

Ownership and Nurture in Native Amazonian Property Relations

by MARC BRIGHTMAN, CARLOS FAUSTO,
VANESSA GROTTI

Foreword by JAMES LEACH

Ownership and Nurture makes a stimulating contribution to general anthropological theory and to specific recent debates in lowland South American anthropology. . . I have no doubt it will provoke lively and engaged debate.

KATHLEEN LOWREY, University of Alberta

This book addresses the classic anthropological theme of property through the ethnography of Amazonia. *Ownership and Nurture* sets new and challenging agendas for anthropological debates about the region and about property in general. Property and ownership have special significance and carry specific meanings in Amazonia, which has been portrayed as the antithesis of Western, industrial-based, civilization. Through carefully constructed studies of land, labor, slavery, shamanism, spirit mastery, aesthetics and intellectual property, this volume demonstrates that property relations are of central importance in Amazonia, and that the ownership of persons plays an especially significant role in native cosmology.

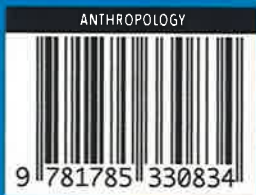
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OWNERSHIP AND NURTURE

OWNERSHIP STUDIES IN NATIVE AMAZONIAN AND PROPERTY RELATIONS NURTURE

Edited by
**MARC BRIGHTMAN
CARLOS FAUSTO
VANESSA GROTTI**



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*Studies in Native Amazonian
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CHAPTER 9

Temporalities of Ownership

*Land Possession and Its Transformations
among the Tupinambá (Bahia, Brazil)*

Susana de Matos Viegas

Land is generally conceived by Indians as something inalienable; any report of their selling and buying it under aboriginal conditions is suspect.
—Robert Lowie, 'Property among the Tropical Forest and Marginal Tribes'

But all property necessarily originated in prescription, or, as the Latins say, in *usucapion*, that is, by continuous possession. I ask in the first place, then, how possession can become property by the lapse of time [only]? Continue possession as long as you wish, keep it for years and for centuries, but you can never give duration, which by itself creates nothing, changes nothing, and modifies nothing, the power to transform the usufructuary into a proprietor.
—Pierre Joseph Proudhon, 'What Is Property?'

The epigraphs to this chapter refer to two debates that normally do not enter into mutual dialogue. On the one hand, Robert Lowie (1949: 351), writing about property in the *Handbook of South American Indians* in the 1940s, describes ownership in lowland South America, arguing that 'under aboriginal conditions', land would be an inalienable space. Reflecting on various sources, ranging from observations by naturalist Wied-Neuwied on the Botocudos living in the south of Bahia in the nineteenth century, Manizer on the Kaingang in southern Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century or the Yecuaana in Amazonia, Lowie argues that for indigenous peoples of lowland South America, various factors elicit an 'impermanence of ownership' particularly concerning the land. Very occasional exceptions occur: for instance, among the Cubeo, who predominantly engage in fishing, 'each Cubeo clan jealously guards its fishing rights along the river frontages' (355). However, a more frequent situation in the lives of indigenous peoples in lowland South America, Lowie argues, is possession of certain areas of cultivated land for only short periods of time, due either

to ecological circumstances resulting from slash-and-burn agriculture, or to dislocations associated with death (355). Dwelling places burned down in the wake of their inhabitant's death are thus among the relevant aspects that on occasion 'force' displacement and cyclical abandonment of these places. On the other hand, Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) – a key figure of the opposition to liberal conceptions of property – argued in the first half of the nineteenth century that not even 'continued possession' would justify property of land: 'Who is entitled to the rent of the land? The producer of the land, no doubt. But who made the land? God. Therefore, proprietor, retire!' (Proudhon 1994: 71). Thereby, an analytical window is opened to consider how time, or specific temporalities of possession, can intervene in the historical diversity of land ownership in Lowland South America.

In this chapter I approach experiences of land possession and their transformations, integrating anthropological traditions arising out of Lowie's preoccupations and those inserted in the philosophy of social life in which property was immersed by authors such as Proudhon. I address and re-evaluate continued occupation of land as a criterion for determining ownership, but my analytical path clearly diverges from Proudhon's comparative political philosophy, aiming instead to seek out concepts 'that might correspond to what is understood in other traditions as property' (Brightman 2010: 136). I deal here specifically with experiences of land possession among the Tupinambá of Olivença, a population regarded as 'mixed blood' in multiple different respects that resides in an area of the Atlantic Forest in the south of Bahia, where they first settled in a Jesuit-controlled indigenous village in the early period of Brazil's colonization.¹ Their long-term experience of dealing with colonizers, the land privatization in the region and their inhabitation of the Atlantic coast rather than the Amazon region distinguish their case from Amazonian situations discussed in other chapters of this book.

Based on ethnographic descriptions of the different historical instances and meanings of possession developed by the Tupinambá, I will discuss temporalities illuminated by the contrast between the Gê and the Tupi, as framed long ago by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1985). In a well-known text, the authors enunciate a Tupi-like philosophy of time that does not have recourse to a 'return to an Origin', but inversely configures an 'order of creation and production' in which time is 'institutive, not instituted or re-constituent', 'an openness to the other, places distant and the beyond: towards death as a necessary positivity. It is, in sum, *a way of fabricating the future*'² (205). In this text the debate around Tupi temporalities emerges as an alternative reinterpretation of functionalist perspectives of cannibalism and revenge among the Tupinambá in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, proposing that

'revenge', as it appears associated with cannibalism, should not be seen as a function of another ordering of the social (i.e. war, or the need to restore order through retaliation), but rather as an indicator of the very type of Tupi meanings of historicity: 'Tupinambá revenge is mostly a way of speaking about the past and the future'; it is a temporality 'which does not point to the beginning of times but rather to their end', in the form of a longing for future immortality (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985: 198, 200).

My intention, in bringing this debate about the sixteenth-century Tupinambá into an ethnographic understanding of the Tupinambá's sense of possession of land in the present day, is not in any way to reify their history. Instead I invoke this as a theoretical device that sheds light on temporalities of land ownership among the Tupinambá of Olivença. I will argue that among these Tupinambá, resettling – abandoning a house site and opening a new one by cutting the forest – is entangled with aspects of life that can be illuminated by what Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro (1985: 203) call a Tupi-like temporality, where 'memory is in the service of a destination, not of an origin; of a future and not of a past'. These temporal parameters are also present in the analysis of ownership among the Trio living in Suriname (Brightman 2010). In contrast, a Gê-like temporality is spatialized, in the sense that space mirrors the past, the present and the future 'within the circumscribed limits of the village', where 'everything has its place' – or even further, 'everything *is* place; immutable place exorcises time' (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985: 201–2). A third contrast of temporalities could be envisaged through socialities of exchange like the ones described by Bonilla, Gordon and Fausto (each in this volume), where distribution is constitutive of cycles of renewed duration.

