

## Jean de Léry: records of colonization and education in the work “Story of a journey made to the land of Brazil, also called America” (1557–1558)

*Jean de Léry: registros de colonização e educação na obra “História de uma viagem feita à terra do Brasil, também chamada América” (1557–1558)*

*Jean de Léry: registros de colonización y educación en la obra “Historia de un viaje realizado a la tierra de Brasil, también llamada América” (1557–1558)*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the records of colonization and education in the book “History of a trip made to the land of Brazil, also called America” by Jean Léry, in the period from 1557 to 1558. This is a historical research anchored in Cultural History. Jean de Léry’s work in Brazil represented an attempt to introduce the values and practices of Calvinism to the Tupinambá. Among the records of education and colonization examined, catechesis stands out, which promotes Christian precepts and new cultural values; the reception of visitors as a form of cultural exchange and survival, and various rituals covering anthropophagy, funeral, marriage, polygamy, curing illnesses and body ornaments. These educational records illustrate the diversity and cultural richness of these people, which, despite the impacts of colonization, continue to inspire and challenge our conceptions about this culture.

**Keywords:** Jean de Léry. Colonization. Education.

### RESUMO

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar os registros de colonização e educação no livro “História de uma viagem feita à terra do Brasil, também chamada América”, de Jean Léry, no período de 1557 a 1558. Trata-se de uma pesquisa histórica ancorada na História Cultural. A atuação de Jean de Léry no Brasil representou uma tentativa de introduzir os valores e as práticas do calvinismo entre os Tupinambá. Entre os registros de educação e colonização examinados, destacam-se a catequese, que difundia preceitos cristãos e novos valores culturais; a recepção de visitantes, compreendida como forma de intercâmbio cultural e de sobrevivência; e diversos rituais, abrangendo a antropofagia, os funerais, o casamento, a poligamia, a cura de doenças e os ornamentos corporais. Esses registros

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educativos evidenciam a diversidade e a riqueza cultural desse povo que, apesar dos impactos da colonização, continua a inspirar e a desafiar as concepções contemporâneas sobre sua cultura.

**Palavras-chave:** Jean de Léry. Colonização. Educação.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los registros de colonización y educación en el libro “Historia de un viaje hecho a la tierra de Brasil, también llamada América” de Jean Léry, en el período de 1557 a 1558. Se trata de una investigación histórica anclada en la Historia de la Cultura. El trabajo de Jean de Léry en Brasil representó un intento de introducir los valores y prácticas del calvinismo a los Tupinambá. Entre los registros de educación y colonización examinados destaca la catequesis, que promueve preceptos cristianos y nuevos valores culturales; la recepción de visitantes como forma de intercambio cultural y supervivencia, y diversos rituales que abarcan la antropofagia, el funeral, el matrimonio, la poligamia, la curación de enfermedades y los adornos corporales. Estos registros educativos ilustran la diversidad y la riqueza cultural de estos pueblos que, a pesar de los impactos de la colonización, continúan inspirando y desafiando nuestras concepciones sobre su cultura.

**Palabras clave:** Jean de Léry. Colonización. Educación.

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this text was to analyze records of colonization and education in the book “History of a Voyage Made to the Land of Brazil, Also Called America,” by Jean Léry. The time frame covers the years 1557 and 1558, a period during which this traveler conducted an ethnographic study of the Indigenous Tupinambá of Guanabara Bay, Rio de Janeiro. The work represents, in particular, the version and perspective of a European religious figure regarding the customs and values of the Tupinambá of Guanabara Bay, in present-day Rio de Janeiro. The natives are sometimes described as “naive” and “docile” and, at other times, as “evil,” “cannibalistic,” and “demon-possessed.”

The interaction between travel and education is particularly relevant in the accounts of this Calvinist traveler. According to the Indigenous scholar Gersem dos Santos Luciano (Baniwa, 2006), education is a vital element in the cultural structure of a people. In this context, education is defined as the set of processes inherent in the socialization of individuals and as an essential component of any cultural system. These processes include mechanisms aimed at reproducing, perpetuating, and/or transforming culture. Educational systems are guided by the specific social projects of each community, articulating institutions, values, and practices in dynamic integration with other social systems, such as economics, politics, religion, and morality. Thus, Indigenous education, according to (Baniwa, 2006), refers to the inherent processes of transmitting and producing knowledge among Indigenous peoples and plays a crucial role in preserving and transforming their cultures within specific social spaces and times.

