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CANELA RELATIONSHIPS WITH GHOSTS: THIS-WORLDLY OR OTHERWORLDLY EMPOWERMENT

The Canela, also known as the Ramkokamekra, are an Eastern Timbira, Gê-speaking people. They live in the cerrado or closed savannah countryside of central Maranhão state, 70 kilometers south of the town of Barra do Corda and 600 kilometers southeast of the mouth of the Amazon. The Canela are best known through the 1946 monograph by Curt Nimuendajú, *The Eastern Timbira*, and currently through my 1990 monograph, *The Canela (Eastern Timbira), I: An Ethnographic Introduction*. In contrast to most native South American peoples being studied today, the Canela live much further east in Brazil–250 kilometers due east of the Belém-Brasília highway–and therefore were "pacified" much earlier, in 1814.

This essay, while on the topic of mourning and its relationship to the afterlife, focuses on two outstanding Canela orientations: (1) living for the present and (2) reliance on the this-worldly based procedures of living Canela in contrast to interventions from the other world, the supernatural, in the form of ghosts. While the distinction between their "*this* world" and their "*other* world" is not actively made and spoken about by ordinary Canela individuals and shamans, since for them these worlds are *one* continuous world, they nevertheless can make this distinction semantically through their choice of expressions in Canela. For instance, activities relying on this-worldly initiatives undertaken by ordinary Canela or by shamans are *amyiá-?khôt* ("self-following": carried out by oneself) in contrast to otherworldly initiatives undertaken by ghosts, which are *me karõ-khôt* ("plural-ghost-following": carried out by ghosts). Even though a *this*- versus *other*worldly distinction may be more of an etic than an emic one, I hold that it is important for us to debate, since it is such an outstanding aspect of the relationship between Canela mourning individuals and their afterlife.

As the Canela shift through the decades from their prepacification view of the relationship between their this world and their afterlife to their current more folk Catholic view of the relationship between their living world and heaven, they shift from projecting their basic reliance onto their *this* world to projecting their basic reliance onto their *other* worlds. The extent that the Canela are no longer relying on their aboriginal shamanism and are relying more on folk Catholicism measures the extent to which they have left a state of considerable self-reliance and therefore *independence* for a state of reliance and therefore *dependence* on backland Brazilians and their religion and culture.

Lowland South American ethnologists are currently studying the effects of colonialism on Native American Amazonian peoples. This measure–relative reliance on *this*- or *other*worldliness–should be helpful in studying the effects of colonialism on other Amazonian peoples, and the degree to which they have undergone cultural change in the direction of the national culture, if change exists in this direction.

Being more specific, I am talking about, for instance, whether a shaman cures or bewitches on his own initiative and responsibility or whether he cures or bewitches only after having received the authority from ghosts from the afterlife–the other world. I am talking about, for instance, whether a Canela widow, in wailing extensively to rid herself of her longing and her memories of her late husband, does so through a this-worldly placed initiative or whether she does so through an otherworldly placed initiative. Actually, a Canela woman wails, on her own initiative, a this-worldly undertaking as projected by herself, while in contrast, a Brazilian backland woman mourns and prays for an otherworldly intervention from god, the Virgin, or a *santo*, an otherworldly undertaking, as projected by herself.

To provide background, I will discuss, first, outstanding Canela beliefs about the ghosts' world and related aspects of shamanism, and then related aspects of mourning practices. Later, I will focus on Canela shamanic contacts with ghosts in this-worldly versus otherworldly contexts. Finally, I will raise issues placing the Canela this world versus other world empowerment of individuals in the context of pan-Amazonian cultures and culture change.

I use the term "otherworldly" rather than "afterlife" most of the time, because I am discussing ongoing relationships between the world of living Canela and their ghosts' other world, not between the world of living Canela and their afterlife–a world that comes later in time.

