IN THIS CHAPTER I explore the Triple Frontier from the viewpoint of the Guarani Indians, a group that occupies a cluster of villages at the confluence of the Paraná and Iguazú Rivers. The starting point of this analysis is the spatial movements of the Guarani across international borders, their wanderings through the cities in the border area, and the multiple social interactions that take place during these journeys. An indigenous perspective helps reimagine the Triple Frontier as a space of mobility where the Guarani walk and live different social experiences. More than just a social or cultural production of space in the region, the history of the Guarani underscores the symbolic production of groups living in border areas.

The Guarani already occupied this area before the arrival of the first Spaniards and Portuguese conquerors in the sixteenth century. Today, as in the past, the area continues to present a permanent spatial occupation by the Guarani, and it is an important route of passage for families and groups crossing international borders toward distinct areas in all three countries.

The Guarani living in the Triple Frontier are part of a group of hundreds of small villages scattered in an area of more than 350 square kilometers between the basins of the Paraná, Paraguay, and Uruguay Rivers to the west and the Atlantic coast to the east. The total Guarani population of about one hundred thousand competes for space in an area that presents the largest industrial and agricultural centers of Latin America as well as some of the highest rates...
of urban density in Brazil, exemplified by the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. They are speakers of the Guarani language (Tupi linguistic branch) and communicate in Spanish or Portuguese with Indians from other ethnic groups and the jurua (non-Indians).

The historical experiences lived by the Guarani—such as attempts at conversion to Christianity that occurred between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, forced displacement, and colonial and postcolonial wars—shaped new patterns of culture and sociospatial organization. Today, Guarani populations comprise several subgroups, each occupying different areas of the geographical space, speaking multiple variations of the Guarani language, and having particular cultural traits and specific forms of sociospatial organization. The population of the Mbyá subgroup occupies northeastern Argentina, Eastern Paraguay, northern Uruguay, and parts of southern and southeastern Brazil. The Caiuá, or Pai Tevyterê, inhabit the border area between the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul and Eastern Paraguay. The Nhandeva, or Chiripá, reside in Eastern Paraguay, the southwestern Brazilian states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, and the coast of the state of São Paulo, also in Brazil. The Chiriguano-Chané live in southern Bolivia and northern Argentina. And the Aché-Guayaki reside in Eastern Paraguay.

Despite geographical distance and sociocultural and linguistic differences, all Guarani consider themselves to belong to the same ethnic group and refer to each other as nhanderetarã—“our kin.” They travel long distances to visit their kin; to celebrate weddings, parties, and religious rituals; to establish political alliances; to provide mutual assistance; and to practice various forms of solidarity and reciprocity.

**THE GUARANI OF THE TRIPLE FRONTIER**

In the sixteenth century, the area of confluence between the Paraná and Iguazú Rivers was the scene of intense territorial disputes between Portuguese and Spanish colonial forces seeking gold, silver, and slaves for their new colonies. It was in this context, in 1542, that the Spanish conqueror Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca saw, for the first time, several Guarani groups, recording in his diary his first impressions:

> These Indians belong to the Guarani tribe; they are farmers who sow maize and manioc twice a year, raise chickens and ducks in the same way that we do it in
Spain, have many parrots, occupy a large extent of land, and speak one language. But [they] also eat human flesh, which can be either of the Indian enemies, Christians, or their own fellow tribesmen. It is a very friendly people, but also very warlike and vindictive.⁴

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, under Spanish rule, this region was part of the historical and thriving Provincia del Guairá, which harbored dozens of pueblos run by Jesuit priests and populated by Indians from various indigenous ethnic groups, mostly Guarani, who fled the atrocities of colonial wars and the persecution of slave hunters.

With the decline of the Jesuit missions and the expulsion of the Jesuits by the Portuguese crown in 1759 and by the Spanish crown in 1768, the Indians dispersed throughout the region. Part of the Guarani population gathered in the forests surrounding the small villages on the banks of the Paraná River, forming some of the ancestral grounds of the current Guarani population. Another part was assimilated into the national societies of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina.⁵

The independence of Paraguay (1811), Argentina (1816), and Brazil (1822) created the conditions for various territorial and border conflicts between these nations. The territorial demarcation of the Triple Frontier as we know it today was definitively established only in the late nineteenth century, after the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870). This war brought a profound sociospatial disorganization to the Guarani not only because they had to leave their villages but also because many males, including children, were forcibly recruited by local governments and died in combat.

With the end of the war, the governments of all three countries implemented various projects to attract and retain national populations along their international borders. As part of these border occupation efforts, the Brazilian government founded Foz do Iguaçu as a military colony in 1889. The Argentine government across the border made plans for a similar state-sponsored colony in the area of the future town of Puerto Iguazú in 1902.⁶ Later, in 1957, the Paraguayan government established the town of Puerto Flor de Lis on the banks of the Paraná River, and soon after changed its name to Puerto Presidente Stroessner, named after the dictator Alfredo Stroessner. In 1989 it was renamed Ciudad del Este.

Despite the public engagement of different governments in promoting colonization, much of the colonization of the border was done by the private sector. During the first half of the twentieth century, private colonization companies
razed the remaining forests, parceled and sold land to farmers, and expelled Indians from their lands at the same time they used them in road construction and public works. Between the 1940s and 1970s, the governments created “indigenous areas” designed to receive people who had been displaced. In those places were settled, in addition to the Guarani, indigenous peoples of other ethnicities, such as the Kaingang, Xokleng, and Xetá among others. However, these lands were already populated and unsuitable for agriculture, and many families left in search of better living conditions.\(^7\)

The following decades witnessed an intense movement of indigenous populations traversing international borders with families and groups crossing from one side to the other to flee land grabbers and seek new settlement sites. Small Nhandeva groups, for example, managed to find refuge in forest areas at the Brazilian and Paraguayan margins of the Paraná River. Among the Mbyá, there were those who could not settle in government reserves and moved to distant regions in northeastern Argentina and in southern and southeastern Brazil.

