inscribe the next battle in the ancestral values of courage and warrior skill, making the living generation worthy of living posthumously in the land of their ancestors. If we had to name this land, it would not be with the term *yby marãe’ỹ*, but with that of *rypykãera yby* (land of the ancestors).¹³

¹² I have developed this theme in another text entitled “The Irreligious Physics of the Tupinambá People,” in the process of being submitted for publication.

¹³ In his ethnography of the Apapocuva-Guarani, Nimuendaju (1987, p. 38) describes a difference between *yby marãe’ỹ*, where the souls of children go when they die, and *tanytãé*, where, alongside relatives and friends, the souls of adults come to live “more or less as here on earth.” Nimuendaju translates *tanytãé* as “a past tense of *tany*—to get lost, to go astray.”

According to Thevet (2018 [1557], p. 226-227), for the Tupinambá people, the dead warriors who “valiantly fought against their enemies [...] go in the company of many others to delightful places—woods, gardens, orchards.” According to Léry (1961 [1575], p. 187, my brackets), “after death [...] [the Tupinambá believe that] they go beyond the high mountains to dance in beautiful gardens with the souls of their grandparents.” Likewise, d’Abbeville (1975 [1614], p. 252) reports that the Tupinambá believe

that their souls, [...] when they separate from their bodies, go beyond the mountains, where their ancestors, grandparents, are found [...]; there, in the case of a life in accordance with good customs, their souls live eternally as in paradise, jumping, singing, and having fun without stopping.

These and other records confirm the post-mortem nature of the ancestral land.

This point of view clarifies the following imprecise passage about *karaíba* by Manuel da Nóbrega, who at the time did not know Tupi (a letter written five months after his arrival in Brazil [1549]), and in truth never learned it:

He tells them [the Tupinambá of Bahia] not to bother working, not to go to the fields, that food will grow by itself and that they will never lack food, and that houses will build themselves, and that the hoes will go to dig, and the arrows will go to the forest to hunt for their masters, and that they will kill many of their enemies and captivate many for their food. And he promises them a long life, and that the old women will become young women [...]. (Nóbrega, 2017, p. 84, my brackets).

Nóbrega’s interpretation suggests that this promise was fulfilled within their lifetime. According to the descriptions of all the other chroniclers, he made a mistake here, which is quite understandable given his inability to understand the *karaíbas*’ words directly in Tupi, possibly having heard this speech secondhand, as it is difficult to imagine that, as a provincial of the Society of Jesus, he would have been present at a *karaimonbanga*).¹⁴

According to Vainfas (2022, p. 51 and 54), the insistence of Métraux, Pierre Clastres, and Hélène Clastres on seeing, in the migratory movements of the Tupinambá people that have been recorded since the sixteenth century, a purely prophetic-religious element, supposedly driven by ancestral narratives about the *yby marãe’ỹ*, underestimates “the possible cultural crossover that diverse native movements presented in the sixteenth century”;¹⁵ according to Vainfas, who, unlike me, accepts the (relative) role of the myth of the Land Without Evil in the aforementioned migratory movements of the Tupinambá people after colonial conquest, it seems “untenable the idea that Tupi prophetism [*syĩ*] [...] did not have a

¹⁴ Thevet and Léry witnessed these *karaimonbanga*, and they provide a careful account. Based on their accounts and d’Abbeville’s, I believe that it is necessary to establish a causal relationship between “they will kill many of their enemies and captivate many for their food” while alive and, therefore, will become worthy of the land of their ancestors where they will “not work, they will not go to the fields,” etc.

¹⁵ Incidentally, this is a discussion that Vainfas (2022) develops in his excellent book about a multiethnic and culturally syncretic movement, clearly anti-colonial and anti-slavery, which took place at the end of the sixteenth century in Bahia, which took the form of what, in Jesuit chronicles and letters, appears under the name of “Holiness.”

direct—that is, historical—relationship with the irruption of colonialism.” On the contrary, I think that, in the absence of historical testimonies that indicate at least the relationship between the Tupinambá migrations prior to European conquest (as I will show later, known and recorded by the chroniclers) and the recent Guaraní myth of the Land Without Evil, it is necessary to examine what multiple sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chroniclers say about the *posthumous* character of a land of joys and festivals, destined *individually* for the courageous and brave (a place they never name as the Land Without Evil). In doing so, nothing remains of a prophetic, socially destructive promise of *collective redemption in an earthly paradise, offered to the living*, as Métraux and Pierre and Hélène Clastres interpret and name it. The subjects and the times are clearly understood to be different.