I use "ghost" most of the time rather than "soul," "spirit," or "picture" (photograph), even though the Canela use only one word *karõ* (Portuguese: *alma*), for these four Western concepts. They use the plural, *me karõ*, only with alive and dead Canela, not with other peoples

or with animate and inanimate objects. Ghosts are recently dead Canela, who first take human form, though months or years later they may take zoological or botanical forms. Eventually they cease to exist. "Souls" are out-of-body living Canela forms *(me karõ)*, who return to their living Canela bodies. "Spirits" are out-of-object forms *(karõ)* of originally zoological, botanical, and mineral materials. All *karõ* entities and items are invisible to ordinary Canela but visible to Canela shamans.

THE OTHER WORLD OF GHOSTS

The Canela world of ghosts is only one of the Canela other worlds. Excepting the world of ghosts, Canela other worlds are inhabited by culture heroes, which are portrayed best in myths, war stories, and festival origin accounts. Culture heroes inhabit: (1) the other worlds above the living Canela world, (2) the other worlds on the same level as the living Canela, and (3) the other worlds below the level of the living Canela. I will not be discussing the Canela culture heroes and their other worlds. These culture heroes are not ghosts: they were never alive in the sense of principally inhabiting the Canela this world and being subject to death. Culture heroes exist in their own right as beings in the Canela mythic, war story, and festival traditions.

Ghosts, who have left forever their this-worldly bodies (*i?-khre-?khà*: its hollow's/space's cover/structure), inhabit a village on the same level as the living Canela's village but to the west of it. Ghosts also wander around the living Canela world so that almost everything a Canela does is seen by some ghost. While ghosts in their own village are believed to enjoy themselves moderately, Canela informants believe they would not enjoy being a ghost. Ghosts carry out almost all the same activities that living (*hĩ iá*) Canela undertake, but living Canela believe that ghosts experience less pleasure in each activity. For instance, the water ghosts drink in their other world's village is warm instead of cool, their meat is relatively tasteless, their sex is less invigorating, and their festive activities are less fun. Thus the Canela prefer to be living in their present world, which they believe is more enjoyable.

Ghosts eventually turn into animals, which turn into still smaller animals and maybe into plants. Eventually they cease to exist as living entities. Thus ghosts are not immortal; their life spans are finite. I maintain that the lack of a concept of immortality is related to the

Figure 1. Canela women mourning, with ceremonial friend watching.

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Canela valuing their other world of ghosts less than their living world. Canela ghosts never go to the other worlds of Canela culture heroes, though living Canela in accounts of the origins of festivals did travel to these other worlds, and they returned to the Canela this world as living Canela.[1] By 1993, most Canela were baptized and believed they ascended to the folk Catholic heaven upon death.

The advantages ghosts have over living Canela are that they can travel instantaneously throughout time and space and that they all know instantaneously what any one ghost has seen while moving around among living Canela individuals. Thus ghosts serve as an all-knowing source of information for shamans (*kay*), and all good shamans can converse with ghosts. In contrast, ordinary Canela do not have access to this otherworldly source because if they have contacts with ghosts they die and become ghosts themselves.

Shamans can summon ghosts when they need to know who stole a machete and where it is, or when they need to know what taboo was broken by a Canela individual and where in his body the resulting intrusion lies. Shamans can summon ghosts when they need to know whether a certain witch (also a *kay*) cast a spell (*h˜u˜utsùù*) of illness on a victim, the shaman's client, and what sort of a spell it was. Informants explain that shamans undertake these activities on their own initiative and responsibility (*amyiá-?khôt*), relying on their this-worldly abilities, even though the special information obtained from a ghost is otherworldly in its origin.

Before pacification, shamans could "see" arriving enemy warriors or approaching plagues on their own initiative–a this-worldly ability–though ghosts sometimes warned them well in advance–an otherworldly intervention.

HOW AN ORDINARY CANELA BECOMES A SHAMAN

Ordinary Canela become shamans through two distinctly different ways. First, a youth who wants to become a shaman carries out extremely careful restrictions *(ipiyakhri tsà;* Portuguese: *resguardos)* against eating certain foods believed to have a high level of "pollution" (*ampoo kakô ?-khên*: some liquid it-bad), such as certain meat juices. Pollutions already in an individual are transmitted to other individuals during sexual intercourse. Consequently, an individual who aspires to become a shaman avoids on his own initiative the more highly polluted foods and sexual intercourse with the individuals who have sex frequently, those in their teens and twenties. The Canela concept of pollution is quantitative, and therefore relative.