Rather than searching for a tupinization of the Tupinambá of Olivença's sense of land possession, my argument in this chapter suggests that those temporal parameters are not only an integral part of the Tupinambá's living in the world – in the sense discussed by Toren (1999) – but also part of the understanding of their articulation with the historical process of land privatization in the region. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Viegas 2007, 2011a), in the period from the mid-1930s until 1970, when demand for land in Olivença was peaking due to the rise of cacao prices on the international market, among other factors, the Tupinambá sustained exchanges with non-indigenous people, based on equivocations about the meaning of plots of land. These exchanges, which resulted in 'equivocal compatibilities' between the parties concerned and those who acted as intermediaries in the register of land titles (Pina-Cabral 2002; Viegas 2007, 2011b),³ implied the Tupinambá's surrender of swidden areas and even

dwelling spaces that were destined to be abandoned anyway and therefore had relatively low value for the Tupinambá (Viegas 2007: 237–34, 2011b). This, then, set in motion a process of transformational historicity of land possession. In fact, as Peter Gow (2001) and Fausto and Heckenberger (2007) argued, a 'transformational model' of historicity reveals mutual implications of continuity and change, 'without resorting to romantic motifs ... which suppose self-similarity across time' (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007: 10; Viegas 2012). Applied to the theme of land possession, this approach contains a reflection on different facets of the same motor of history. It implies considering relationships between different agents in multiple political encounters while also regarding the environment as a lived place.

Personalized, Transitory Possessions

The territory the Tupinambá currently occupy includes numerous different socio-ecological zones across an area of five hundred square kilometres. Exploration of the lived experience of the Tupinambá reveals that the more circumspect, small, kin-based dwelling places dispersed in this area, which they call *lugares*, are core aspects of their sociality (Viegas 2011b). These dwellings incorporate a set of places, namely, *casas* (houses) encompassing dwelling buildings, *quintais* (vegetable gardens) situated in the backyards of houses, *córregos* (water ponds), *roças* (swiddens) for cultivating root crops, and *casas de farinha* (flour houses) – buildings where manioc flour is processed. Pathways interconnect each of these elements with others. Each Tupinambá dwelling places is small in area, with an average size of only two hectares. Despite its small size, each *lugar* may have three, four, or occasionally five or six houses, each household tending a swidden cultivated exclusively by its members. Manioc is the most common crop in the swiddens, although beans, pumpkin, maize and yams are also found.

For the Tupinambá, the dynamics of affects and the process of growing up are heavily concentrated in these small-scale, kin-based dwellings. In their everyday life, children who live in the same *lugar* move freely between houses as they play and bathe together in the water ponds, prepare manioc roots, compete to get an adult's attention and experience the affective dynamics between relatives, mostly sustained in feeding practices (Viegas 2003, 2007, 2012; see also Brightman and Grotti this volume; Costa this volume). As soon as they learn to walk, they move between houses to play. From the baby's viewpoint, growing up involves wriggling free of one's mother's arms and joining siblings, who live in the same house, and cousins, who live in other houses in the same dwelling place. It

is rare for small children to visit other *lugares*; this occurs only on special occasions. Children begin to move about more freely and go further afield when they are between nine and eleven (Viegas 2003, 2011b).

People who reside in these dwellings or *lugares* may move to other sites several times in their lives for many different reasons, including conjugal separations, the development cycle of domestic groups, and most certainly when a close relative who lives in the same *lugar* actually dies. Conjugal ruptures outline a social imaginary of moving women and fixed men. Thus, regardless of how a husband and wife began their courtship, when conjugal ties break down it is most frequently heard (and surprising to people from other regions) that it is the woman who has left (*largam*) her partner. In fact, women and men easily seem able to argue that women have a natural tendency to flee their husbands, even to the extent of abandoning their children. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, such formulations configure gender dynamics with a heavy emphasis on the intimacy developed around the kin-based dwellings and therefore tend to describe affine relationships through experiences of movement (Viegas 2007: 164–67, 2008, 2011b).

The pathways running across the dwelling places offer a suggestive image of shared and individualized possession of different spaces. Thus, there is generally a single pathway to access the water ponds, which are shared by the set of houses, while individual pathways connect each house to its own swidden; yet other pathways link the backyards of each house (Figure 9.1)

Sentiments of possession vary along those different spaces. For example, the sense of possession of one swidden by the members of only one household is explicit, particularly when manioc flour processing occurs. Grinding manioc to make flour is a cooperative effort by people from several houses, but the final processed manioc flour always returns to the household that owns the swidden where the manioc was grown. Within a dwelling, each house's possession of its own swidden is a core feature of sociality among the Tupinambá. Sharing the raw products of a swidden is thus hardly imaginable for them.

This house-based possession of swiddens contrasts with the image of communal property that is frequently deployed in projects for producing food via collective swiddens (*roças coletivas*) run by NGOs and Catholic Church organizations in rural and indigenous areas in Brazil.⁴ These projects promote collective labour to cultivate the *roça*. As such this is not problematic, but the projects also presume communal sharing of the cultivated crops, which is indeed most problematic for the Tupinambá. In projects previously implemented in the region, each individual would go independently to the swidden and harvest what he or she had grown, instead of sharing the total collected crops. Episodes of this sort were con-