Thus, similar to what Meliá proposes regarding the Guaraní people, a radical distinction is made between the Tupinambá migrations prior to European conquest, mediated (given the wars these migrations provoked) by the *karaíba* narrative of the land of pleasures in the afterlife, and migrations during the colonial period (most, if not all, of which are recorded as anti-colonial). The use of categories from a particular religious tradition (Judeo-Christian), such as prophecies and prophets, messianism, and paradise, in the Tupinambá cultural experience, also loses all meaning. This concern was not omitted by the well-educated Christians who described it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (despite calling the *karaíba* “prophets”).¹⁶ Aware of the catechists’ efforts to bridge the gap between Christianity and native cultures, “discovering” elements in them that foreshadowed revealed religion (the Catholic thesis of “natural knowledge of God”), there is no reason to imagine that they would not be excited to identify these Judeo-Christian categories here. Nevertheless, they did not do so, inhibited by their intellectual honesty, despite their desire and research into this possibility.¹⁷

III. The symbolic-material determinations of migrations

The migratory movement of Indigenous peoples (Tupinambá and others) from the *sertão* (semi-arid inlands) to the coast or from the coast to the *sertão* was extensively recorded by sixteenth-century chroniclers. Referring to the Aimoré people, Pero Magalhães de Gândavo (1995 [1574], p. 9) states that this “nation of gentiles [...] came from the *sertão* five or six years ago, and they say that other Indians,

¹⁶ The longstanding imprecise translation of *morubixaba* as “chiefs,” “kings,” etc. allows Pierre Clastres to juggle rhetorical and theoretical maneuvers that impress readers who are relatively familiar with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chronicles. He calls them “chiefs without power,” a puzzle that must, for him, be explained, when the simplest thing would be to admit that they are not chiefs, just as the *karaíba* are not prophets. As institutions of a classless, stateless society that is nonetheless hierarchical, they do not lend themselves to naming in terms of class-based and state-based societies, nor on completely distinct cultural traditions (creationist and metaphysical).

¹⁷ Thus, they went so far as to claim that the Tupinambá had a certain notion of the “immortality of the soul,” a metaphysical thesis that, in Christianity, is based on the distinction and primacy of the intelligible (or spiritual) over the sensible-carnal. However, this distinction is completely absent from Tupinambá cosmology, as there is nothing in the “soul” that breaks with the sensible nature of the living: it continues to be sensible and physical, although disembodied. Once again, this is a central characteristic of Tupinambá physicalist cosmology.

contrary to these [possibly Tupinambá], came upon them in their lands, and destroyed them all, and those who fled are the ones who roam the coast.” In this passage, we receive the information that there is both a migratory movement of the Aimoré, a non-Tupi ethnic group, from the *sertão* to the coast, and subsequently of “other Indians,” hypothetically Tupinambá, who also migrated, possibly from another region on the same coast, to those regions where the Aimoré people had begun to live nomadically in a large territory. There was, therefore, a dispute over territory (naturally accompanied, on both sides, by the entire ritual processes customary to each of them).

“These Indians,” continues Gândavo (1995, p. 10) about the Aimoré people,

live only by the arrow; their food is game, animals, and human flesh. They make fire underground so as not to be detected or know where they are. Many lush lands are lost near this Captaincy [of Ilhéus], which are not possessed by the Portuguese because of these Indians.

In his subsequent discussion of the Captaincy of Porto Seguro, where the Aimoré people are also located, Gândavo claims that they “do as much harm to the residents there as they do in Ilhéus.” He further observes, “It is a land very rich in game, and in fish, which they catch in the river that runs alongside the town.” Thus, the reader has no difficulty seeing the connection Gândavo proposes between the Aimoré people’s symbolic-material forms of life, characterized by hunting and fishing and the natural conditions of the territory to which they moved from the *sertão* and within which they were on the move, natural conditions conducive precisely to hunting and fishing. This is what Gândavo himself (1995, p. 118, my brackets) explicitly states in the second version of his chronicle:

The reason why [the Aimoré people] live in this part [from the Captaincy of Ilhéus to Porto Seguro] more than in the others is because these are the lands best suited to their purpose, both because of the large forests they have, where they are always in ambush, and because of the large amount of game found there, which is their main source of sustenance.