In 1973 the governments of Brazil and Paraguay signed the cooperation agreement for the construction of the Itaipu Dam on the Paraná River. In 1982, the dam’s reservoir was flooded to create a lake over 1,300 square kilometers in size. As a result, Nhandeva villages by the river were covered with water, and the population was once again displaced. Government agencies of the two countries transferred the affected Indians to new lands on the lakeshore, where they established the Ocoí reserve on the Brazilian side and the Kirito, Acaray-Mi, and Arroyo Guazu reserves on the Paraguayan side.

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing number of demarcated indigenous lands for the Guarani at the Triple Frontier area. However, they are not enough to meet the needs of the entire population. This is evidenced by the growing large number of indigenous settlements in the region’s urban peripheries and along the major highways linking the three countries.\(^8\)

**WALKING ON THE BAD LAND**

The ethnographic data presented in this work was collected in the following villages: Ocoí, Tekoa Anhetete, Rio das Cobras (Taquara, Lebre, and Pinhal villages), Mangueirinha (Palmeirinha village), and Marrecas (Koendy Porã village), all located in the west and southwest of the state of Paraná in southern Brazil; Acaray-Mi, Kirito, and Arroyo Guazu in the department of Alto Paraná,
in Eastern Paraguay; and Fortin Mbororé and M’Bocaí, on the banks of the Iguazú River in the province of Misiones in northeastern Argentina. These settlements are part of a broader tekoa guasu, a designation that the Guarani use to refer to clusters of villages whose close-knit community is maintained by the frequent contact and visits of relatives. This tekoa guasu consists of about forty villages with a total population estimated at five thousand people distributed between the Mbyá and Nhandeva subgroups.9

The villages (tekoa) are like islands among extensive agricultural plantations, sometimes located alongside highways or close to urban areas. Almost all are surrounded by wire and have an entrance gate with a sign that reads “No Entry—Indian Area.” They are established in tracts of various sizes, usually in old cattle-ranching areas or secondary forest camps. Dwellings are scattered over the terrain, forming small clusters of houses of close relatives (tei’y). The houses are made of wooden planks or bricks and covered with clay tiles, asbestos, or palm leaves. The kitchen, separated from the rest of the house, is constructed of various materials such as bamboo, canvas, aluminum plates, logs, and tree branches. The electrical grid reaches only the houses close to the highways; thus, not all households have electricity despite the dwellers being neighbors to the second largest hydroelectric plant in the world.

Sanitary conditions are very precarious; the waste of households is deposited directly into the soil in pits or washed away by rain. Like electricity, water supply also does not reach the entire population, leading some families to obtain water from wells, rivers, and streams. Crop plots are close to the dwellings and grow corn, beans, manioc, sweet potato, and banana. In the absence of forests and animals to hunt or fish, dwellers complement their diet by buying products in the city. They rely on these nearby markets for buying meat, sugar, salt, coffee, soybean oil, noodles, and wheat flour. Adults, young men, and even children are employed in neighboring farms during the planting and harvesting seasons, working in the fields and loading the trucks that transport the products. Women and children prepare handicrafts such as seed necklaces and bracelets, artificially dyed chicken feather headdresses, decorative bows and arrows, woven straw baskets, and animal sculptures to sell to tourists on the streets of Foz do Iguaçu, Puerto Iguazú, and Ciudad del Este.

In general the settlements have only elementary schooling with indigenous teachers who teach children in Guarani, Portuguese, and Spanish. Students who wish to continue studying have to go on foot or by bus (provided by local governments) to the nearest schools. Health clinics have Native nursing assistants...
and jurua nurses and doctors visit the villages two or three times a week. Severe cases are referred to local hospitals.

The House of Pray (Opj) is the core of community life. It is where every night locals gather to sing, dance, smoke the pipe (petygua), and listen to the “beautiful words” (arandu porã) of the elders (xamôi). The entrance doors and the altar (amba) must face eastward, the mythical region where it is believed the Land without Evil (Yo Marãey) is located, which is the house of the gods and the destination of the Guarani after death.

The myth of Earth’s creation can give us some clues about the Guarani perception of space and surface and how they interpret their wanderings in the Triple Frontier area. For the Guarani, the Earth (Yo), also called Evil Land or Imperfect Land (Yoai), is the “place of unhappiness.” This is the second Earth, because the original, literally the “First Earth” (Yo Tenonde), the “true land of the Guarani,” was destroyed by a universal flood. The catastrophe occurred because of the “misbehavior” of its inhabitants. During the flood, all men and women “without evil” (marã ey) reached the “state of perfection” (aguyje) and therefore rose to the Land without Evil to live next to the divinities. The other inhabitants of the earth, that is, the “imperfect,” drowned. Once the First Earth was destroyed, “Our Father” (Nhandeu) molded from the clay with his own hands a new Earth, the Evil Land: an island floating on the “Great Waters” (Yguazu). To inhabit this new world he carved in wood (veyra) images similar to the divinities and placed them “in front” (ovai) and “standing” (ã) to walk on Earth. These are the “true humans” (avaete), as the Guarani call themselves. For the other inhabitants of the Earth—the jurua, animals, and ghosts of the dead (ãgue)—are all considered nonhuman beings because they are not the “image” of the divinities. Collectively we are called “terrestrials” (veygua) because we are born, die, and remain on this earth. As once told to me by a shaman Nhandeva in Ocoí, “You whites were made of clay, as it is said in your Bible. You were made of land, and when you die, you go back to the land once again.” “Back to be soil” is also the destination of animals. Ghosts, who are the souls of people who made “evil” on this earth, will wander this earth forever scaring people at night on the paths.