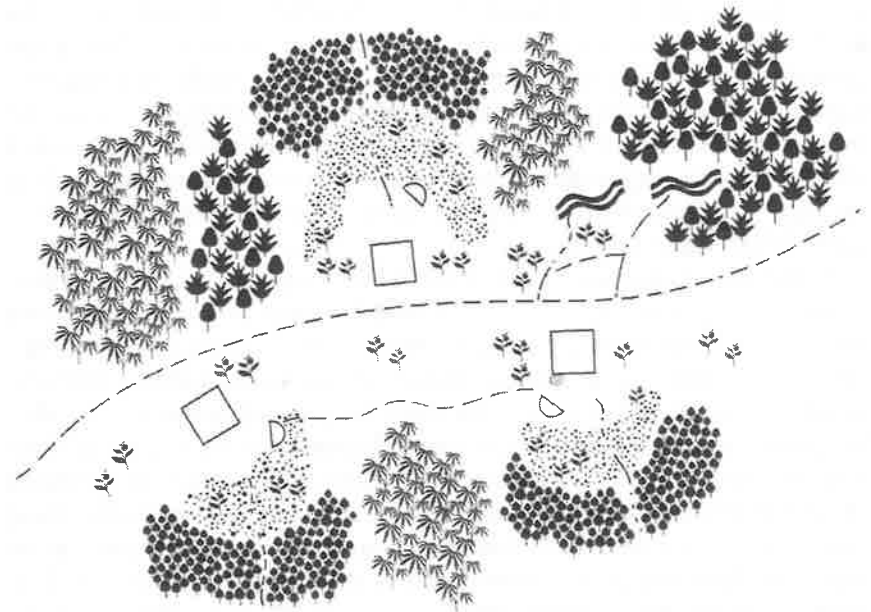


Figure 9.1 A dwelling place. Diagram by Susana de Matos Viegas

veyed to me time and again by both Tupinambás and project promoters. In fact, the project promoters had initially expected the Tupinambá to accept collective swidden cultivations in the same way other rural peoples had elsewhere in Brazil. Their references are genuine and can easily be identified in the anthropological literature. Among riverine peasants, for instance, communal harvesting has been observed and constitutes a 'moral sense of community' (Harris 2000: 74–75; Lima 2004). In those contexts we may even find a traditional model of land tenure based on a notion of 'collective ownership'. Nevertheless, the idea may persist that *roças* are owned by those who tend them, or more specifically 'those who have cleared the forest to plant *roças*' (Lima 2004: 13).

The more personalized, individualized sense of possession that prevails among the Tupinambá ultimately dooms these collectively based projects. This has also been the case with many other projects of the same nature implemented in other regions, which similarly presumed communal possession and usually failed when the crop or object resulting from communal work was supposed to be shared. Among the Kaxinawá in the 1980s, Cecilia McCallum observed the failure of one such project that involved sharing a motor boat, noting that in the first phase, as long as the motor

was used individually by people who paid for its fuel, the project was unproblematic for the Kaxinawá (McCallum 2001: 123). Only when the motor boat broke down and it became necessary to decide who should carry the burden of its repair did problems arise. The underlying idea that it belonged to all implied that no individual was in charge of its control and care (McCallum 2001: 92, 123). The sentiment of possession as a form of control/responsibility over others is relevant here, approaching findings from elsewhere in lowland South America (Brightman 2010; Costa 2010; Fausto 2008).

In the case of land possession, it is broadly recognized throughout Brazil that the right to harvest crops is held by those who have cultivated them – even in areas owned by someone else. The ownership of cultivated crops falls within a long-standing legal tradition of *usucapion*, based specifically on the ‘acquisition of rights over land through its cultivation’, that has prevailed in Brazilian property rights legislation since the colonial period (Motta 2009: 16). Diverse ethnographies have shown the incidence of variants of these rights of ownership through the cultivation of plots of land very often identified as *benfeitorias* (‘improvements’). Even in regions where the land has been concentrated in the hands of owners of great estates since the outset of the colonial era, as on the sugarcane plantations in Pernambuco, smallholders acquired rights to the ownership of land by cultivating and harvesting its fruits. For this reason, as anthropologists working in the region of Pernambuco have shown, the cultivation of swiddens by resident paid labourers (*moradores*) on large estates was frequently banned by some landowners to keep the cultivators from gaining effective rights of ownership over that land (Herédia 1979).⁵

In actuality, the recognition of property rights over cultivated crops as a *benfeitoria* is a key element of Brazilian land law. When a piece of land is recognized as ‘land occupied traditionally by Indians’, all non-indigenous occupants must leave the area, and previously issued titles to that land are declared null and void, though the former owners of these titles are compensated for their *benfeitorias* (‘improvements’). These are the so-called compensation rights (*direitos de indenização*) (Constitution, section 231, 6 in Constitution 2010: 152–153). In these cases the land is declared traditionally owned by the Indians, so the valuation of this compensation takes into consideration not the extent of the area previously owned by non-indigenous occupants, which is neglected as such, but rather the existing number of fruit trees (or rubber trees, or cacao trees etc.) that are considered *benfeitorias* of previous non-indigenous occupants.

The Tupinambá clearly perceive an overlap between this generalized right of possession to whatever is cultivated on a particular piece of land and their own sense of personalized possession, mostly of cultivated products. In 1998, I witnessed concrete situations in which people changed

their residence to another location and thus abandoned cultivated land but then, when the manioc was expected to be fully mature, returned to the *roça* to harvest its last manioc. Seldom do third parties usurp these crops, as it would also be unusual for the individuals who cultivated the *roça* not to harvest them, exemplifying a sense of possession that is simultaneously exclusively possessed, and personalized.

The personalized sense of possession among the Tupinambá is even more prevalent in the case of the *quintal* (garden). Located close to one of the building’s entranceways, the garden is usually planted with herbs for seasoning food (especially annatto, *Bixa orellana*), herbs for healing purposes, fruit trees and flowers. Unlike the swiddens, which are perceived as the joint possession of all the home’s occupants, each garden is associated with one particular person. This is normally the woman who most often cooks at the house’s fireplace. She tends the garden and bears the main responsibility for everything inherent to its maintenance. In a very literal sense, a garden projects the person who tends it – to the point that it may perish with the gardener, as I heard in the explicit formulation ‘when the person dies, the garden dies with her’.

The possession of a garden is personalized to the point that it ceases to exist when the life of the person who tends it ends. It is not expected to remain as an asset to be inherited by the next generation. I built up an understanding of this sense of a finite, transitory possession in various different ways, one of which became particularly revealing. This occurred when I served as a messenger in a request to exchange plants between a non-indigenous woman who was my friend and lived in an urban house in a town far from the Tupinambá, and a Tupinambá woman who was my host in the inland rural area. My friend in town requested cuttings to complete a herb garden in her own backyard, as she was already advanced in age and felt she was approaching the end of her life. Confessing her great desire to complete her own *quintal* with different plants that were missing, so that her nephews would inherit as complete a garden as possible – a situation that was common in town – she asked me to obtain those plants from my host in the Tupinambá area. I transmitted the message in these exact terms to my host, who happened to be a distant relative of my town friend. Her reaction was very illuminating: she immediately sharply accused the elderly woman from town of a certain degree of ignorance. First, she neither had nor could ever have had those herbs in her garden, as the requested type of plant grew well only near the coastline (where the town actually lies), not inland in the forest-rural region. In addition, she considered it absurd to presume that a garden could survive the death of the one who cared for it and concluded: ‘I don’t know what [she] means by this; but a ‘herb-garden’ (*jardim de quintal*) ... Well, when the person dies, the garden goes with her.’