But the Aimoré are not Tupinambá. “They do not fight in the field nor do they have the spirit for doing so” (Gândavo, 1995, p. 9); regarding the latter, however, who maintain agricultural activities, which combine hunting, fishing, and gathering, they must not have been indifferent, in their migration to the coast of Ilhéus, from where they expelled the Aimoré people, to the fact that this Captaincy was “one of the richest lands of food in Brazil,” possessing, as bears repeating, “many lush lands” (Gândavo 1995, p. 9 and 10).

Frei Fernão Cardim (1978 [1584], p. 121-127) presents a cartography of nations and peoples, showing, in some parts, their migratory movement: thus, the Tupinakyia (Tupiniquim people), who extended along the coast of Ilhéus, Porto Seguro, continuing on to Espírito Santo, “will come from Pernambuco and will spread along a line of the *sertão*, multiplying greatly [...]”; the Carijó “run along the coast of the sea and backlands as far as Paraguay [...]”; the Carajá “live in the *sertão* in the part of São

Vicente; they came from the North running there [...]”; the Aenaguig “were residents of the lands of the Tupinaquins, and because the Tupinaquins became lords of the lands they are called Tupinaquins”; the Quirigmã “were lords of the lands of Bahia [...] The Tupinaquins expelled them from their lands and will remain lords of them, and the Tapuyas went to the South,” etc.

Structurally identical events are reported by Gabriel Soares de Sousa:

The Tupiniquim people ruled and possessed the land on the coast of Brazil, along the sea, from the Camamu River to the Cricaré River, which has now depopulated this entire comarca, fleeing from the Tupinambás, their adversaries, who pressed them, on one side, and the Aimorés, who attacked them on the other (Sousa, 1987 [1587], p. 87).

Similarly, the Goytacaz people ruled over the entire coast of the Captaincies of Espírito Santo and São Tomé, after expelling the Tamoio, Papaná, and Tupiniquin peoples, with whom “they came to have [...] such a cruel war that they forced them to leave the coast and head for the *sertão*, with which [the Goytacaz] became masters of the coast until they bordered the Tupiniquins [...] between whom the Cricaré River was their landmark” (Sousa, 1987, p. 95). “The first settlers who lived in Bahia de todos os Santos and its comarca,” Gabriel Soares de Sousa (1987, p. 299, my italics) further informs,

[...] were the Tapuias [...]. These Tapuias were driven out of the land of Bahia and the vicinity of the sea by another people, their adversaries, who came down from the *sertão*, after the fame of the abundant land and sea of this province, who they call Tupinaés, and these peoples waged war against one another as long as it took the Tupinaés to defeat and disband the Tapuias, and they made them abandon the shore and go to the *sertão* [...].”

He continues:

having heard from the Tupinambás about the abundance and fertility of this land, they gathered and came from beyond the São Francisco River, descending upon the land of Bahia, which they had been dominating, making war upon the Tupinaés who possessed it, destroying their villages and plantations, killing those who opposed them, without sparing anyone, until they were driven out of the vicinity of the sea; who went to the *sertão* and abandoned the land to the Tupinambás, who held dominion over it. (Sousa, 1987, p. 300, my italics).

These chroniclers clearly and simply describe migratory movements driven by the search for land suitable for forms of work and production, according to the customs and cultural values of each village; migratory movements in which, once they attain dominion over the territory, ethnic groups split into diverse communities, sometimes occupying many kilometers of the coast and/or *sertão*, which suggests a distribution of spaces and natural resources among kin and allied groups;¹⁸ and, finally, movements as a result of which the expelled ethnic groups move in search of new territories suited to their ways of life.

¹⁸ Regarding this demographic determination, see Maestri (1994, p. 43): “A Tupi-Guarani community of three or four hundred members would require an economic subsistence space of approximately 45 km. In some regions rich in natural resources, only a few kilometers separated one village from another. The Jesuits recorded that the Tupinambá, who lived 120 to 240 km apart, remained ‘at war with one another.’”