As outlined below, the Guarani maintain a relationship of respect and fear with the earth and the beings that inhabit it. On the one hand, this land was a gift from the gods given specifically to the Guarani, a kind of second chance to restore the broken ties with the divinities after the destruction of the First Earth. On the other hand, it is an imperfect Earth and a dangerous surface
inhabited by nonhumans that may jeopardize the final destiny of the Guarani to regain their place among the gods. In this regard, the geographical area of the Triple Frontier is a privileged **locus** to understand how the Guarani system of thought operates in practice.

There is always a steady stream of Guarani people crossing international boundaries via the Friendship Bridge on the Paraná River between Brazil and Paraguay and the Brotherhood Bridge on the Iguazú River between Brazil and Argentina. They are groups living in local villages or coming from distant areas who are doing what they call “walks” (−guata). Such walks can be short trips between the villages and the nearest towns for shopping, selling handicrafts to tourists, visiting the doctor, going to school or work, looking for jobs, or simply “walking aimlessly” (−guata rei). They can also consist of long commutes to visit relatives in distant villages on journeys that can last several days and cover over one thousand kilometers. During these trips, short or long, they use the available means of transport according to affordability. They usually alternate between stretches of walking, biking, riding buses or vans, taking motorcycle taxis, and riding trucks when commuting to work in plantations.

During their wanderings, they walk through trails, rural roads, highways, borders, farmland, and cities, interacting with different people and enjoying multiple intercultural contact experiences with Indians from other ethnic groups and, especially, with jurua. Although these cities, roads, bridges, and vehicles provide the means that enable their wanderings, these elements of jurua life also act as a barrier that hinder the Guarani’s movements.

The memory of the elderly is filled with vivid recollections, lived or heard, from a time before the many modern barriers to the cross boundary mobility of the Guarani. Memories that date back to the first decades of the twentieth century and that refer to the old routes that connected this area to other distant areas in Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. Memories of crossing the Iguazú and Paraná rivers on boats that the Indians themselves carved in wood logs, or of a time with an abundance of berths for rafts along those rivers. They say that at that time it was possible to walk for several days on the trails in the woods without finding any jurua, or if they were found, they would be loggers, hunters, or yerba mate collectors who did not prevent the Guarani from following their walk. The elderly also recall that the groups moving in these ways were large, made up of several families and counting men, women, and children together. They say that when they were hungry, men entered the woods and hunted with shotguns or bows and arrows, bringing birds, capybaras, armadillos,
peccaries, deer, and honey. The women cleaned and roasted meat, and the children searched for fruits and small game such as rabbits, agoutis, and coatis. To spend the night, the men built shelters with palm leaves at the margins of the trails, and in the morning they continued their trip without being bothered by anyone. They remember that, gradually, paths started “to close” as a result of the widening of the roads by the jurua and their tractors, axes, and chainsaws.

From the 1950s on, the development of international trade and the increase in the flow of people crossing borders also intensified police surveillance at border posts. For the Indians, the situation deteriorated in the late 1960s with the construction of the bridge between Brazil and Paraguay and in the 1980s with the construction of the bridge between Brazil and Argentina. Older Guarani say that the customs authorities made many questions and demanded “papers” that the Indians did not possess, a situation that further hampered their movement.

Even today, problems with documentation and communication between Indians and immigration officers continue to be the main obstacle in the crossing of the international bridges. Some Guarani explain that at the time of crossing they do not always carry a passport, identity card, or birth certificate for the children. There are cases of people who simply do not possess any of these documents, such as parents without the documents of their children or relatives who travel with someone else’s children without the proper authorizations. The lack of documentation among the Guarani is an issue that comes from the way in which national governments have conducted local geopolitics. As we have seen, with the agricultural expansion from the mid-twentieth century on, the Guarani were systematically persecuted and driven away from their land, wandering from one place to another without the protection of national citizenship. When they headed to Brazil they were treated by the local authorities as illegal aliens, that is, identified by physical appearance and Spanish accent as “Paraguayan” and sent back. In Paraguay and Argentina, the same thing happened, with the local authorities expelling those people who had no documentary evidence of their nationality. This situation persists today, and foreigner is one of the labels used by farmers and their advocates in the three countries to deny the Guarani the right of access to land, education, health, and other civil rights.

According to the Guarani, Brazilian and Argentine immigration officers are the most rigorous in monitoring. Indians, therefore, have developed tactics that help decrease the chances of being held up at border control points. Instead of walking on the Brotherhood Bridge, as many people do, they prefer to cross it on buses that take tourists, merchants, and workers. Thus, the Indians choose
the busiest times—normally in the morning, at lunchtime, or late in the day—when the buses run crowded and police monitoring decreases. At the Friendship Bridge, on the other hand, inspection is not as strict. Brazilian and Paraguayan officers rarely ask for documents of passengers crossing on foot as they instead focus surveillance on cars, motorcycles, and buses. Thus, the Guarani cross this bridge on foot, intermingling with the crowd of shoppers who seek mainly to buy cheap Chinese products in the bustling streets of Ciudad del Este.

With or without documentation, the fact remains that the Guarani say they are not Paraguayans, Brazilians, or Argentines. They are Guarani, who were there long before the jurua arrived and who find it wrong to ask permission to walk on an earth of which the jurua are not the “owners.” They therefore focus on the creation myth that teaches that the earth was made by “Our Father” for the Guarani to walk on. From this view, the earth is conceived as an immense surface free of obstacles, without barriers to the movement of people and on which all groups (Guarani, jurua, animals, and ghosts) must trace a path and keep walking.