Indigenous education, according to (Baniwa, 2006), is a process of transmitting ancestral knowledge and shaping generations through oral practices spanning from childhood to adulthood. In this context, musicians, painters, artisans, and others are formed under the tutelage of parents and grandparents, who share ancestral wisdom from the earliest years of life. The uniqueness of this educational system is shaped by observation, empirical experience, and self-reflection, all of which are rooted in myths, stories, festivals, and rituals. Elders and community leaders significantly influence on the formation of character and technical skills, which are fundamental elements for life and social interaction.

As the author points out, mature life entails the obligation of elders to pass on knowledge and values to their descendants, as they are the guardians of culture and tradition. Failure to transmit this knowledge may result in the gradual loss of cultural identity and the weakening of practices that sustain collective memory, perpetuating a cycle of social disintegration and disconnection from a people's ancestral roots.

The analysis of educational dynamics is enriched by the primary source examined in this study, "History of a Voyage Made to the Land of Brazil, Also Called America," written by Jean de Léry and published in Portuguese in 1889. The main framework is based on Fernandes (1963), Ciampa (1998), Almeida (1999), Canen (1999), Évieux (2002), and Baniwa (2006). This research contributes to the history of education in the colonial period by challenging limitations in the field's historiography.

In addition to the introduction and final considerations, the text is organized into two sections: "Jean de Léry and his accounts of the colonization of the Tupinambá," which discusses the first attempt to colonize the indigenous Tupinambá of Guanabara Bay, Rio de Janeiro; and "Education and the invention of the 'other,'" which analyzes Tupinambá culture with the aim of understanding the fine line between imagination and reality in attempts to colonize and catechize the "Other."

## JEAN DE LÉRY AND HIS ACCOUNTS ON THE COLONIZATION OF THE TUPINAMBÁ

"I should very much like to see the clause in Adam's will that excludes me from a share of the world."

King Francis I of France (1494–1547) uttered this phrase to express his discontent with the Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494 by the kings of Portugal and Castile and Aragon (future Spain), John II and Ferdinand II, respectively. The treaty divided the lands discovered during maritime expansion between the two countries, preventing other European nations from participating in the colonization of what would become the Americas. Francis I expressed this view in an ironic tone to indicate that he did not accept the treaty's terms and would pursue overseas exploration (Bezerra, 2017).

Merchants from non-Iberian countries who embarked on maritime ventures and traded in the "West Indies" were regarded as slavers or pirates and were therefore labeled criminals by the Iberian crowns. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, some merchants, supported by the French crown, opposed the "Testament of Adam" (as the Treaty of Tordesillas became known) and planned to establish a colony in Brazil called France Antarctique. This colony was based in Guanabara Bay, present-day Rio de Janeiro, a geographic area assigned to Portugal by the Treaty of Tordesillas. This mercantilist enterprise was established in 1555, following an expedition led by Admiral Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon (1510–1571). The entourage, consisting of approximately 600 people, landed in Guanabara Bay. After negotiating with the Tupinambá, they managed to build Fort Coligny and initiate the colonization project. According to Moreira Neto (2009a, p. 32), "It was not a settlement colony, but rather a pioneering and transitory center where political and economic reasons were added to religious fervor." Fort Coligny was destroyed in 1560; however, the French continued to trade with the natives until they were definitively expelled in 1567 by troops commanded by the Portuguese.

According to Moreira Neto (2009a), the first French attempt to colonize the Americas was organized and sponsored by merchants, who received support from the state and both Calvinist and Roman Catholic Christian churches. Religious leaders were responsible for catechizing the natives, the state for maintaining order and control, and the merchants for exploiting colonial labor and natural resources. Among these religious figures was a young Calvinist theology student named Jean de Léry.

Also according to Moreira Neto (2009b), the Frenchman Jean de Léry (1534–1611) arrived in Brazil on March 10, 1557, as a theology student of the Calvinist Church and was sent to serve as a missionary in France Antarctique, in Guanabara Bay. He remained among the natives until January 1558, when he returned to France. He was the heir to a wealthy family that had converted to Calvinism, a religion founded by John Calvin (1509–1564). At the age of 18, Jean began studying theology in Geneva, Switzerland, the center of Calvinism. Before completing his theological studies, he was commissioned to travel to Brazil, along with thirteen other missionaries, to catechize the natives involved in the colonization enterprise founded by Villegaignon. He remained on Brazilian soil for nearly a year, dedicating most of this period to direct contact with the Tupinambá of France Antarctique.

Léry believed that conversion to Christianity would grant the Tupinambá access to salvation and eternal life after death, as well as enable them to abandon their “barbaric” customs and become civilized according to European standards. It is important to emphasize that Léry’s catechesis took place in a context of conquest and colonization, in which European values and interests were imposed on Indigenous peoples. Thus, the catechesis practiced by the missionary consisted of teaching the principles of Christianity and converting the Indigenous population to Calvinism, generating conflicts and religious disputes between Catholics and Calvinists in the region.