Possession of a garden is thus associated with looking after, or having the responsibility for, a given thing. In the case of *quintais*, this entails an extreme personalization. Not only does the garden perish when its gardener dies, but any disease afflicting a plant or even the sudden death of a plant extends to whoever tends it. People may explain the death of a common rue bush as the result of an evil eye cast (*mau-olhado*) on the herbs by someone who is jealous of the woman who tends that garden and her home. To attack plants in a garden is therefore a way of attacking the person who looks after it.⁶ This extension of personhood to the garden can be understood as a principle linking creativity and ownership, similar to that by which some sort of vital substance is passed from the maker to the made object (Santos-Granero this volume).

Among the Tupinambá of Olivença, the temporal finitude of possession (implying a sense of transitory possession) applies to gardens as well as to swiddens. Gardens are perishable because they do not survive the death of their tender. Swiddens are perishable because they have a limited life cycle. They are attached to households, which, as I will detail in the next section, shift cyclically. Neither gardens nor swiddens are plots of land conceived as items with heritability or alienability – two elements of possession that are equivalent to each other and exogenous to the Tupinambá. As we shall see, this idea of a temporality grounded more in finite cycles than in cycles of continuity that bear marks of sites inhabited in the past, is replicated in several other dimensions in the lives of the Tupinambá of Olivença.

Personalized possession of *quintais* and its strong identification with the world of women have been observed in other Brazilian contexts, both peasant and indigenous. Recent ethnographic works emphasizing a feminine perspective and based on ethnography of daily life are particularly sensitive to these dimensions of possession. For instance, Juliana de Machado (2012) presented an ethnographic view of how women in Caviana in the Amazon basin have a personalized sense of possession regarding the plants they cultivate in *canteiros* (a kind of backyard garden). Possession of *canteiros* by Caviana women has two meanings that are close to what I described above for the Tupinambás' *quintais*. The first concerns the differentiated senses of possession between *canteiros* and swiddens (*roças*): 'a plant can either belong exclusively to a woman, if it grows in a *canteiro*, or be shared with men, when it is located in *terreiros*, *sítios* or *roças*' (Machado 2012: 173). The second is more about the personalized identification of one woman with the *canteiro/quintal* that belongs to her, insofar as tending and exchanging plants are acts that simultaneously guarantee possession and enhance the value of female personhood (178, 184, 211). As Machado shows, women elders who are no longer capable of tending their garden, and no longer managing to exchange plants with female neighbours and relatives, fall into self-deprecation of their moral

personhood, to the point of claiming they have become useless (*não presto mais*) (173–83).

The practices Machado observed in Caviana are distinguished from those I describe here for the Tupinambá of Olivença by the aspect of temporality. Machado's ethnography shows the centrality of continuity more than of finite cycles of possession of land, implying a sense of transitory possession. The identification between *canteiros* and women in Caviana seems to be inscribed in a matrix of continuing transmission over generations – at least with daughters, who learn from their mothers how to tend their plants, which they also receive from elders (Machado 2012: 182). Later I will return to this significant comparative element.

Cycles of Abandonment and Re-opening of New Places

Observation over a longer time period demonstrates that at least until the 1970s Tupinambá undertook cyclical displacement, heading up the branches of rivers and streams. As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay and have developed elsewhere, this means that from the 1930s, during the period of land privatization in the region, cycles of abandonment and foundation of new kinship settlements were able to continue (Viegas 2007: 237–74, 2011a). Thus, privatization did not immediately wipe out a particular way of life. In many cases, the Tupinambá entered directly into relationships of 'exchange', sometimes based upon debt bondage with parties interested in the acquisition of land. Those who served as intermediaries for landowners affirm that the 'caboclos' (Tupinambá) would hand over their areas of residence in exchange for items of little value, such as *cachaça* (sugarcane spirit) or equivalent assets like mirrors and kerosene that nowadays they tend to regard as much less valuable than land. For the Tupinambá, the plots of land exchanged in this way in the past were devalued because they were temporary residential spaces destined to be eventually abandoned – thus, transitory possessions (Viegas 2007: 265–68).

The compatibility between the Tupinambá's meanings of transitory possession and capitalist landowners' estates diminished in the 1970s, when the Tupinambá began running out of space to continue carrying out these displacements, due certainly to the increased price of cacao internationally and the subsequent expansion of the landed ownership interests behind the estates in the region.⁷ Before the 1970s, exchanges of plots of land and displacements of kin-based dwellings were intertwined. The Tupinambá repeat life narratives of their past displacements every five to eight years, telling of places of habitation they then left behind. These narratives show that such displacements always involved short distances covered in one hour on foot, on average. I heard several stories of how in the

past people would plant 'a little there and a little here', living in a certain place only for a while (five, six, eight years) and then moving: 'He'd head off into the jungle and open up a clearing and go and live there.' Genealogical diagrams of close kin exemplify the effects of displacement on the dispersion of members across the scope of their kin network (Figure 9.2).

The Tupinambá do not perceive this dispersion solely as a result of pressure from estate owners. The absence of new areas to move to is instead felt to result from a complex history. The movement once associated with abandoning inhabited sites and opening new ones is now mirrored in the movement of the houses on the same site of inhabited *lugares*. Nowadays, after a time of absence from a kin-based dwelling site (as I observed when I returned after more than a year) changes in the number of houses there are clearly apparent. 'Dismantled' houses are slowly absorbed back into the forest. The land returns to forest, and the reordering of houses and reconfiguration of space in the new houses all make it difficult to know just where somebody lived or who was living in each settlement at a particular point in time. This is connected to the cyclical process of abandoning houses that then merge back into the forest. The Tupinambá use a very descriptive expression in reference to abandoned homes and their reconstitution: an abandoned house is said to have been 'left isolated' (*deixada isolada*), because it becomes disconnected from daily human care and reverts to forest.