In many ways, the Guarani notion of space approaches the concept of “nomad space” (as opposed to “sedentary space”) as described by Deleuze and Guattari. It is true that the nomads in Deleuze and Guattari are groups of shepherds from the Eurasian steppes whose movement in space is dictated by rainfall patterns and the life cycles of plants. This is not the case of the Guarani, but much of what these authors say can help us reflect on the meanings implied in these spatial wanderings. The “striated” or “sedentary space” of Deleuze and Guattari is the space of the city: cut, measured, scanned, with paths linking points of departure and arrival. While walking through this space, the authors say, the sedentary individual performs a “trip distance”—his journey is guided by predefined paths that lead from one point to another, as when he goes from home to work, he follows a path that connects points A and B. By contrast, the “nomadic space” is designed as an open or “flat” space, because when walking, the nomad does not follow a trajectory—he “slides” on space, tracing his own path.12

The idea of “sliding” over space is reflected in the relative freedom of older generations in walking, choosing, and opening paths—in sum, in “sliding” over space without many obstacles. In this regard, the difficulties posed to the Guarani in traversing the Triple Frontier borders, such as police harassment and the requirement of documents, are seen as barriers to movement not only by preventing the passage through space itself but also by imposing on the Guarani a path and a way of walking that are not theirs. When police request immigration
documents and ask the Guarani about where they go, when they will come back, and what they will do, these representatives of jurua society project the spatial notion of a “sedentary space” constituted of clearly defined and planned trajectories and points of arrival and departure. In turn, the Guarani want to “slide” on space without asking anyone’s permission, without precisely defining a path, a time, or a predetermined destination. They want to repeat on this earth the walk of their gods, like Tupã, whose firm stamping leaves a convoluted trail of light wherever he goes (i.e., the thunder and lightning we hear and see in a stormy day).

Contrary to what we might assume, the importance of walking for the Guarani does not relate to a statement of tradition or a mythical-religious requirement. For the Guarani, to walk is to live, to be alive. In the Guarani language the words walk (guata) and live (iko) have similar senses. The intransitive verb -iko can be used both to indicate life, as in jaiko va’e (we are living), and to indicate movement in space, as in ka’aru peve oiko (he walked until late). It can also indicate the place where one lives but without a definition of fixed location, as in xero py aiko, which in a free translation could be “I am living [or walking] in my house.”

WALKING IN THE CITY OF WHITES

The issues involving the wanderings of the Guarani are not only restricted to the crossing of international borders. The cities of Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este, and Puerto Iguazú constitute obligatory stops for those crossing these borders, and as such they present many obstacles to Guarani movement. When arriving in the city, or “place of jurua” (juruareko), issues such as how long they will stay and which routes they will follow may suffer sudden changes according to the circumstances of the moment. If the sale of handicrafts is good, people may decide to stay a few more days in the same place. If a baby gets sick or if the rain does not stop for some days, the whole family might decide to return to the village of origin. Once in the city, individual or collective plans can change suddenly; an unexpected encounter with relatives at the bus station, a premonitory dream, a new job opportunity, a football game, a quarrel, and new plans may redefine the trajectories.

When walking in the city, they seldom walk alone. It is common to walk in pairs or trios of friends or siblings, young couples (sometimes with a baby in
their arms), groups consisting of nuclear families (father, mother, and children), or groups of five or six people with different degrees of kinship. When they cannot afford to sleep in hotels or have lunch in restaurants, they start searching for other places to rest, sleep, sell handicrafts, eat, drink, smoke, and drink _terere_ (a yerba mate beverage).  

For selling their handicrafts the Guarani prefer the busiest tourist places, such as the entrance gate of the Iguazú Falls, the entrances of hotels, restaurants, and shopping centers, or the sidewalks of the busy shopping streets. For lunchtime and siesta they look for benches in squares, in the shadows of trees in streets and avenues, or on sidewalks under the awning of stores. Stories about direct contact with the _jurua_ in the city reflect the marginalized experiences of the Guarani, such as the case of a Paraguayan businessman who poured water on a family that slept on the sidewalk in front of his store, or the security guard that kicked over the handicrafts set up on a step at the entrance of a shopping mall. Far more positive stories also exist, and _jurua_ also are known to express solidarity by providing food, water, clothing, and money. One example of a good non-Indian ( _jurua porã_ ) is of the owner of a bakery in Foz do Iguaçu who saves unsold bread to give away to the Guarani.

Finding places to sleep in the city is a much more difficult task. At night, cities in the border region pose many risks: there are thieves, drug dealers, drug addicts, homeless people, armed gangs, and the police. Twenty-four-hour bus stations are the safest alternative, as they are well lit and have a continuous presence of people. However, guards almost never allow passengers to sleep on the benches or floor of these stations. Alternative to this are the sidewalks and gardens around the stations, which are likewise well lit and relatively safe. Women and men sleep on separate sides with babies and young children in between them, clinging to the women, sheltered from the wind, and covered with blankets and pieces of clothing. Young men take turns to guard the group while some sleep, circulating through the station, watching TV, smoking, drinking, carving wooden animals with pocket knives, playing cards, and talking.

In warm summer nights, sleeping outdoors does not present an immediate problem. During the winter, however (between the months of April to July), temperatures can drop to −2°C at night, and their clothes may not be enough to keep their bodies warm. Then, the groups roam the city looking for shelter from wind and the dew that freezes and covers the ground with a thin layer of frost. The Guarani recall that decades ago people sought shelter under bridges and in abandoned houses and vacant lots. However, many of these sites have
become dangerous, as they turned into refuges for drug users. Another increasingly abandoned practice was to gather sticks on the streets to light bonfires at night. This has been suppressed by security guards at bus stations, who argue that concrete sidewalks can crack with the fire.