As a result of these religious disputes, Léry was accused of heresy and forced to leave Coligny Island, the seat of France Antarctique. He then began living in Tupinambá villages, where he described their culture while continuing his conversion efforts. In January 1558, he returned to Geneva, where he completed his theological studies and became a Calvinist pastor.

His accounts of the journey to Brazil resulted in the historical source “*Histoire D’un Voyage Faict En La Terre Du Brésil Dite Amérique*,” written eighteen years after his return to Europe and published in French in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1578. In 1889, it was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil under the title “*História De Uma Viagem Feita À Terra Do Brasil, Também Chamada América*.”

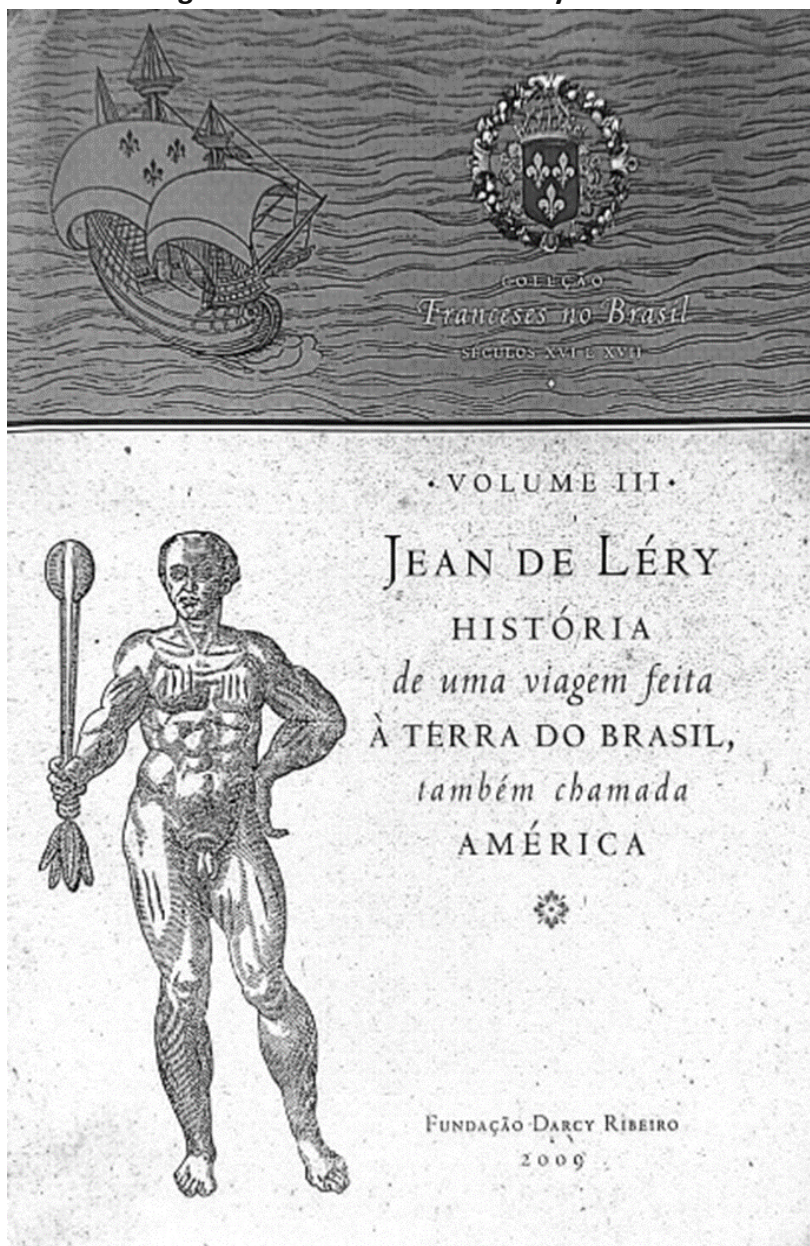
The cover of the book, published in 2009, features an image of a naked Tupinambá man holding a *maracá*. At the top of the cover, a caravel sailing on the high seas represents the great voyages and the conquest of lands by the French. The image of the Indigenous man is significant because Jean de Léry lived among the Tupinambá and provided detailed descriptions of their culture. Thus, this image (Figure 1) represents the author’s perspective on Indigenous life in Brazil and the importance of observing and documenting local cultures.

The work was published by the Darcy Ribeiro Foundation and, like the original French edition, contains 290 pages, including a dedication to Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, a preface, and sonnets praising the work. It consists of twenty-two chapters: the first six focus on the departure from France, the voyage, and arrival at the destination; chapters seven through twenty describe Brazil and its inhabitants; and the final two chapters address the return journey to Europe.