A house that stops being inhabited is no longer cared for. The daily brushing of the mud floor in front of each house ends, weeds are not kept

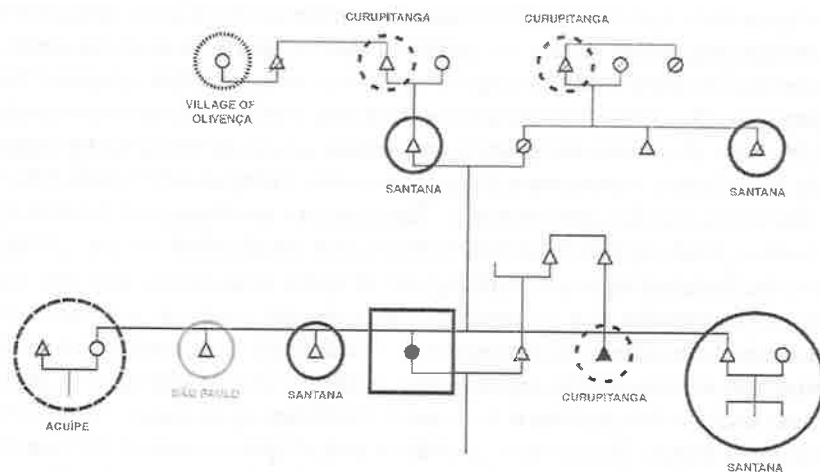


Figure 9.2 Genealogical diagram showing distant places of residence in the territory. Diagram by Susana de Matos Viegas

at bay and, in a terrain that has to be trodden to be deemed living and inhabited, the pathways connecting the house with other houses begin to fade.⁸ Houses are ephemeral clay buildings, called *casas de sopapo* (Figure 9.3). Despite knowing techniques enabling greater clay durability (e.g. 'working' the clay well and taking it from the subsoil – 'from the nests of biting ants', as they say – to better withstand the rain and the heat, or treading it firmly), the Tupinambá do not necessarily apply them. One of the typical sounds of a clay house, when there is otherwise total silence, is the sound of small grains of dried clay dropping downwards inside the walls. The greater the level of structural 'degradation', the louder this noise becomes.⁹

Faced with the slow but no less inevitable process of the building's destruction, its inhabitants' most frequent attitude is to cover the biggest breaches using a range of materials, very often the remains of cloth or plastic. On certain walls of the home, especially the wall nearest the fireplace and garden, these cracks in the clay become ideal niches for storing utilitarian objects. The walls of a *sopapo* house thus have the appearance of stick structures dotted with objects of diverse origin – knives, pieces of cloth and very commonly newspapers and bits of black plastic – stuck in amidst clay filling.

This attitude towards buildings has been described in other indigenous and rural contexts in Brazil. Patrick Menget gave an accurate description in his monograph on the Txicão in the Xingu (2001: 145). Highlighting



Figure 9.3 A nonplastered *casa de sopapo* or *casa de taipa de mão*. Bahia, Brazil, 1998. Photo: Susana de Matos Viegas

that the Txicão have no great sense of durability in houses, which last on average between two and five years, Menget (ibid.) describes how the Txicão do not consider the house a building whose preservation is worth great care; in fact, they 'easily rip up bunches of herbs at the bottom of the wall to throw onto the fire and any accidental burning down of a house represents an incident of little importance as they only need a few weeks of work to build themselves a new place of habitation'.

According to the Tupinambá, when a house's clay begins to break up, the building is said to be 'falling apart'. The performance of the clays in the support pole framework varies, but they all inevitably dry out, break up and turn to dust. In the same area of residence, it is therefore common to find new buildings going up at another location chosen within the same *lugar* as the 'envaramento' (structural construction) of vines and soil begins. On completion of this phase, inhabitants move in, often bringing with them the roofing of their former house as they now often have resistant fibrocement roofs that are able to outlast more than one clay structure.

The effects of the processes of 'isolating' buildings (*casas isoladas*) are observable within the scope of the currently inhabited terrains. In some areas, the current house might be just half a dozen paces away from that the one undergoing abandonment. However, moving the building leaves a physical trace in the abandoned site in the form of holes up to two metres deep, dug in order to extract the clay used for each building (Figure 9.4).



Figure 9.4 The hole from which clay was extracted for a home in a kin-based dwelling. Acuípe, Bahia, Brazil, 2004. Photo: Susana de Matos Viegas

The terrain surrounding kin-based settlements may thus be transformed into a complex grid of fruit trees, gardens, clay buildings and holes in the ground, which all contribute to the circulatory character and effects of the residential dynamic.

Land Possession and Its Transformations

One outcome of the land privatization from the 1930s to the 1970s was an effective restriction of the space available for the Tupinambá to open new kin-based settlements.¹⁰ In this section, I will further detail how abandonments and rebuildings occurring through displacement – which in the past meant movement of kin-based dwellings – have steadily been transformed into movement of houses within the same dwelling place. This is particularly clear in attitudes towards death and the extension of people and places through life and death.

Among the Tupinambá, the death of a person is reflected in the 'death', degradation or destruction of the individual's home. The death of somebody in a home may contribute to the degradation of the building and may likewise impinge upon the health of its members. The dead may disturb living relatives with visits to the house where they lived, normally preannounced by noises (e.g. footsteps next to the house) or names called out by doorways or open windows. Some Tupinambá deny this occurs but simultaneously insist that many people believe in 'ghosts and apparitions'. The ideas that the house remembers the dead, and that the dead can meet the living through the house's intermediation, meet with greater consensus. In fact, contact between the dead and the living is recurrently described in reference to the place of residence. The closest relatives of the deceased refer to their dead kin as consubstantiated in the sensation of 'an air' that passes through the house and enters through doorways. At dusk, the time most propitious to such sensations, they lock the house's door.¹¹

The son of a man who had passed away told me that he avoided going past his father's house, particularly at dusk. He felt 'shivers' but insisted that I should not consider this to be out of fear as he did not believe that his father would 'haunt' (*assombrasse*) him – the sensation was uniquely about 'remembrance' (*lembrança*). The term remembrance was also insistently used by the mother of a young man who was only 28 years old when he died in 1998. At that time, she and I were living in the same kin-based dwelling. She very vividly described to me how she sensed her son's death through the intermediation of the house environment. The son had passed away in her house after having been released from hospital. After he died, his presence was felt not only in her own house, but also in the house where he had lived with his wife and two children in another dwell-

ing place about ten kilometres away. As we sat inside his mother's house, where the death had occurred, the mother began talking about her dead son, saying that on a certain occasion after he had died, at dusk – 'in the mouth of night' – she and her mother and daughter were at home when they felt a strong wind and, simultaneously, his presence. She said that she had not seen him, explaining that this was not a vision but something that she had felt (like shivers). The sister of the deceased, who was by the window, heard the sound of flip-flops on the floor and the dead man calling her by her name. He called but once. Afterwards, she turned to listen to the wind blowing in the direction of the house where he lived with his wife. Days later, she continued, the wife of the deceased told her that on that same night, a strong wind had brought her dead husband to pass by there at her home. Seeing my concern, the mother assured me that this would only happen in the six months after someone's death and would then stop. The dead only reappear because people 'go on remembering'. And here lies a dilemma: though it is necessary to forget, she said, we end up 'always remembering'. 'Remembrance' is, after all, among the affective ties that define kinship and that need overcoming, at least partially, when faced with death. This dilemma has received particularly incisive treatment in Amerindian ethnology, in particular in the wake of Anne Christine Taylor's essay (1993) on the Jívaro Achuar.