The walkers say they do not want conflict with the jurua, have no intention of claiming ownership over the places they choose to stay, and just want to rest and keep walking. In this sense, their strategy to avoid conflicts consists of not staying for too long in the same place and splitting into smaller groups to avoid the clustering of large groups at the same site. In these settings, the Guarani developed two distinct skills, each equally effective for their wanderings in the city. The first is to attain a form of social invisibility by mimicking the urban environment through wearing clothes and shoes similar to those of the jurua. Women wear lipstick, makeup, nail polish, rings, bags, and arrange their hair in a way that is not seen when they are in their villages. Men wear pants, tucked in shirts, belts, socks, and shoes. They also hide their necklaces under their clothes and keep the wooden pipes (peteygua) in the women’s handbags.

By attempting to erase the signs they believe to be the most evident of their indigenous identity, the Guarani signal to the jurua that they want to go through the city discreetly, almost unnoticed. Invisible and wandering, the Guarani update what Virilio calls the “fleet in being,” or the “motion art of bodies unseen,” that is, the military strategy of crossing the oceans without being detected by the enemy. The second “ability” of the Guarani walkers is the opposite of the first. It occurs when they overvalue the alleged traces of a perceived indigenous ethnicity to sell handicrafts on the streets or to perform singing and dancing for tourists in front of the hotels and restaurants and in schools on commemorative dates. There, they exhibit gestures, clothes, paintings, and body adornment objects that supposedly correspond to the image that jurua have of the “indigenous.”

If the city as the “place of jurua” presents itself as a hostile space to the presence of Indians, it also provides the Guarani with urban facilities that allow them to proceed with their movements. They appropriate such spaces, even if only for a few hours, turning bus station courtyards into their bedrooms, squares into kitchens and dining rooms, and sidewalks into handicraft outlets. All temporarily, until they leave the sites and keep walking—or “surfing,” to use the Deleuzian metaphor of sliding on the water surface free of obstacles. As in the Guarani myth, they walk on the city space as if sailing in the Great Waters toward the abode of the gods.
THE “EVIL” LURKING IN THE PATHS

The physical and geographical proximity between the Guarani and the jurua is interpreted as the source of several evils (−axy) that can afflict the Guarani. To explain the evil and its effects, the Guarani resort to a theory based on their creation myth. As we have seen, the story explains that this is a “Bad Land,” inhabited by the Guarani (the real humans) and nonhuman beings (the jurua, animals, and ghosts of the dead). Nonhumans are considered to be carriers and transmitters of evils, which is one of the main obstacles to the full realization of human perfection by the Guarani. The Guarani worldview, as with several Amerindian cosmologies, considers evil as foreign to humanity because humans were designed to live in “a state of perfection” on Earth. In this regard, evil has an external source, as it can be brought on by beings such as the jurua and can settle down between the Guarani.

As observed in ethnographic studies, the human condition of the Guarani is not a permanent, unchanging state. This means that over a lifetime a person can undergo transformations and lose this condition. What the Guarani call jepota is the process that transforms human beings into nonhuman beings. This shift includes changes to the body and the way of life of the person affected, who starts to show the same social behavior, eating habits, and use of language of the species that he or she has now become. If a person begins to manifest an evil behavior—becoming aggressive, disrespectful to family and elders, drinking alcohol in excess, or avoiding work in the fields—he or she may be suffering from jepota. This is an evil that can transform the body physically into the shape and behavior of a particular animal or jurua. If the transformation process is not treated and halted by shamans, one continues to live that way, and when one dies, he or she will remain on this Earth, returning “to the dust” or wandering as a ghost. Therefore, the jepota is seen as a great evil, nullifying the human/divine condition of a person and devolving them to a nonhuman condition. And as alerted by the myth, a person deprived of humanity can never reach the Land without Evil.

These questions bring us to the issues concerning the body, as has been the case in studies of Amerindian perspectivism, particularly the work of the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. What these studies show is that many domains of the social life of Amerindian groups can be understood by the Native notion of body. The principle of these systems of thought is that the body is not a support, ready and finished, on which we invest cultural meanings;
it is, instead, transformed, manufactured, continuously molded, retouched and, therefore, susceptible to mutations in its nature.20

Returning to the Guarani social cosmology, the transformation of the human condition to a nonhuman state occurs in certain social contexts involving physical proximity or bodily contact. Thus, if the Guarani go on to live, eat, sleep, or walk too close to jurua or animals, they can suffer jepota, losing their human condition and getting the form and habits of those whom they approached. Yet physical proximity alone might not be capable of triggering changes, as those who have the “strong body” (−ete mbaraete), that is, those who live “without evil,” are not at risk of being transformed. Life “without evil” concerns an idealized life: to live with a healthy body (bete rexai reve oiko) constitutes the walkers’ primary challenge. Their goal is to keep their body human, healthy, and without evil, all while walking on a surface populated by nonhumans.

According to the Guarani thought, all beings that walk on this Earth form their own “community,” each with their own “way of life” (−eko), with their habits, language, beliefs, food preferences, and their own “bodily substances” (−etã). The bodies of the jurua—along with their customs and habits—are made of the dust on the ground (−etã). Their “way of life” is called juruareko. The Guarani, on the other hand, have wood as the constitutive substance of their bodies. They were carved by Our Father in the sacred wood (yvyra). Their “way of life” is the −eko porã, the perfect way of life. Thus, each species has its −eko and its −etã. For example, dogs have their jaguareko and jaguaretã, chickens their urureko and ururetã, frogs their ji’ireko and ji’iretã, ghosts their âguereko and âguereta, and so on.