The book provides detailed descriptions of the flora, fauna, and culture of the Tupinambá. The records are imbued with medieval Christian values, in which worldly actions associated with pleasure were considered sinful, whereas actions linked to suffering were valued as preparation for heavenly life. According to Almeida (1999), travel literature from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries does not conform to a modern framework because it is permeated by medieval imagery. Accordingly, the Tupinambá are described by the traveler based on medieval visions infused with religious, mythical, and superstitious concepts, as will be discussed below.

Léry’s records provide valuable insights into the lives of the Tupinambá during their first contact with European colonizers. His observations and descriptions also contribute to a understanding of the process of colonization in Brazil.

Figure 1 - Cover of Jean de Léry's book.



Source: Léry (2009).

## EDUCATION AND THE INVENTION OF THE “OTHER”

“They all – men and women – went around naked.”

*“Andam nus [...] todos os brasileiros.”*

In the epigraph chosen to introduce this topic, Léry (2009, p. 100) refers to the Indigenous people inhabiting the Brazilian coast. It may seem unusual to speak of Brazilians in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, since the term “Brazilian” began to be constructed as a nationality only after Brazil’s political independence in 1822. However, according to Funari (1997), at the beginning of colonization, the term “Brazilian” was used by travelers to identify Indigenous brazilwood traders, not as a nationality. These traders were characterized as shameless, uncivilized (savages, barbarians, and cannibals), and strong. The epigraph indicates that the travelers’ first perception of the natives was their nudity.

Regardless of age, the natives lived naked, as if they had emerged from the “mother’s womb,” and showed no “modesty or shame” (Léry, 2009, p. 129).

The naming of peoples, places, the continent, and the country itself reflects cultural estrangement and the incessant effort to make the unknown intelligible and mappable. Attempts to become familiar with what was exotic and different allowed travelers to associate it with religious elements influenced by biblical knowledge, as well as with superstitious and mythical elements present in the European imagination. Describing “others” from the perspective of the “self” proved easier than attempting to understand Indigenous peoples within their own sociocultural universe.

Thus, what was seen began to be renamed to facilitate communication: Indian, West Indies, New World, Santa Cruz Island, Brazil, Maranhão, etc. European Christian names were attributed to places and their inhabitants. Biblical and medieval explanations were adopted in attempts to understand the native cultures encountered. These views were marked by bias toward the exotic and aimed to deify or demonize Indigenous customs according to Christian parameters. Drawing on medieval European cultural influences, travelers sought to document their observations and expectations, disseminating European “discoveries” — in this case, French — to future investors and Christians in the Old World. According to Rinaldi (2007, p. 40), the traveler “writes what he observes and what he expects to find.” In this sense, what was recorded corresponded to what readers were expected to know. These observations were guided by Eurocentric perspectives.

The practice of Eurocentric relations between conqueror and conquered reinforced the construction of identities for the “other.” Burke (2017) notes that discussions about the “other” (*l’Autre*) originated with French cultural historians seeking to understand homogenization, identity, and cultural encounters. According to this author, two inverse processes occur in cultural encounters: the construction of analogies or the opposition of cultures. In the constructions of analogies, cultural distances are disregarded, and the “other” is assimilated as a “reflection of the self” (Burke, 2017, p. 184). In the opposing process, the “other” is perceived as belonging to a culture entirely different from that of the dominator. In both cases, “the ‘other’ is dehumanized through identity reduction”, causing “the ‘I’ to not recognize itself in the ‘other.’ The summary elimination of the ‘other’ becomes naturalized in the social imaginary” (Canen, 1999, p. 94). In Léry’s chronicles (2009), the Indigenous person is sometimes portrayed as a new Adam or as a descendant of Adam’s corrupted lineage and of Ham, Noah’s cursed son.

According to the Holy Bible (2017), in the Book of Genesis (cf. Gen. 5:32; 10:6), Noah had three sons — Shem, Ham, and Japheth — who survived the Flood. Ham was cursed for having disrespected his father: he entered Noah’s tent, saw him drunk on wine, and, instead of covering him, went to tell his brothers, who then covered their father (Gen. 9). Thus, the natives of the lands of Brazil were considered cursed and abandoned by God, a people left “to the blindness of their senses” (Léry, 2009, p. 217). Brazil was also interpreted through the opposition between good and evil, being portrayed at times as paradise and at others as purgatory or hell.

The supposed “inherited curse” and “promiscuous life” of Indigenous peoples were justified by Jean de Léry (2009) based on practices such as polygamy and sexual freedom. He explained that the Tupinambá were polygamous and could have as many wives as they wished; however, women were allowed only one husband. Before marriage, parents could offer their daughters to any man, but after marriage, women were expected to live exclusively for their husbands. In cases of infidelity, they could be repudiated or killed, at their husbands’ discretion (Léry, 2009).