Ghosts like and are attracted to relatively unpolluted, that is, relatively "pure" (my expression), individuals. Ghosts will choose their time to visit such an individual in a dream or in the wakeful state. A youth may be very pure from carrying out long, careful, and extensive restrictions, but a ghost, nevertheless, may or may not choose to visit him. Thus the final initiative is up to the ghostly world to take. The final initiative is not up to the individual who is trying to become a shaman no matter how hard he tries.

Women seldom become shamans because, according to men, women rarely have the strength and persistence to maintain sufficiently high restrictions against pollutions to attract ghosts to transform them into shamans. Statistically, these male informants are correct about the number of woman shamans. Nevertheless, there are at least two Canela myths about the activities of female shamans, and one of my best female informants was a shaman.

If a ghost decides to make the aspiring youth a shaman, the ghost visits the youth in animal or human form. The ghost issues instructions which, if followed, enable further visits by the ghost. These are otherworldly interventions. The instructions have to do with purifying the body by maintaining a high level of restrictions to keep out more and more pollutions, increasingly purifying the body. If the youth carries out the instructions well enough, the ghost eventually gives him "powers" (*h˜u˜utsùù*), which the youth carries in his body, usually in the left armpit. Thereafter, the youth as shaman uses these powers on his own. He does not have to summon a ghost to empower himself, though he may summon a ghost to obtain needed information. Thus, the bestowal of "powers" is otherworldly, while the use of powers is this-worldly, though the source of information may be otherworldly. Informants vary as to whether a shaman can summon a ghost to appear or whether he has to wait for a ghost to happen to appear. The more traditional shamans say they can summon ghosts, being more self-empowered, while the more folk Catholic-oriented shamans say they have to wait, being more subject to the other world.

The second way of becoming a shaman occurs when an individual is very sick and possibly dying. Then ghosts may choose to visit the sick individual to cure him or her. If a shaman thinks that such a visitation is likely to occur, he orders Canela families to vacate the part of the village in which the sick person lives and to leave him entirely alone in his house for a night. Dogs may have to be tied up or taken to a farm, because their barking would scare away the visiting ghosts. If the village is sufficiently quiet, the ghosts might choose to come during the night. If they do, and if they choose to cure the sick person, this cured individual has become a shaman and will possess powers to make certain kinds of cures, which he can use on his own initiative and responsibility. Again, the initiative of bestowing "powers" is otherworldly, while the use of the powers, once they are received, is this-worldly. The maintenance of such powers over a lifetime is by the continuous

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practice of food and sex restrictions.

RETRIEVING A SOUL

When Canela are near death, their souls often leave their bodies and travel to the ghosts' village. There a particular soul may or may not participate in the on-going activities of ghosts. If the visiting soul becomes involved in the activities of ghostly life to any significant extent, the soul has to stay in the ghost's world, becoming a ghost, so that the body back in the living Canela world dies. When the kin of a person near death suspect that the soul has left the body, they summon a shaman to help return the soul to its body. The shaman assesses the situation, maybe with the help of some information from a ghost, and then the shaman's soul goes out after the soul of the near-death person into the world of ghosts to try to bring it back to its body. This would save the shaman's client's life, as has been reported to me a number of times. The following occurrence was told to me directly by informants during my fieldwork in October 1991.

A young man of about fourteen years was dying of a stomach ulcer, dysentery, and dehydration (my diagnosis from informants' descriptions). His family summoned a shaman to try to return his soul to his body. The shaman's soul went out into the ghostly world, along the traditional path to the ghosts' village, and found the young man's soul along the path in the company of the ghost of the shaman's aunt. The shaman's soul tried to bring the young man's soul back to the village of the living Canela, but the young man's soul physically knocked down the shaman's soul twice in rapid succession. Nevertheless, the shaman's soul kept working with the young man's soul, cajoling it to return, until the shaman's aunt's ghost told her nephew's soul to go home, saying that the young man's soul wanted to stay in the ghostly world. Thus the shaman's soul returned to the Canela village of Escalvado empty handed. The young man died, and his soul stayed in the ghostly world, becoming a ghost. It was said by informants that the youth really wanted to die.