In the Guarani thought, the Earth, or any portion of its surface, does not have an “owner.” This is true because the Earth’s “true owner” is “Our Father,” who created it. And despite that, all beings that walk the Earth are in “transit” on it, which prevents them from establishing a link with any particular place. In the particular case of the Guarani, “walking the Earth” has an even greater goal: to fulfill their destiny of reaching the mythical Land without Evil on the other side of the Great Waters. In this respect, the difficulties and barriers they face when moving in the Triple Frontier area are also seen as obstacles to the full realization of their humanity. And for this reason, the lands around the Triple Frontier are also “evil lands,” and the troubles afflicting the Guarani when walking there are interpreted as evidence that the “end of the world” is near and that Our Father will again destroy the earth—this time with fire.

The Triple Frontier, as part of the Bad Land, is seen by the Guarani as a space where evil dwells everywhere. As a result, walkers find themselves in a
state of permanent threat. The evils mentioned by them have different origins, which are related to the presence and proliferation of the jurua and how they have appropriated and transformed the space. For the Guarani, many of the evils affecting them are caused by environmental changes caused by the jurua: the cutting of forests, the disappearance of animal species, the contamination of rivers with pesticides, and the flooding of the land by the Itaipu reservoir. These evils extend to the untimely death of infants and the various diseases “that make people die sooner,” all of which exacerbate existing problems by making their lands barren, invoking heatwaves, and changing rainfall patterns.

A Guarani shaman who lives in the Ocoí village at the shore of the Itaipu reservoir commented on the ecological imbalance caused by the dam. He said that several species of fish, birds, and land animals such as the capybara, the tapir, and the jaguar have disappeared since the formation of the lake. At the same time, certain aquatic animals, such as toads and frogs, saw a huge population growth. The shaman believes that the proliferation of these amphibians and the consequent physical contact of people with them have brought many evils to the community. He told the story of a teenager who got an “evil” while swimming with his friends in the reservoir. According to the shaman, the teenager began to feel weak and discouraged, stopped eating or even going home, spending all day sitting silent and alone in the lake with water up to his waist. Brought by his mother to consult the shaman, it was discovered that the boy was suffering from jepota and that the evil was caused by physical proximity and frequent contact with frogs (juytara) living on the banks of the lake. In a dream, the shaman found himself surrounded by frogs, so many that just to walk forward he had to push them away with his ritual stick. Their croaking was deafening, and they leapt agitated in front of him as if trying to prevent his passage. With difficulty the shaman progressed until he saw the teenager at a distance in the middle of a cluster of amphibians. The shaman explained that the boy had a frog body, croaking and jumping with them. But as a shaman, he still managed to see the teenager as “people” (ava). Getting closer, he held the stick for the teen to grab, but the boy did not want to leave, as he was already feeling himself part of that animal species and was getting used to that “way of life.” The shaman, however, refused to give up, and in one swift blow he managed to catch him by the hand and bring him back to his “real kin.” After the dream and after passing through various rituals of healing, the shaman said the teenager began to resume his behavior as “people,” going back to eating, talking, playing, and studying. Advised by the shaman, the teenager began avoiding the banks of the lake.
The Guarani also point to population growth in cities and the countryside throughout the Triple Frontier area as a cause for new evils. In their view, the jurua population boom had generated an unavoidable physical and geographical proximity that has increased the frequency of contacts (i.e., the source of evils). They cite the example of interethnic marriages between Indians and jurua, arguing that the mestizo children are born weak, die as babies, and when they do not die, they become lazy adults and physically weak for lacking the “strong body” of the “real human.” Many Guarani also worry about the increasing number of Indians living the “wrong way” with a different behavior in relation to the “real humans.” One example is the accusation, by the Ocoi residents in Brazil, that their kin living in the Acaray-Mi and Kirito settlements in Paraguay are losing their “good way of living” and have adopted the “evil behavior” of the jurua. They argue that the residents of Acaray-Mi and Kirito spend much time in town, working, studying, or drinking cachaca (Brazilian rum) with the jurua, and as a consequence they have adopted inappropriate behavior, such as buying guns to threaten and kill people, consuming alcohol, taking drugs, and having sex with jurua prostitutes.

Similar arguments are used by the Mbyá on the Argentine bank of the Iguazu River against the Guarani arriving from “São Paulo” (i.e., the Guarani villages at the Atlantic Seaboard of Brazil), who are seen as the carriers of many evils obtained from walking with the jurua. This criticism is especially applied to young people who prefer to spend money on clothes, shoes, baseball caps, and cell phones instead of helping their families. In these cases, the problem is not related to specific places but rather is inherent to the people who “come from far away” and bring evil with them in the process. In this sense, the Triple Frontier area, as a high-transit nexus of people—especially jurua—is considered a space conducive to the spread of evil, a situation that can endanger the very meaning of life for the Guarani and their ability to live as humans on Earth.

**CLOSING REMARKS**

The Guarani live an apparent paradox: walking on this Earth is the only way to perpetuate humanity and fulfill their destiny of eternal divinity. But the earth’s paths have come to present numerous dangers that can derail their existential project. In this sense, the space of the Triple Frontier area plays an important role as a place that both generates instability and affirms the human condition.
of the Guarani. It is an unstable space due to its intense flow of people, most of whom are seen as potential carriers of evil. It is also a hostile space, surrounded by nearly insurmountable obstacles to the conductivity of the walkers. Yet in the eyes of the Guarani, the Triple Frontier area is not a distinct, strange, or unknown territory; on the contrary, they traverse the area with dexterity and an ever-present internal compass. In Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, they are well aware of the points and bus lines, street names, shops, places where to sell handicrafts, and squares with taps for drinking water and washing clothes. As they cannot stay for long in any one place, they never stop walking and make use of transborder buses that take them from one country to another within minutes.