Burke (2017) further observes that stereotypical European imagery was transplanted from Africa and Asia to the New World. As Europeans became familiar with their colonies (such as India and Ethiopia), they sought mythical beings in the newly discovered lands of the West Indies. This resulted in a fixation on mythical and monstrous figures, such as Amazons (one-breasted warrior women), mermaids, *Blemmiae* (headless men), and *Sciopods* (enchanted men with a single leg), etc.

From the perspective of constructing the “other” based on preconceived notions, the modern state project aimed to establish collective identities for “discovered” peoples, thereby destroying the cultural identities of invaded nations. Freire (1987) defines cultural invasion as the domination of one culture over another, reinforcing the dominant culture. Culture thus becomes “an instrument of domination between subjects and between human groups” (Brandão, 2017, p. 396). National cultures are forged through processes of domination over different ethnicities, gradually reproducing the identity of the civilizer (Hall, 2006).

Identities attributed by others and assimilated or internalized by subjects are termed presupposed identities by Ciampa (1998). Presupposed identity alienates, whereas metamorphosis liberates. For this author, metamorphosis is characterized by constant and permanent transformations occurring in everyday experiences, group consciousness, and the sense of belonging to social, political, religious, and cultural groups. These metamorphoses represent transitions from a life without prospects or collective foundations — a dehumanized existence — to a life of possibility, hope, and grounded reality in search of better conditions. In the travel literature analyzed, several examples of metamorphosis are evident, such as Indigenous individuals who accepted baptism to become subjects of the King of France and receive advantages, as well as those who befriended the French in exchange for gifts.

Another element identified in the encounter between the Old and New Worlds was cultural hybridism, that is, the construction of hybrid identities based on the interaction between invading and invaded cultures: “Hybridism highlights the dialectic between strategies that resist globalizing oppression and the processes of identity ‘translation’, ‘reinscription’ in light of cultural shocks and clashes” (Canen, 1999, p. 93).

The French arrived with knowledge acquired in their own country but depended on Indigenous knowledge to survive, as local populations were familiar with forests, rivers, animals, plants, and medicinal and poisonous roots. Consequently, French settlers needed to assimilate Indigenous knowledge to remain in Brazil. This exchange led to a fusion of cultures, resulting in the emergence of hybrid cultural forms that incorporated elements from both colonizers and colonized.

Lucinéa Rinaldi (2007) emphasizes that the traveler carries the “self” and, in encounters with the “other,” recognizes familiar elements while seeking to find in the unknown what is already known. In this process, the traveler becomes an apprentice:

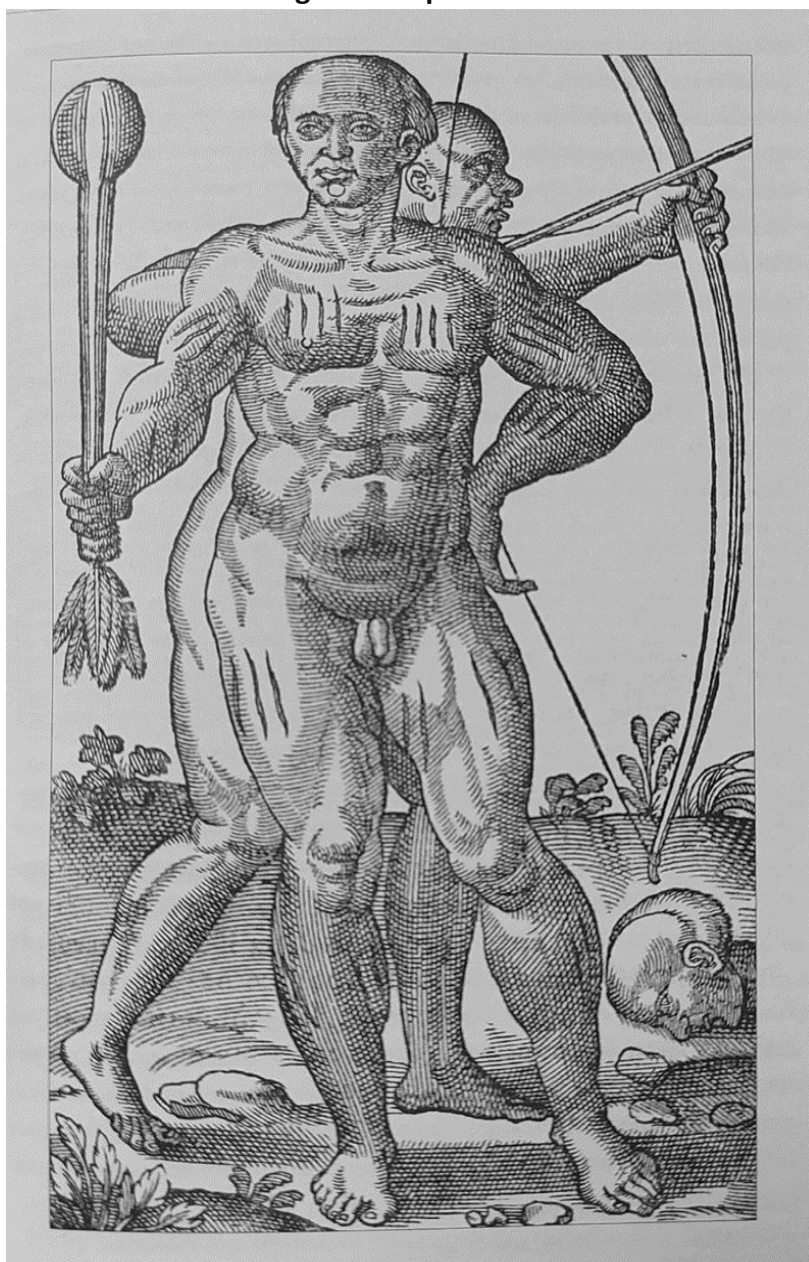
More than just a dream, the traveler carries much of their “self,” their culture, and, depending on the adventure, whether they like it or not, they end up recognizing themselves in the other. When traveling, one hopes to find in the place visited similarities to what one already knows or to everything that belongs to the traveler’s reference, whether in clothing, food, the way people talk, or customs. There is always a shock for those who are apprentices. Happy are those who no longer travel with a ready outlook, for they will learn nothing. Traveling is always learning (Rinaldi, 2007, p. 19).