WAILING

The most conspicuous aspect of mourning is the wailing done mostly by women over thirty who are close kin of the deceased. Only a few men can do Canela wailing, which involves singing in a high-toned yodeling manner, including words of personal meaning to the mourner. The wailing by the close kin, sitting around the cadaver, starts as the first sliver of sun appears just above the houses or landscape in the morning. The wailing continues for two to four hours as the sun rises.

The close kin remain wailing around the cadaver as the principal "formal friend" of the deceased and his or her close kin, the formal friend's associates, prepare the corpse for burial and dig the grave. The formal friend and associates are nonrelatives of the deceased by definition and self-selection. The close kin continue to wail as wave after wave of increasingly distant kin of the deceased walk across the village in family groups from different houses to wail with the closer kin of the deceased, squatting on their ankles around the cadaver. When the formal friend's associates have dug and prepared the grave in the cemetery about half a kilometer outside the village, they return to the village and walk briskly to the house of the deceased with old mats, ropes, and a pole with which to wrap, tie, and sling the corpse. As pallbearers, they will carry the cadaver, slung horizontally from the pole, to the cemetery.

The deceased's formal friend's associates serving in his house usually have to pull his close kin away from his decorated cadaver. The mourners are wailing so intensely that they are not aware of what is going on around them. Consequently, most of their material goods are taken at this time by people from other houses. When a death occurred in my Canela family's house, my Canela sister used to stuff a few family valuables for safe keeping in my private room before the wailing started.

As the pallbearers carry the corpse out of the house, the wailing reaches a dramatic crescendo. The very seriously bereaved, such as the father of a small son, have been known to do somersaults, landing on the back of their heads, breaking their necks. Consequently, associates of the formal friend are on the alert to swiftly intervene and stop such attempted suicides. This scene is the most Dionysian of any that I know of among the more characteristically Apollonian Canela. When the pallbearers return about an hour and a half later from the cemetery, having entombed the corpse, the wailing breaks out again. Then the associates of the formal friend of the deceased tear out some of the walls of the palm straw house and sweep its floor, so cleansing breezes can pass through the house.

During the following days, before the grave-diggers are paid for their services, the bereaved individuals may break out wailing as the sun appears in the morning and as it sets in the evening. Wailing may also break out as close or distant kin return to the village from farms or from distant travel and come to the house of the bereaved. The very severely bereaved, such as the mother of a favorite child or the wife of a lifelong husband, wail with every individual returning to the village they have not wailed with yet. Each time I returned to the Canela, my Canela sister and mother used to wail over me, pushing me down to kneel on a mat, my head bowed. One time when they did not wail over me at all, I had to investigate the situation to learn why. I had thought they were wailing only to honor my return. But I found out that each time I had returned,

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they had wailed over me for a deceased person they were remembering, not just to honor me. The time they did not wail over me was when no close person had died during the year of my absence.

A few days after a Canela burial, depending on how long it takes to assemble the necessary items of payment, the bereaved family pays the deceased's principal formal friend, the grave-digger, for his services and the services of his associates. At sunset, members of the extended family of the deceased sit on the edge of the boulevard just in front of their house. One of their leading mothers' brothers, or grandfathers, summons the grave-digger by chanting out in a formal manner for him to appear. Soon the grave-digger walks solemnly along the village boulevard and arrives before the assembled family with several helpers following him. The principal spokesman of the deceased's extended family tells the grave-digger in the formal language of exhortation to pick up and take away the items laid on a mat, which might include an axe, two machetes, a cast-iron caldron, a shotgun, several cuts of cloth, and a half-meter section of tobacco wound into the form of a rope.

As the grave-digger and helpers pick up and walk casually away with the items, wailing breaks out among the kin of the deceased and lasts about ten minutes for the most severely bereaved. Then their principal elder calms the last mourners and lectures the group for one or two minutes. The thrust of his lecture is always to say that the living must forget the deceased and that they must live for their surviving relatives, especially their children. The principal uncle stresses that it is dangerous to remember the recently deceased. If the mourners remember him or her too intensely, the deceased might return as a ghost to claim their lives.