Many Guarani claim to like it in the city, that they rejoice in wandering through its streets, looking at the shop windows and façades, and that they welcome the movement of people and cars. It is not that they prefer urban life—even those who have lived in the city say life in the villages, next to their kin, is always better. However, walking in the city brings an experience of joy that life in the villages does not offer in the same manner. In the city there is entertainment, distraction, the chance to eat different foods, meet different people, discover new places, make money, get a job. In this regard, for the Guarani, to walk the paths of the Triple Frontier area is a way of putting to the test their own human condition. There are those who manage to cross it and move on, proving to themselves and others that they have the “strong body” and continue to be “true humans.” But others let themselves get carried away by evil while walking in this space, losing their humanity and, in the process, devolving into other beings.

In Guarani cosmology, however, nothing is permanent. Those who today are human may lose this condition, and nonhumans can return to humanity just as easily. This ongoing dispute between humanization and its opposing forces is at the core of Guarani thought. This worldview is based on the dual attempt to overcome and control earthly urges while still balancing the desire to achieve the perfection of the gods.

NOTES

1. There are no current demographic data on the Guarani population. The estimate of one hundred thousand people is by Grumberg and Melià. By comparison, the anthropologist Pierre Clastres estimates that the Guarani population of the sixteenth century in this area was approximately 1.5 million people distributed between several inhabited villages with an average of 600–700 residents. Georg
Grumberg and Bartomeu Melià, *Mapa Guarani Retã 2008: Povos Guarani na fronteira Argentina, Brasil e Paraguai* (São Paulo: CTI, 2008); Pierre Clastres, *A sociedade contra o estado: Pesquisas de antropologia política* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1978), 48. The challenge of defining a “Native point of view” has been a central concern of anthropologists since the end of nineteenth century. Without directly engaging in this scholarly debate, this chapter approaches the “Native perspective” of the Guarani Indians through the ethnographic methodology used to conduct research. The findings presented herein are the product of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between 2002 and 2003 as the author lived with Guarani groups for twelve months as they moved across the frontiers of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina.

2. According to some scholars, the people who make up the Mbyá and Caiuá subgroups would be the descendants of the ancient “Guarani do Mato,” groups that remained relatively distant from contact with settlers between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Nhandeva or Chiripá would be the direct descendants of the ancient “Guarani das Missões,” catechized by Jesuit priests between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. After the expulsion of the missionaries in 1759, the Indians would have returned to live in the forests on the banks of the Paraná River at the border between Brazil and Paraguay. As for Chiriguano-Chané, there is evidence that they would have migrated in the period before the Spanish conquest from the Chaco region toward the highlands of the Bolivian Andes, where they would have merged with Chané (Arawak). About the Aché-Guayaki of Eastern Paraguay, Pierre Clastres develops a controversial hypothesis, but no less fascinating, that the Guarani groups would have “returned” to a previous cultural level, turning to hunting and gathering, developing large social differences compared with other current Guarani subgroups. See Bartomeu Melià, “A Terra sem Mal dos Guarani: Economia e profecia,” *Revista de Antropologia* 33 (1990): 33–46; León Cadogan, “En torno a la aculturación de los Mbya-Guarani del Guairá,” *América Indígena* 10, no. 2 (1960): 133–50; Pierre Clastres, *Crônica dos índios Guayaki: O que sabem os Ache, caçadores nómades do Paraguai* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34, 1995); Isabelle Combés and Thierry Saignes, *Alter ego naissance de l’identité Chiriguano* (Paris: Édition de l’école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1995).

3. According the ethnologist Bartomeu Melià, frequent visits between the Guarani groups living in geographically distant places reinforce a “reciprocity economy,” a fundamental principle that is expressed not only in economic terms but also that refers to various fields of social, political, and religious life, uniting these spatially dispersed populations. Bartomeu Melià, “A Terra sem Mal dos Guarani.”

4. Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Naufrágios e comentários* (Porto Alegre: L & M, 1999), 129. At first glance, it might appear strange that Cabeza de Vaca described chickens and ducks among the livestock of the Guarani, as these birds had originally been introduced in the Americas by European colonizers. Although Cabeza de Vaca was the first European to visit this area in particular, it must be noted that the Guarani Indians whom he encountered were already aware of the existence
of Europeans elsewhere. Moreover, it is possible that the Guarani themselves had earlier come into contact with Europeans in farther-away locations. In his diary, Cabeza de Vaca explained that he began his journey on the coast of Santa Catarina (in southern Brazil) and followed the “Caminho de Peabiru,” a path through the forest used by Indians before the arrival of Europeans. These caminhos (roads) were part of a larger network through which people and goods circulated widely, linking Guarani Indians in the coastal regions of southern Brazil to inland communities that lived in the tropical forests near the confluence of the Paraná and Iguazú Rivers. Cabeza de Vaca himself noted that some of the men accompanying his troops were Guarani Indians and that their knowledge of the area—a region previously unknown to Europeans—was important to the success of their expedition. We can thus infer that the chickens and ducks observed by Cabeza de Vaca (much like the many other material goods of European origin) probably arrived to the local Guarani by way of the Caminho de Peabiru. It is worth mentioning that the Guarani living on the Island of Santa Catarina had contact with Europeans since 1503, nearly four decades before Cabeza de Vaca’s journey inland.