Curiosity constitutes an indispensable motivational element in education and is likewise activated in intercultural encounters and efforts to understand the “other.” Attempts to assimilate unknown cultures tend to be based on similarity or opposition; the unknown is thus defined by what already exists in the cultural imagination of the observer. What cannot be compared is often considered inferior and interpreted as its opposite. During cultural encounters, both cognoscent and cognoscible subjects engaged in mutual interpretation. The Tupinambá, for example, developed their own interpretations of the colonizers, at times comparing them to gods within their cultural imagination.

Jean de Léry (2009) initially sought to identify the Garden of Eden and elements of Greek and Asian myths present in medieval imagination. Curiosity, as a driving force in cultural encounters, was fully embodied by Léry (2009), who sought similarities and differences between his own culture and that of the peoples of the “land of Brazil.”

Léry (2009) described the Tupinambá by attributing to them characteristics such as a robust physique, nudity, and a warrior and hunter ethos considered indispensable to males. Figure 2 presents a representation of the education of a strong and agile male body, linked to religiosity, as indicated by the *maracá* and the bow and arrow, objects handled by warriors, hunters, shamans, etc. The image depicts the profile of a skilled warrior with the head of an enemy lying on the ground and cuts on his body indicating the number of enemies defeated. Healthy, agile, and well-defined bodies are shown to convey to readers that Brazil’s climate, way of life, and diet were beneficial to

**Figure 2. Tupinambá.**



Source: Léry (2009, p. 197).

its inhabitants. The educational message underlying the image appears to suggest that this was a favorable place to live, created by God and endowed with suitable living conditions. Nevertheless, its inhabitants were perceived as needing Christianization so that God might truly reign there — a mission attributed to the civilized French.

According to Léry (2009), the Tupinambá waged war for religious reasons. War was not intended to plunder or conquer territories, but to avenge the deaths of ancestors. The objective was not killing *per se*, but the capture of prisoners for sacrifice in anthropophagic rituals. Europeans termed this practice cannibalism, as it involved the sacrifice of prisoners of war by the tribe and its guests. The Tupinambá were thus described as “savages” and “cruel barbarians” toward their enemies.

Savages do not wage war to conquer countries and lands from one another, for there is plenty of land for all; nor do they seek to enrich themselves with the spoils of the vanquished or the ransom of prisoners. They are not motivated by any of these things. They themselves confess to being driven by another motive: to avenge parents and friends who were imprisoned and eaten in the past [...]. And they are so fiercely opposed to one another that whoever falls into the enemy's power cannot expect forgiveness: they will be treated in the same way, that is, beaten to death and eaten (Léry, 2009, p. 183).