If strong memories of the deceased still persist in the thoughts and feelings of deeply bereaved individuals, the latter's same-sex primary formal friend goes with the deeply bereaved person to all the locations in and around the village where the associated memories are strongest. A woman may intensely remember where she went bathing privately or had sex with her late husband, or where she pulled up weeds with him on their farm. Consequently, she goes to these places with a female formal friend, and the two women wail together for some time. The formal friend listens to the bereaved

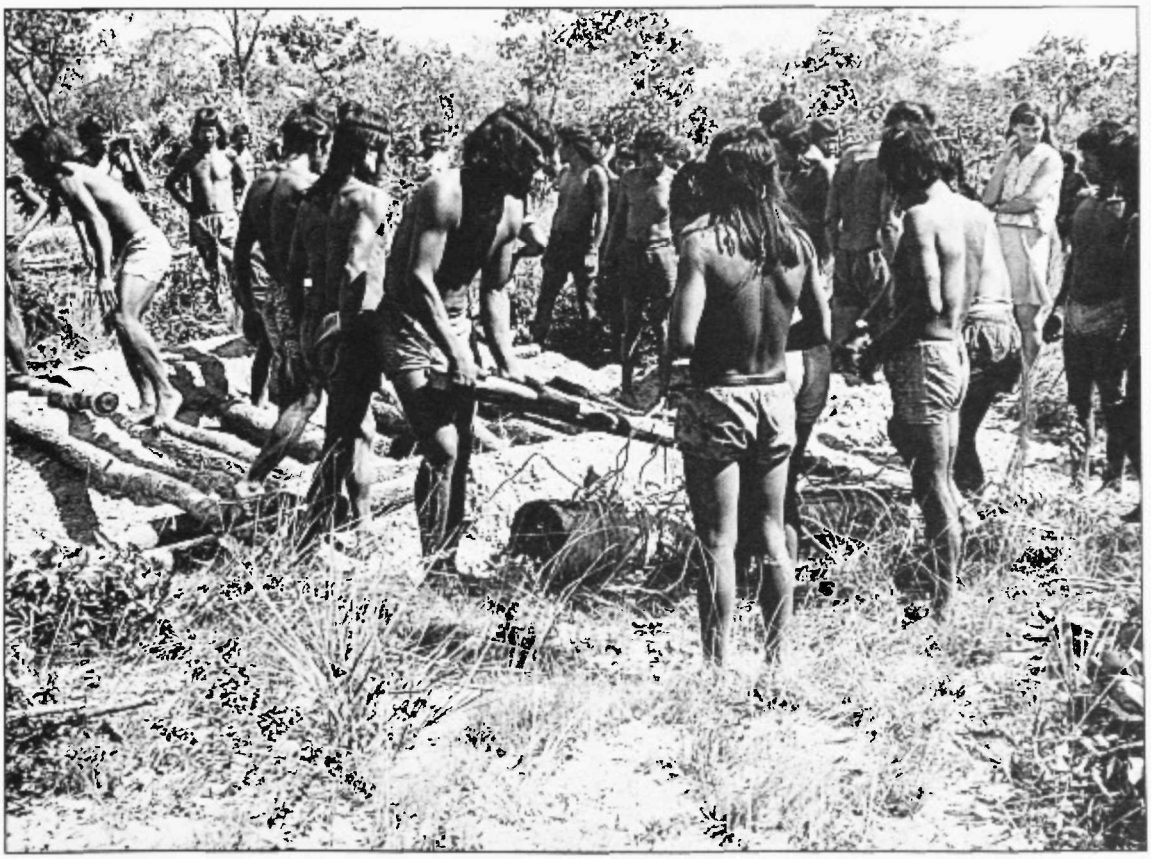

Figure 2. Covering a Canela grave.

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woman's memories as she wails, and the formal friend wails with her to help keep her wailing longer.