Among the Tupinambá, people sometimes do continue to live in the house after the death of a relative there, despite the possibility of 'remembering' the departed is greater. Failing to abandon a building carries risks, as illustrated by the case of a widow who remained throughout an entire year in the house where her husband had died. She was stubborn and wanted to remain there even in the face of reprimands and criticism from her children. Eventually her children dismantled the house, that is to say, 'isolated' it. They afterwards explained to me that they had done so because the widow was 'practically dead'; they had saved her by giving her homemade herbal medicines and taking her to a medical doctor, but also by taking her out of the house where her husband had passed away and bringing her to one of her children's homes.

I heard many reports about abandoning a space or a house, and ideally destroying it, as a means of continuing with life after the death of somebody close. In some cases the house is destroyed and rebuilt nearby; in others people depart for periods of variable length, especially when the deceased person was a particular close kin or elder – thus leaving longer memories in his kin.¹² Abandoning the place of habitation is a way of breaking with connections of life, that is, the 'remembrance' bound up with the body as a bundle of affections that provoke shivers, headaches and other sensations. From the perspective of the living, the places where the dead lived return to the forest, just as the sites of these abandoned

houses revert to secondary forest growth. This reversion of abandoned environments to the forest allows the jettisoning of the social and affective and even human ballast bound up with the departed person.

The same sense behind the abandonment of habitation spaces following a family member's death is found in various indigenous contexts across lowland South America.¹³ For example, among the Piro, 'the site once inhabited is densely overgrown with new forest, and people must search about for paths leading to new houses' (Gow 1991: 189). In his study of 'acculturated' indigenous people in the Atlantic north-east, Eduardo Galvão (1979) attributes dislocations to the limitations of swidden horticulture. However, he mentions in a footnote that 'death and belief in the supernatural' do in some cases definitively influence dislocation and movements of villages and kinship settlements (1979: 233). In other Amerindian indigenous contexts, it is rare to return to a previous place of residence, though the Yaminawa represent one example (Calavia Sáez 2005: 112). Among the Tupi Waiãpi, Dominique Gallois affirms that they do not return to the sites of former settlements: Waiãpi leaders maintain that '[i]n past times, when somebody died, people would move place immediately and leave the village of the dead to turn into a cemetery' (2002: 101), as indeed also happened with the Nahua in Peru, who in the past 'would abandon an entire village, including its gardens, when an adult died' (Feather 2009: 79) and the Trio in Suriname (Brightman 2010: 146).¹⁴ Among the Tupinambá of Olivença, the physical abandonment of the house is accompanied by an explicit action of making it revert to forest, that is, 'isolating' it from human contact to revert to the wild, while people move, sometimes only a few steps from the old building, to build a new house.

It is thus important to notice that it is not only the displacement that retains meaning but also this prospective movement. Allowing the jungle to invade the immediate vicinity of the home in the present, can thus be envisaged as a transformation comparable to allowing the jungle to invade former places of residence in the past. This type of transformation bears resemblances to that detailed by Waud Kracke (1978) for the Tupi Parintintin. According to Kracke, following pacification, the Parintintin gave up moving their units of residence in five- or ten-year cycles but still perpetuated the mobility of the houses themselves, which 'are easily taken apart'. A settlement might therefore end up moving only in the event of the death of several of its members (1978: 9). More recently, and from an analytical perspective closer to the transformational process described here, Marc Brightman sets out just how abandonment and the founding of new sections of Trio villages might be seen as replicating the displacement processes and founding of new villages in the past (2010: 146).

As is the case among the Trio, the reasons for abandoning homes among the Tupinambá and their past cyclical displacements do not derive

only from death and are integrated into many other aspects of social life, incorporating dynamics of kinship and the resolution of existing tensions (2003, 2007). In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the debate triggered by Rivière about the segmentation of Trio villages and the value placed on ways of conflict-free living may equally be mentioned for the case of the Tupinambá (Rivière 2000; Viegas 2007: 170–73). I focus here on death because it is one of the most explicit means of understanding the transformation processes bound up in the displacement and possession of land.

In the Tupinambá case, cycles of abandonment of dwelling places accompanied the process of land privatization that took place after 1930, which entailed both the surrender of dwelling places destined to be abandoned, and the Tupinambá's occupation of new spaces to inhabit. As I mentioned in the previous section, this process became unviable in the 1970s after four decades of progressive land privatization and a surge in the demand for land throughout the 'cacao area' (*região cacueira*) due to rising prices of that commodity on international markets. Thereafter it became virtually impossible to find new free spaces in which to settle and establish dwelling places.

The process of indigenous land claims initiated in this region in the 1980s has to be understood in this historical perspective. In formal terms, the claiming of indigenous territory by the Tupinambá started in 2001, but it had antecedents, most notably an encounter with FUNAI in the early 1980s. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Tupinambá were in a subservient situation in the management and control of their own territory, despite having developed close ties over the years with non-indigenous inhabitants, including cross-marriages. They at last managed to organize themselves and muster the strength to face the challenges involved in claiming indigenous land in an adverse regional conjuncture in which landowners' influence over the political and juridical systems could be interpreted as a remnant of the old *coronelista* arrangements.