Bravery was highly valued among the Tupinambá. Warfare involved attacking, capturing, and consuming the enemy, actions considered both brave and defensive, as enemies might otherwise retaliate. Fernandes (1963, p. 90) also associates warfare with territorial and foraging disputes, noting that conflicts often occurred during harvest seasons of crops such as cashews and corn, since “the victorious group likely preserved a greater supply for itself.” Évreux (2002) recounts an expedition to a place called Areia Branca, where Tupinambá groups collecting fish, bird eggs, chicks, and ambergris<sup>1</sup> from the beach were attacked by the Tremembé; some were killed, and others taken prisoner to serve as participants in cannibalistic rituals.

According to Moraes (2009), the Calvinist missionary under study, in opposition to the Catholic Church, associated Tupinambá cannibalism with the Catholic ritual of transforming bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the sacrificed individual was not arbitrary but the strongest warrior. It was believed that consuming this body conferred strength, dexterity, and skills — an idea also present in Catholic belief. This comparison, however, did not aim to value Indigenous ritual but rather to devalue Catholic practice by associating it with cannibalism, “savagery,” and “barbarism.” This interpretation must be situated within the context of religious conflict in Europe, given Léry's Calvinist affiliation.

Jean de Léry (2009) presented Tupinambá anthropophagy as a vicious cycle, since relatives of those killed in rituals would later seek revenge:

An indigenous woman who was captured with her son, who was less than two years old, and enslaved, hoped that when her son grew up, he would escape and join his people to avenge the deaths of his relatives. For the natives who practiced human sacrifice, this act was honorable; thus, the victim's bones served as fleshless trophies (Léry, 2009, p. 198).

In contrast, Fernandes (1963) argues that the purpose of anthropophagic rituals was to appease the gods, as responsibility for a death was attributed to the village of the accused, which was required to present those responsible:

<sup>1</sup> Ambergris is a product originating from the stomach of whales and can be carried to the beach by the waves (Nogueira, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> This Catholic ceremony can be called theophagy, that is, the sacramental ingestion of God in the form of the consecrated host.

Whatever the situation, the local group to which the perpetrator (or perpetrators) of the death belonged was held responsible for the incident. Revenge became inevitable and had to be directed against those responsible for the act (enemies). Only the consummation of revenge could restore the state of social eunomia and the normality of tribal life (Fernandes, 1963, p. 120).

Elsewhere, the same author reports that:

When a Papanaz [boy] killed another of the same generation, in a fight or accidentally, his relatives were obliged to hand him over to the family of the deceased. The two families would gather, and the relatives of the deceased would drown the guilty party. "And all in these gatherings would mourn greatly, eating and drinking for many days, and thus they would become friends." If the killer fled, his or her family had to replace him or her with someone of equivalent status, such as a son or daughter (Fernandes, 1963, p. 259).

This process reflects a logic akin to the law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," in which the offender suffers the same fate as the victim. When the offender was absent, substituting another family member reinforced collective responsibility and concepts of justice among villages.

According to Léry (2009), Indigenous peoples were stronger and more robust than Europeans, and among them one rarely found individuals who were "lame, deformed, crippled, or sickly," nor those with gray hair. They pierced their ears and lips and adorned their bodies with feathers and paint.

Indigenous women painted their eyebrows and eyelids like the "salacious women of France" (Léry, 2009, p. 136). The term "salacious" likely carried a negative connotation, suggesting that Indigenous women were perceived as shameless and obscene, comparable to French prostitutes. Léry (2009) disapproved of female bodily adornment, interpreting it as a means of displaying oneself to men. Throughout his account, contrasts and analogies are employed to define Tupinambá characteristics, highlighting both shared and divergent cultural elements in relation to Europeans.

According to Léry (2009), before the arrival of Europeans, the Tupinambá had no knowledge of the existence of the true God. They did not worship any deity through liturgical rites, pray, or have a designated space for religious worship. They were described as "ignorant," unaware of the creation of the world, and unable to write: "The inhabitants of Europe, Asia, and Africa must praise God for his superiority" (Léry, 2009, p. 204), that is, for being literate, since Indigenous people could neither read nor write.

The noble traveler failed to grasp the natives' religiosity. His religious conceptions likely prevented him from recognizing that their religiosity was based on the existence of *Toupan* (tupán), the thunder, believed to become angry when thunder boomed in the sky; and on *Aygnan* (anháng) or *Kaagerre* (ca'ájára), the evil spirit that tormented and beat the natives. They also believed in the immortality of the soul and that, after death, the righteous — those who had taken revenge and eaten several enemies — would live "beyond the high mountains and dance in beautiful gardens with the souls of their ancestors" (Léry, 2009, p. 205). Regarding places of worship, although they did not have temples like those of Europeans, they nevertheless worshiped their deities. As previously mentioned, anthropophagy was a religious ritual.