6. See Frederico Freitas’s “Argentinizing the Border,” chap. 4 in this vol.
7. There are few historical and ethnological studies that portray the situation faced by the Guarani groups in the first decades of the twentieth century, a period of intensified migration of farmers toward the Triple Frontier area. Some scholars refer to a “demographic vacuum” in historical and anthropological literature on the indigenous presence in the region. Other scholars argue that one reason for this silence in the regional bibliography is that indigenous populations were described in historical and documentary sources of the period as “Paraguayan” or “savages.” In Packer’s analysis, this “silence” or “emptiness” of historical sources was a deliberate effort by government and private agencies to deny rights and any kind of protection to the Indians and thus to allow the advance of the agricultural expansion fronts. See Lúcio Tadeu Mota, As guerras dos indios Kaingang (Maringá: EDUEM, 1994); Sarah Iurkiv Gomes Tibes Ribeiro, “O horizonte é a terra: Manipulação da identidade e construção do ser entre os Guarani no Oeste do Paraná” (PhD diss., Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2002); Ian Packer, “Violação dos direitos humanos e territoriais dos Guarani no Oeste do Paraná (1946–1988): Subsídio para a Comissão Nacional da Verdade” Centro de Trabalho Indigenista, Biblioteca Digital, January 4, 2014, http://bd.trabalhoindigenista.org.br/documento/viola%C3%A7%C3%B5es-dos-direitos-humanos-e-territoriais-dos-guarani-no-oeste-do-paran%C3%A1-1946-1988-sub.
8. On this theme, the article by Misuzaki describes in detail the history of these occupations and the situation of poverty in which many Guarani groups lived in the far west of the Paraná State, near the border with Paraguay. Teresa Itsumi Misuzaki, “A luta dos povos Guarani no Extremo Oeste do Paraná,” in “Mundo do trabalho,” special issue, Revista Pegada 16 (2015): 75–88.
9. The number of households and total population of a *tekoa guasu* are difficult to estimate because of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that define which villages belong to each particular set, something that is really flexible. It depends often on the personal assessment of each indigenous informant or the context in which the information was recorded. That said, the computation of forty estimated villages for this set has the membership criteria geographically linked to the proximity of the Triple Frontier area; in other words, they are included in this set of villages, the ones located within a 200-kilometer buffer around the point of intersection of the three international boundaries (Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay). For an estimate of the total population, the numbers of residents per village collected in the last five years by the local offices of the Brazilian National Indian Foundation, the Argentine National Aboriginal Pastoral Team, and the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute were considered.


11. The spatial wandering of the Guarani is a classic theme in South American ethnology. In the pioneering work of ethnologist Curt Nimuendajú *Legends of Creation*, it is evident that the “long walks” of the Guarani had strong ties to their mythical-religious system. Nimuendajú describes the wandering of many Guarani groups that, in the early twentieth century, left the border of Brazil with Paraguay and walked on foot for over a thousand kilometers to reach the coast of São Paulo. In the author’s analysis, this movement was motivated by the belief that walkers could reach Yvy Marãéy, the Land without Evil, a mythical paradise where they would live in peace with ample food and eternal life. This analytical perspective was taken up and developed by various scholars, enabling an expansion of our knowledge of the relationship of the Guarani with the geographical space. Ethnologists such as León Cadogan, Egon Schaden, Hélène Clastres, and Bartomeu Melià each in their own way addressed the spatial wanderings of Guarani groups in different perspectives and arrived at different conclusions. Nevertheless, what can be seen in these studies is an attempt to unify the social and religious fields into the same plane. On the sociological level, these scholars point out that the Guarani have a model of social organization that is realized by associating their nonfixation on space with a cosmological system that locates the Land without Evil on the other side of the Atlantic. From this perspective, walking for the Guarani is a concrete way to update a system of thought that encodes meanings for their social life in their spatial wandering. See Curt Nimuendajú, *As lendas da criação e da destruição do mundo como fundamentos da religião dos Apapocívaa-Guarani* (São Paulo: Editoria Hucitec, 1987); León Cadogan and Egon Schaden, “Ayvu Rapyta: Textos míticos de los Mbyá-Guarani del Guairá,” *Revista de Antropologia* 1, no. 1 (1953): 35–41; Egon Schaden, *Aspectos fundamentais da cultura Guarani* (São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1962); Hélène Clastres, *Terra sem Mal: O profetismo Tupi-Guarani* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1978); Bartomeu Melià, “A Terra sem Mal dos Guarani, 33–46. On the spatial movements of the Guarani in the Triple Frontier, I suggest read-
ing Evaldo Mendes Silva, *Folhas ao vento: A micro-mobilidade de grupos Mbya e Nhandedéva (Guarani) na Tríplice Fronteira* (Cascavel: EDUNIOESTE, 2010).


13. This equivalence between the terms is recorded in the *Vocabulário y Tesoro* of Montoya that presents the following meanings for the term *ycó*: “being, living, live, walk, understand something, be.” Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Gramática y diccionarios (arte, vocabulario y tesoro) de la lengua Tupí ó Guarani* (Vienna: Faesy y Frick and Maisonneuve, 1876).

14. Traditional beverage of the Guarani Indians and other indigenous groups in South America. It is widely consumed by the non-Indian population of Paraguay, Argentina, and southern Brazil. It is prepared from the infusion of yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*). When served cold it is called *terere*, and when served hot it is called *chimarrão* (in Portuguese) or *mate* (in Spanish).


17. The suffix -axy sets a very broad universe of meanings that can be applied to a single person, a community, or a specific situation. -Axy can be a disease or physical discomfort (as discouragement to walk, to work, drowsiness, lack or excess of appetite for food or sex, body aches, fever, wounds, skin damages, vomit, diarrhea, and alcoholism). It can refer to the “evils” that afflict some or all of the Guarani population, such as the scarcity of land, food, or the contempt of the youngest for language and cultural traditions. It can also indicate a “bad behavior,” individual or collective, which is called *eko-axy* (wrong or bad way to live life). It is a behavior that deviates from the principles of “good behavior” (*eko porã*) recommended by the gods and shamans.


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