In these passages, Gândavo, Cardim, and Sousa did not mention any prophetic or religious motive for these migrations, indicating, on the contrary, a substantially material motive (the search for fertile lands that are plentiful for planting, hunting, fishing, and gathering), migrations triggered by war. Thus, the explanation behind the persistent migratory movement of the Tupinambá people, attested by the chronicles, needs and can have another interpretation. In his doctoral thesis, Florestan Fernandes (1952, p. 55) shows that the Tupinambá forms of occupation and labor led to a “periodic depletion [of the biosphere].” “Within a certain time period, the natural resources existing therein or those that are exploitable by the technical effort of human populations ceased to meet the vital needs of those populations.”¹⁹ Thus, because

the technological system they had did not allow them to regenerate or restore the environment [...], and as this was not essential for their survival, the aboriginal peoples, and among them the Tupinambá, reestablished the biotic balance through the occupation of new niches (Fernandes, 1952, p. 55).

In the same sense, Frei Vicente do Salvador (2007 [1627], p. 62, my brackets) testifies in the seventeenth century about the Tupinambá:

They only live in a village until the palm of their roof rots, which is the space of three or four years, and then they move to another part, the leader [that is, the *morubixaba*!] choosing first, with the advice of the elders [gathered in the courtyard, *okara*], a site that is high, open, with water nearby and suitable land for their crops and seedbeds, which they say is land that has not yet been cultivated, because they find it less work to cut down trees than to remove weeds [...].

It is this search for new territories, driven by the exhaustion of the ecological conditions for housing, planting, hunting, fishing, and gathering in the previously occupied biosphere (according to the criterion of less work, in Salvador’s words), that, according to Fernandes (1952, p. 56, my brackets), constitutes the so-called “nomadism of the primitive aboriginal populations of Brazil, which were [nothing more than] migratory movements [...], thanks to which they achieved adaptive conditions favorable to their own subsistence.”²⁰ In the same vein, Mário Maestri (1994, p. 45), considering Tupinambá agricultural methods, such as slash-and-burn, notes that this “method of clearing land caused damage to the Atlantic Forest ecosystem,” recalling André Thevet, according to whom fire burned “the forest well beyond what the Tupinambá desired” (Maestri, 1994, p. 45). This would admittedly have

¹⁹ Elsewhere: “Their mobility in space was relatively high. These activities were carried out without any attempt to preserve or restore the balance of nature. Therefore, the relative exhaustion of occupied areas required both periodic displacement within the same region and abandonment and invasion of other areas considered more fertile and richer in natural resources. This means that migration was used as a technique for indirect human control of nature. When the balance between food needs and the resources provided by the surrounding natural environment was disrupted, populations moved in one sense or another” (Fernandes, 1976, p. 73).

²⁰ Hélène Clastres (1978, p. 59) also recognizes that there were “ecological and economic reasons [that] induced the Indians to seek new, more appropriate habitats, perhaps (but this would have to be demonstrated), to meet their needs.” Considering that the chroniclers’ testimonies do not demonstrate these ecological and “economic” reasons, he insists that “reasons of a mythical order could also associate the rich (or supposedly rich) lands with the Land Without Evil.”

consequences for hunting and fruit gathering. Thus, for Maestri (1994, p. 46), the migratory movement could not be explained solely by soil infertility—mitigated by the “quantities of mineral nutrients [that] [the burned trunks and branches released]”—but mainly “due to the depletion of the region’s food resources—hunting, fishing, gathering [...]”. It is, in short, the depletion of a set of natural conditions, which Fernandes calls the biosphere. Furthermore, Maestri (1994, p. 46) considers “that migration was also determined by the increasing degradation of the sanitary conditions of the environment in direct relation to the villages.”

Given this need, in relation to the material conditions of community existence, according to their customs, values, beliefs, and narratives, the fundamental motive for territorial displacements would not be the supposed prophetic promise of the Land Without Evil, promoted by *the karaíba* in opposition to the *morubixaba*, but the search for other biotic conditions of social life, through war, in which the *morubixaba*, without rivalry against the *karaíba*, but in alliance, play a fundamental role. These displacements seek, in appropriate territories, the maintenance and reproduction of communal life, in accordance with inherited customs, and not the “destruction of society” (Clastres, 2003, p. 231).²¹ They therefore fulfill a conservative function (whose meaning needs to be better explained), never a destructive one.