How, then, can it be stated that the Tupinambá did not believe in any superior being when French missionaries used local religious imagery to catechize them? Spanish missionaries claimed that their God was the same *Toupan*:

And, as they are very frightened by thunder, which they call *Toupan* (tupán), we used this to show them that our God made the heavens and the earth tremble to demonstrate His greatness and power (Léry, 2009, p. 204).

The Spanish missionaries also told the natives that, because they were followers of God, they were protected and not persecuted by the evil spirit that tormented them so greatly:

They were very surprised when we told them that we were not tormented by the evil spirit and that we owed this protection to God, of whom we spoke so much, because, being much stronger than *Aygnan*, He prevented him from harming us. And it happened that, feeling frightened, they promised to believe in God (Léry, 2009, p. 204-205).

The evil spirit was identified by the missionaries as the devil, an entity originating from the Christian imagination and unknown to the natives of America until then.

At another point, unable to deny the natives' religiosity, Léry (2009) speculates that the Tupinambá did not believe in the one true God but instead had a rudimentary form of religion, believing in some kind of divinity. This belief was supposedly taught to them by the Caraíbas, whom the Spanish called false prophets. The Caraíbas wandered through villages, convincing the indigenous people that "they communicated with spirits," and helping them win wars and grow their roots and fruits (Léry, 2009, p. 207).

Jean de Léry (2009) described Tupinambá culture by identifying common elements and comparing them with European culture. He simplified his accounts to make it more understandable and easier to explain.

It is important to note that Jean de Léry (2009) described Indigenous people based on realities shaped by medieval conceptions, particularly religious, superstitious, and mythological ones. He sought to document both the natives and the preconceived notions that had already been applied during the colonization of Africa and Asia. When he encountered cultural elements that completely escaped his imagination, he classified them as exotic or demonic.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The travel literature of missionary Jean Léry, entitled "History of a Voyage Made to the Land of Brazil, Also Called America," addresses, in addition to the voyage itself, education and the perspectives of the French colonizers regarding the Tupinambá, who inhabited Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro. Léry's mentality reflects the Eurocentric, colonial perspective of the time, as evidenced by frequent use of the terms "savages" and "barbarians" to describe Indigenous peoples, a view that is now academically outdated.

Léry's work followed the same medieval pattern employed by Catholic priests. In other words, it relied on the fear of hell and the authority of religious institutions. This pedagogy was developed in stages. First, reality was observed. Next, certain aspects — such as the anthropophagic rite, nudity, and polygamy — were demonized. Subsequently, other elements were appropriated and adapted to the Christian imagination; for example, *Tupã* became identified with the Christian God. Finally, the natives were catechized based on fear of the devil — introduced to the Americas by missionaries — and on the power of military and religious force, as religious leaders relied on state support and claimed to represent the true God.

In his work, Jean de Léry (2009) defined the "others" of this part of the "West Indies" as people living simple lives in complete harmony with a paradisiacal natural environment. They derived only what was necessary for survival and were devoid of king, law, and faith.<sup>3</sup> This imaginary construction

<sup>3</sup> The original use of the expression "king, law and faith" belongs to the Portuguese chronicler Pero de Magalhães Gândavo (1576): after a trip to Brazil in 1570, he wrote that the indigenous could not be anything great, as in their language they did not have words with the letters F, L, and R, which justified them not having faith, law and king (fé, lei, e rei, in Portuguese).

of Indigenous peoples influenced the way in which colonization and education were conducted, perpetuating stereotypes and romanticized ideas about them.

The educational records identified in Jean de Léry's travel and colonization account of Tupinambá culture reveal a series of practices and values that shaped the lives of these people, highlighting catechesis, the reception of visitors, and the various rituals related to anthropophagy, funerals, marriage, polygamy, healing, and body adornment. Catechesis, for example, functioned as a form of education aimed at instructing Indigenous individuals in the principles of the Christian faith through the introduction of new customs and cultural values.

The reception of visitors, in turn, was a practice that enabled Indigenous peoples to establish relationships with other cultures, exchange knowledge, and trade material resources — such as axes, sickles, mirrors, and fishhooks — for wood and other natural products. This practice also contributed to the survival of Indigenous communities in a hostile environment marked by intertribal wars.

Rituals related to anthropophagy, funerals, marriage, polygamy, disease healing, and body adornment reveal the complexity of these peoples' cultural practices. Although some of these practices were misinterpreted and condemned by colonizers as "barbaric" and "savage," they were integral to the rich traditions of Indigenous communities.

Jean de Léry's accounts highlight the diversity and richness of the Tupinambá people. Although profoundly affected and, in many cases, destroyed by colonization, these cultural processes and practices continue to inform and challenge contemporary conceptions of this culture.

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