Brazilian legislation's highly original, anthropologically fruitful way of recognizing 'indigenous land' includes indigenous senses of space and temporality, attending not only to the meaningfulness of specific pieces of land for present livelihoods but also those required for their future reproduction as well.¹⁵ The demarcation of the Indigenous Land of the Tupinambá of Olivença, comprising 47,000 hectares, was recognized by the state in 2009 – but it has not yet been implemented. Since then the Tupinambá have continued to reside in the same dwelling places, or else in areas where they build '*aldeias*' (villages), a demographic structure closer to the one that the state normally organizes for Indians. The legal demarcation of indigenous land implies that the Tupinambá hold the land in usufruct though it remains Federal Brazilian state property. Given that the management of that territory is granted to the Indians, they will be able to

reproduce various senses of land possession there along a historical route that must necessarily introduce modifications into our own understanding of land ownership issues.

Conclusion

The description of transformations in land possession set out in this article would not have been possible just a few decades ago, as a fine 1982 article by Philippe Descola illustrates. Descola describes the collapse of the 'traditional' conditions of life among the Jívaro Achuar following the introduction of cattle breeding by missionaries in the 1970s. Interested in raising cattle and lacking 'any previous experience of private land ownership', the Achuar, assisted by the missionaries, undertook a division of the land in which they adopted the trails heading into the forest as the borders of their plots: 'Each personal hunting trail, leading to a distant portion of the forest, tends increasingly to be considered as a kind of exclusive property, and the use of someone else's hunting trail may cause bitter resentment' (Descola 1982: 306, 316). In a Marxist tone, Descola argued that the Achuar were undergoing a reorganization of land rights that was moving on from the previous system of 'short-term appropriation of resources, justified by labour, to an exclusive and transmissible appropriation of parcelled land' (316). Furthermore, he perceived such changes as a sign of fixed settlement in concentrated areas of habitation that 'seems now irreversible' in rendering the Achuar nondifferentiated as 'members of the Third-World Peasantry' (314, 319). As we know from the important subsequent work by the same scholar (Descola 1996), this process of irreversible change from an indigenous to a peasant society did not take place. In fact, the growing ethnographic and comparative knowledge developed among lowland South American Indians over the last twenty years points to a very different picture.

The ethnography developed in this chapter has aimed to show the diversity of land possession forms through senses of temporalities, following transformations of meanings and values ascribed by the Tupinambá to land possession. I have argued that among the Tupinambá a sense of *personalized possession* is constituted through the relationship of women to their gardens and household members to their swiddens, as far as they are associated with the foundation of a new residential compound. The latter can be approximated to the situation of the Kanamari, where the chief, as Costa (this volume) shows, becomes the 'garden body-owner'.

Among the Tupinambá, however, personalized possession of a residential compound is only temporary. Bonds between people and places are thus necessarily provisional, and their eventual abandonment gener-

ates a condition of historicity: that of *transitory possession*. Responsibility of a named subject (also underlined for other Amerindian contexts, e.g. Brightman 2010; Costa 2010; Fausto 2008) such as a woman to her garden, or a named home, is a second relevant sense of ownership revealed in the Tupinambá's transformational processes of land possession. In both cases (personalization and responsibility) possession is effective only for a determined period of time, thus articulating specific temporalities of transitory possession. These temporalities intertwine land dynamics with kinship dynamics, creating meaningful comparative axes that can even be further developed.

In rural agricultural contexts in North-East Brazil, ownership of land implies continuity via a family-based succession (Woortman 1995: 248–49), sometimes invoking founding ancestors, denominated the 'old trunk' (Godoi 1998: 97). In the dry inland region of 'sertão' in Piauí (North-East Brazil), the meaning of the land is connected to a value of inheritance and to preserving the original terrain of an extended family that people call 'the floor' (*o chão*) with reference to a shared ancestry that shapes 'a social memory in close relationship with its spatial support' (ibid.). Transmission of the land through the family line is such a key factor here that the areas of residence where an extended family live are entitled either 'land of kin' (*terra de parente*) or 'land of inheritance' (*terra de herança*) 'in which what legitimated the right to the land is descendent in conjunction with residence' (Godoi 1998: 109). In these peasantry-like contexts, land possession is based on the principle of heritage by family lines: 'The land, as the individuals, is conceived as owned by the "old Vitorino trunk", that is, those descended from Vitorino and, therefore, the principle of shared ancestry converges with the principle of rights over the land' (Godoi 1998: 104, 111). In some contexts of riverine Amazonia, such as the Caviana mentioned above because of its echoes of the Tupinambá's personalized sense of possession of gardens, the value of continuation of a household/family house also prevails, as 'land is regarded as a family asset. Ideally indivisible, people strive to keep it united through generations. With the death of parents, land passes on to their children ... and is shared among them, but not divided' (Machado 2012: 126). Inheritance is also substantiated in other Amerindian contexts, as in the case of the transmission of ceremonial goods through children among the Gê-speaking Xikrin as described by Cesar Gordon (this volume).

Regarding the articulation between the diversity of temporalities and the processes of land privatization (the second analytical perspective followed in this essay), José Glebson Vieira (2012) has done some especially relevant work on the Tupi Potiguara, who inhabit in the state of Paraíba, in a area of Atlantic Forest located in the north-east of Brazil and who, like the Tupinambá, went through the experience of settling in a missionary

village during the colonial period. Vieira demonstrates how the Potiguara developed different senses of possession of the land in the wake of differentiated processes of legal recognition of land ownership rights. After Paraíba state legislation recognized the Potiguara right to land ownership at the end of the nineteenth century (though in a different way from Bahia state's absence of recognition of indigenous land rights in that period), it proceeded to divide up plots in a village in one area, known as Aldeamento da Preguiça, and grant them to the Potiguara families who lived on them. In another area – São Miguel – the state granted 'collective ownership of the land' to the Potiguara inhabiting in that area (Vieira 2012: 28). Vieira's ethnography contributes to understanding of how different histories of land privatization (between the recognition of family plots in the village and collective areas in São Miguel) had repercussions in subsequent meanings of land possession among the Potiguara. In the village, Aldeamento da Preguiça – the area divided into plots – 'land is conceived of as property transferrable through means of inheritance', that is, through family lines; whereas in the settling of São Miguel, where the land is legally common, personalized ownership seems to be sustained and articulated to successive displacements along rivers and streams 'following a tendency to dispersion' (Vieira 2012: 39–49, 120). The settlements following this latter pattern of digression through the territory are launched when a family opens a *roça*, where the area of residence of each family is referred to as *per-tença* ('belonging') and deemed the personal site of so-and-so, who is the founder of that area and considered its 'owner' (*dono*) (Vieira 2012: 54). However, ownership of land is a transitory possession in the latter case.