Following Pierre Clastres, Hélène Clastres (1978, p. 66) considers that the ultimate meaning of migration, the meaning that would be realized in the Land Without Evil, would be in the “abandonment of social norms,” since “abandoning a village and a territory is, simultaneously, renouncing the essential economic, social, and political activities that are intertwined in this space.”²² Approaching it to a certain spirit of May 1968 (*jourir sans entraves*, in the situationist cliché), Hélène Clastres (1978, p. 67) goes so far as to say that the so-called Land Without Evil is the “refusal of all prohibition,” interpreting the phrase “give your daughters to whoever you want” (Nóbrega, 2017, p. 86) as the defense that “no union is incestuous.” The prohibition of incest was a fundamental value of the Tupinambá people, as several

²¹ In an exchange of messages about the possible relationship between the myth of the Land Without Evil and migratory movement, the historian Mário Maestri wrote to me: “From the beginning, I never agreed with the explanations of the incessant mythical journeys. Studying African horticulture, very similar, yet superior to Tupinambá agriculture, [because] the Bantu people dominated metallurgy and generally had beef cattle, I learned about the tendency to deplete the fertility of unfertilized lands, the resources for gathering, the degradation of malocas, etc. Even if they had wanted to remain still, the Tupinambá could not. The dispute over coastal lands had a material, rather than symbolic, basis. The function of war in Tupinambá society was to have food.”

²² Pushing the envelope, Hélène Clastres interprets the reference in the chronicles to “the fame of the abundant land and sea of this province,” to “the abundance and fertility of this land,” to the Land Without Evil, which she herself defines as “the abode of immortality, accessible here and now.” And in this she falls into a tremendous contradiction, as observed by Pompa (1998, p. 58-59, my brackets): “[...] if in Tupi-Guarani philosophy the Land Without Evil [would be] precisely the place where the rules of society (work, marital exchange relations, the alternation of life/death) are annulled—that is, [it would be] the place of the programmatic destruction of society itself (evil), it is not understood how it could acquire this connotation of ‘fertility,’ a presupposition of that agricultural production that prophecy precisely wants to annul.”

chroniclers record, and there is no evidence of any discontent with this prohibition; quite the contrary, the respectful treatment of children aroused admiration among Europeans. Furthermore, the Tupinambá people did not in fact consider work a cultural value, preferring a life of little work and much rest (Gândavo, 1995, p. 99). For this reason, they greatly appreciated the tools brought by the Europeans, which allowed them to carry out certain agricultural and artisanal activities in less time (Salvador, 2007, p. 61-62). They also desired, after death, a life of rest and celebrations with their ancestors (as demonstrated by their adherence to the *karaíba* narratives in this regard). Thus, it is necessary to admit that, contrary to what Pierre and Hélène Clastres say, the posthumous land of the ancestors—in which there would be no work—would not be a place where social values and practices were dissolved, but rather the maximum realization of these values.

The interpretation of the conservative nature of migrations seems valid to me, even when Indigenous communities confront colonizers, with migration from the coast to the *sertão* being one of the forms of resistance to colonization, through the search for new territories, literally as far away as possible from colonial violence. This is also the interpretation of Florestan Fernandes (1976, p. 86, my brackets):

This alternative [from flight to isolation], in many aspects, represents the form of reaction to [colonial] conquest most consistent with the dynamic potential of the tribal organizational system. It shifted the struggle for survival and tribal autonomy to the ecological terrain [i.e., the search for a new biosphere]. The Tupi paid a high price for this solution, as they had to progressively adapt to increasingly poorer regions. But they managed, at least partially, to combine isolation with the preservation of their biological, social, and cultural heritage (Fernandes, 1976, p. 86).

It is this “preservation of their biological, social, and cultural heritage” that I described above as conservative. Fernandes’s interpretation, which seems entirely correct to me, directly conflicts with the unfounded thesis that the Tupinambá migrations—understood as the “search for the Land Without Evil”—are an “active rejection of society,” a quest for the “deliberate dissolution of society,” or a “suicidal” attitude (Clastres, 1978, p. 68).

From the anti-colonial and anti-slavery character of these migratory movements after the arrival of Europeans (making use of the traditional experience of migrations in search of territories suited to their way of life), the discourse of the *morubixaba* Momboreuasú, reported by Claude D’Abbeville in his chronicle about the French presence on the Island of Maranhão (1613-1614), constitutes a strong testimony:

I saw the arrival of the Però in Pernambuco and Potiú; and they began as you French do now. At first, the Però did nothing but roam without intending to settle down. At that time, they freely slept with the young women, which our companions from Pernambuco considered highly honorable. Later, they said we should get used to them and that they needed to build fortresses to defend themselves and build cities to live

with us. And so it seemed they wanted us to form a single nation. Then they began to say they could not take the young women just like that, that God only allowed them to possess them through marriage and that they could not marry without their being baptized. And for that, priests were needed. They sent for the priests; and they erected crosses and began to instruct our people and baptize them. Later, they stated that neither they nor the priests could live without slaves to serve them and work for them. And so, our people were forced to provide them. But not satisfied with the slaves captured in the war, they also wanted the children of our people and ended up enslaving the entire nation; *and they treated them with such tyranny and cruelty that those who remained free were, like us, forced to leave the region* (D' Abbeville, 1975, p. 115, my italics).²³

The traditional movement of seeking refuge in new lands, when expelled by other Indigenous groups, or of occupying other lands, expelling their previous occupants, was reinstated in the resistance to colonization. Based on this and other accounts by chroniclers, it does not seem credible to me that the migration reported by Gândavo²⁴—one of the leitmotifs of the defenders of a prophetic-religious motive for the Tupinambá migrations (Métraux, 1979, p. 183-18; Clastres, 1978, p. 60-61)—can be detached and independent from the increase in colonial violence, with land expropriation, environmental destruction, and enslavement, from 1534 onwards.²⁵ It is even possible that what happened with Gândavo, due to the same language barriers, is what happened with Nóbrega (2017, p. 84), in the passage cited above, confusing the *karaíba* transmission of the narrative of the posthumous land without work and without disease with a call to seek it in life, “here and now.” This report, in fact, is quite problematic, specifically when Gândavo alleges that the Tupinambá people had nothing to tie them to their lands, as if they were ecologically and culturally indifferent to their lands and were moved by the simple impulse of “always seeking new lands”...

Ronaldo Vainfas (2022, p. 81, I invert the periods in this quote), in his polemic with Hélène Clastres, states, regarding the wars, that “*Caraíbas* and warriors seemed to be united, and not rivals, in the pursuit of this project [of transforming the traditional *karaíba* call to war into a scenario and instrument of resistance to the colonizer].” That is, the previous ethical discourses of the *karaíba* aimed at mobilization for inter-Indigenous wars would have been maintained, and transformed, in the anti-colonial resistance, in a single and traditional unity of *karaíba* and *morubixaba*. Nothing close to a prophetic

²³ This is just the first part of the speech, which deserves to be read in its entirety.

²⁴ In the following passage: the “Indians of the land [...] as they do not have farms that keep them in their homelands, and their intention is none other than to always seek new lands, in order to find *immortality and perpetual rest* there, it happened that a few of them got up from their lands, and went into the *sertão* [...]” (Gândavo, 1995, p. 125, my italics).

²⁵ Métraux (1979, p. 184, my brackets) knows that his interpretation of the migration described by Gândavo does not align with what the author himself (in other, more precise passages of his chronicles) and other chroniclers assert about the Tupinambá migrations: “Most of the chroniclers who report on the migration of this kind [described in the previous note] point to its cause as the insatiable desire for war and adventure, so characteristic of the Tupinambá people. According to others, the fact was nothing more than an attempt to escape Portuguese domination.” The phrase “insatiable desire for war and adventure” can be implicitly understood to refer to traditional wars of an ecological nature, inseparable from traditional values regarding good land in which to live.

mobilization, led by the *karaíba*, “against the chieftainship in a sense, if not explicitly; for, in any case, it had destructive effects on the power of the chiefs [*sic*, that is, of the *morubixaba*]” (Clastres, 2003, p. 215).