To sum up, the analysis presented here contributes to thinking about possession of the land at the crossroads of a wide-reaching comparative spectrum. In the case of the Tupinambá of Olivença, meaningful experiences of dwelling are a key factor in transforming the past by abandoning a place and leaving it to the forest, not to be inherited. Instead of handing land down, it is heading forth to open up new spaces for cultivation, building new homes and thereby establishing a new house that informs these practices of possession, which imply on the one hand personalized, temporary possessions sustained in the owner's responsibility for the owned object/subject, and on the other hand cutting ties with former places of origin. As I argued, these relevant senses of ownership of the land are not only present in the lives of the Tupinambá in the present, but were also constituted in processes of transformation of land possession during the period of increasing capitalistic land ownership in the region. Temporalities of ownership here reveal short-term possessions that are meant to be transitory and finite, but replicable in the future in other places, in prospective movements in which new kin-based settlements are founded and the memory of a death is left behind. Nowadays, the Tupinambá have

made this feasible by struggling for the conquest of a large territory via claims to an indigenous land.

As this chapter has argued, the historicity of this territory has been constituted through processes of ownership marked by temporalities of finite cycles, where 'memory is in the service of a destination, not of an origin' (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985: 203). This is why temporary possessions have played such a key role in the historical transformation of land ownership. The major contribution of this ethnographic analysis to a broader anthropological discussion on ownership is thus sustained in the idea that temporalities should be considered a key perspective in the understanding of the lived experience of possession, namely, in the history of entanglements in the possession of land.

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Notes

1. My field research among the Tupinambá began in 1997 and has since been continued with a diverse range of funding from the Foundation for Science and Technology (Ministry of Science/Portugal), currently under the research project Ref. PTDC/CS-ANT/118150/2010, and previously funding Ref. PTDC/CS-ANT/102957/2008. Seminars promoted by our research team, namely on territoriality and ownership, have been vitally important to the development of the argument presented in this chapter. I thank Rui Feijó for the reading and translation of the article and Carlos Fausto for the thoughtful reading and comments, subsequently complemented by those of the other editors.
2. My emphasis.
3. On equivocations of meanings see also Coelho de Souza (this volume).
4. For a discussion of the problem of indigenous collective ownership and the need for change in the concept of the subject of ownership as such see Coelho de Souza (this volume).
5. In the words of the anthropologist Afrânio Garcia Júnior, who did fieldwork in the region in 1970: 'Coffee bushes that are planted by a labourer, who afterwards then tends them, are thereby considered his *benefetorias* and, as such, eligible for compensation should the labourer be dismissed and expelled from the estate' (Garcia 1983: 57). I would like to thank Ana Luísa Micaelo for these references, which are also confirmed by her own field research in the region (cf. Micaelo 2014).
6. In this sense, the personal dimension of the gardens is similar in nature to that described by Descola in the case of the Achuar to show how this connection is 'practically physical' and actually becomes 'a public projection of the personalities

- and qualities of those tending to them', to the point at which '[w]hen a woman dies, her quintal (*garden*) also disappears in her wake' (Descola 1996: 175).
7. In the 'cacao area' next to Olivença, cacao cultivation developed under a monoculture type of system (less devastating than sugarcane plantations, given that its agrarian techniques are reputed to be sustainable). Known in the region as *cabruca*, this system consists of alternating cacao plants and shade trees (normally from the Atlantic Forest). The cacao economy developed historically through a social regime of great promiscuity between the social and the political spheres, known as *coronelismo* (see Carvalho 1997: 230). Although Olivença does not belong properly to the 'cacao area', proximity to it had particularly important effects at key moments of its history, such as the cycle of land privatization in the early twentieth century (Viegas 2007, 2011a). In the 1970s the boom in international cacao prices caused cacao cultivation to expand to surrounding regions where it had not existed previously, including Olivença.
 8. Peter Gow highlights the same regeneration process among the Piro: 'The house and the garden establish the human space of settlement. Both are transformed forest, and both must be constantly maintained in the face of forest regeneration' (1991: 121).
 9. In the region, *casas de sopapo* ('sharp slap houses') or *casas de taípa de mão* ('rammed earth houses') are clay and mud constructions built around a structure of wooden poles tied with vines that are then covered with clay, normally thrown at the wooden structure. The expression *sopapo* derives from this gesture of throwing the clay. Such clay structures are common throughout the entire north-east of Brazil and have been classified by some authors as 'neo-Brazilian'. One of the characteristics that differentiates *casas de sopapo* from the more generic category of *casas de taípa* is that the former are not plastered.
 10. To put this in perspective, the average size of a kin-based dwelling corresponds to just 0.1% of what is considered a smallholding in the region (Viegas 2007: 77).
 11. In fact, the stories I have heard about strange apparitions, e.g. werewolves and winds carrying evil intent, are always set at dusk. In the Xinguano context, Gregor (1982: 55) mentions that the Mehinakú also lock their doors at nightfall 'as a precaution against mosquitoes and the witches – that they believe, roam the darkness'.
 12. When a death occurs in a Tupinambá family, the relatives of the deceased who have other relatives residing in distant places tend to go and visit them, staying there for several months, in order to avoid living in the same place where the death took place.
 13. See Descola (1996: 117); Feather (2009: 79–83); Gallois (1981); Gow (1991: 189); C. Hugh-Jones (1988: 45); S. Hugh-Jones (1993: 107); McCallum (1999); Rivière (1984: 26); Viveiros de Castro (1992), especially a comparative study of the Tupi (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 51), and Lowie (1949: 354) for indigenous Guiana.
 14. As Peter Rivière has shown, the displacements and abandonments of dwelling places are explained in diverse ways across lowland South America: they may take place following the death of a leader, the deterioration of the house, a search for an area with better hunting, aggravation caused by the increasing distance between the village and the *roça*, attacks by enemies, a desire to be farther from or closer to migrant communities, divisions in a settlement or, alternatively, a search for a location likely to generate future exchanges (1984: 26, 75, 81–82).

15. Brazilian legislation established not only the right but also the urgency of indigenous land demarcation. As I have discussed elsewhere (Viegas 2010), Article 231 of the Federal Constitution is the critical element stipulating a set of criteria for demarcation of indigenous territory based on four main principles, two of which provide for, first, a diversity of relations with the land, and second, the amount of land required to guarantee the perpetuation of an indigenous way of life. These aspects are contemplated in recognition of areas that are 'essential to the preservation of environmental resources necessary to their wellbeing ... and necessary to their physical and cultural reproduction in line with their traditions and manners' (cf. Constitution 2010: 153).

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