This transformation would be no less true regarding migrations (as a form of resistance to colonization) and the function, currently related to them, of the supposed (according to Métraux and the Clastres) promise of a land of delights in life (which traditionally has a posthumous character). The few records that *might suggest* (for these interpreters) this shift do not, however, allow us to take it as certain, nor to universalize it. It is more reasonable to admit that most, if not all, of the flights from the coast to the *sertão*, and within the *sertão*, occurred without it. Strictly speaking, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there are only three Tupinambá migrations cited by Clastres (1978, p. 60-65), among those recorded by chroniclers, which supposedly occurred under a discourse comparable to the Land Without Evil of the twentieth-century Guaraní: the one narrated by Gândavo (1995, p. 125), which is quite questionable (see above); that of 1605-1606 (d’Abbeville, 1975, p. 65-73), led by the Portuguese, which has all the appearance of merely a gross manipulation of the discourses of the true *karaíba* by white adventurers; and, finally, one narrated by Yves D’Évreux (2009, p. 452-454), when a *karaíba* called on Indigenous people from the Northeast to “follow him in order to take possession of a beautiful land in which, naturally, everything would be as they wished without them having any hassle or work” (D’Évreux, 2009, p. 454). Quite possibly, d’Abbeville (1975, p. 65), who was on the Island of Maranhão during the same period as D’Évreux, refers to this last migration when he tells us that “the Tupinambá Indians, who previously lived in the Tropic of Capricorn, had taken refuge on the Island of Maranhão to escape Portuguese rule.” In this case, the fundamental motive is resistance to colonial slavery, even if mediated by discourses of a land “as they desired” and “without hassle or work” What does this mean? Without compulsory labor? D’Évreux says nothing about this, but there is no justification for identifying it with the *yvy moraneĩ* of the Guaraní people of the twentieth century.

There are numerous reports of Tupinambá migrations driven either by conflicts between Indigenous communities or due to the actions of colonizers, whereas migratory movements of which we have record are very rare (and not at all convincing) and which theorists of the Land Without Evil among the Tupinambá interpret as driven by the search, *hic et nunc*, for a land without misfortune, disease, death, and work, where one can *jouir sans entrantes*.

IV. Final considerations

The difficulties of the theses put forth by Métraux, Pierre Clastres, and Hélène Clastres, which, in dialogue with Meliá, Fernandes, Maestri, and Pompa (I believe I have suggested above), have as a common basis the interpretation of Tupinambá beliefs, narratives, and rituals as a prophetic religion, focused on critiquing and disrupting current ways of life. In their expositions, the supposed Tupinambá

prophetism constitutes a phenomenon of its own, to the point that, in Pierre Clastres and H  l  ne Clastres, it becomes independent, opposed to the “political,” and ultimately socially destructive.²⁶

Hélène Clastres has the advantage, as I stated above, of seeking to counter -argue the sixteenth-century chroniclers, polemically revisiting the obstacles they present regarding the existence of a religion among the Tupinambá people. However, the general thesis from which she begins, the thesis that religious discourse constitutes a “discourse about man and the world—and also a society’s discourse about itself” (Clastres, 1978, p. 12), or even that “religion is a set of beliefs that can be expressed in multiple ways: verbal expression (myths, prayers, etc.), gestural expression (rites, attitudes...), material expression (temples, objects of worship, figurative representations of divinities)” (Clastres, 1978, p. 12), is, due to its abstraction, insufficient to support the entire interpretation that it proposes regarding Tupinambá myths, rites, and beliefs as prophetic-religious.

First, because, as is evident, the discourses that a society makes about humans, the world, and itself (this has always been the function of traditional narratives, for example) are not necessarily religious (in our societies, they can be philosophical, scientific); equally, in accordance with these discourses, the narratives, the rites, the daily attitudes, the beliefs (representations) that move individuals in community do not constitute, per se, a religious form (strictly speaking, there is no society without guiding narratives, beliefs, and rites).

In the absence of a conceptual justification, it is therefore legitimate to suspect that the interpretation and naming of these community practices as religion, especially in their prophetic orientation, are based on biased notions, either preconceived interpretations that take them externally, based on the European experience of religion (although modifying it in its determinations), or the naive, albeit well-intentioned, idea that ritual practices, based on beliefs and narratives, necessarily constitute a religion, construed as an index of culture or civilization.

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²⁶ Florestan Fernandes (1952, p. 66), despite accepting the existence of a religion among the Tupinambá people, in Métraux's terms, does not make it autonomous or situate it as a separate phenomenon, given that, as Meliá does regarding the Guaraní, he articulates it entirely with the whole of social life: "religious values [...] completely penetrated the web of intra- and intertribal relations, thus encompassing even relations of an adaptive [i.e., biotic] nature." For the difference between Fernandes' functionalist and Meliá's ethnohistorical perspectives, see Pompa (1998).

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AQUINO, João Emiliano Fortaleza de; SOARES, Domingos Perpetuo Alves. The Myth of the Land Without Evil and the Tupinambá People. *Kalagatos*, Fortaleza, vol.22, n.3, 2025, eK25033, p. 01-21.

Received: 08/2025

Approved: 09/2025