The formal friend is a nonrelative, so she is not bereaved. Nevertheless, she manages to wail with tears and phlegm falling on her thighs. Such wailing activities, including the facilitating services of the formal friend, are believed to help a deeply bereaved person forget a loss and to live in the present for the surviving members of the family.

One time in the late 1950s, a Brazilian backland farm woman complained to me that when she had lost her small son, Canela women of one family came and compulsively wailed, squatting by her side, and expected to be paid for their wailing. The backland woman had failed to understand that the wailing Canela women were trying to help her forget her loss and that this was a service as well as an expression of care and bonding. These Canela women had stayed with the backland woman's family many times, working there for food, and they had remembered her lost son. They were carrying out the role of formal friends to the backland woman, helping her wail and cry, so she would forget her loss–a great service that was paid for back in the Canela village. Of course, it also may be true that the Canela women were hungry and had thought of a legitimate way, from their point of view, of obligating the backland woman to feed them.

Rather than relying on an otherworldly placed intervention, such as praying to a saint (a *santo*) and asking him to relieve the anguish caused by the loss, as a backland Brazilian woman of the Canela region does, the Canela women were relying on a this-worldly placed practice to help the backland woman live for the present and the immediate future.

CANELA RELATIONSHIPS WITH GHOSTS

It should be helpful at this point for me to review the characteristic occasions during which a shaman has contacts with ghosts. Some characteristic contacts, this-worldly to otherworldly ones, between a shaman and ghosts for the Canela are the following:

1. When a youth wants to become a shaman: the issue here is whether he can cause ghosts to come to transform him into a shaman, a this-worldly initiative, or whether ghosts come to the youth only of their own volition, an otherworldly initiative. My data show that ghosts come only of their own volition, but in earlier times when the really great shamans were more powerful and when there was more reliance on this-worldly empowerment, maybe such a youth might have summoned ghosts. More research into early recorded myths and war stories of Timbira nations is needed to confirm or disprove this point.

2. When an older Canela is very sick: the issue here is whether a sick older Canela who wants to become a shaman can cause ghosts to appear to transform him or her into a shaman, or whether ghosts come only of their own volition. My data here are the same as above in "1". More research is needed.

3. When a shaman with developed powers wants to carry out shamanic activity such as curing, witchcraft, or clairvoyance: the issue here is whether a shaman can use already received powers to carry out shamanic activities on his or her own initiative, or whether a shaman has to be empowered by ghosts–by the supernatural–for each new shamanic undertaking. My data show that a shaman needs only his or her received and maintained powers, but this self-empowerment is shifting with culture change to the need for empowerment from ghosts.

4. When a shaman needs otherworldly information about this-worldly activities to carry out a shamanic activity: the issue here is whether a shaman can cause ghosts to appear and give the information, or whether a shaman has to wait until ghosts happen to appear and give the information. My data show that more traditionally oriented shamans in the 1970s summoned ghosts, while shamans who relied more on folk Catholicism believed ghosts came only of their own volition. Thus this characteristic occasion of contact was, and presumably is, in transition.

5. When a great shaman is in contact with ghosts for any particular reason: the issue here is whether a great shaman largely controls ghosts and looks down on them as inferior beings–a this-worldly status of relative superiority–or whether great shamans see themselves as being weak before ghosts, who are superior in power–an otherworldly status of relative superiority. Again, my data show that this belief is in transition as Canela culture changes from more "traditional" to more folk Catholic placements of reliance.

CULTURE CHANGE

I must repeat that *my* this-worldly versus otherworldly distinction is not a distinction made by the Canela. For the Canela, their living world and the ghosts' other world are one continuous world, though they can make the distinction through their choice of expressions. The great importance of this etic distinction, in my view, lies in the fact that as the Canela adopt Brazilian backland and urban ideas and practices, they are giving up the this-worldly self-reliance of their earlier state for the otherworldly reliance of backland folk Catholicism, best expressed in the ubiquitous expression *se deus quiser* (should god wish it), a very otherworldly reliance and dependency. The Canela individual is little by little giving up a do-it-myself approach to life's solutions for a basic reliance on the fatalism of the regional backland Brazilian.

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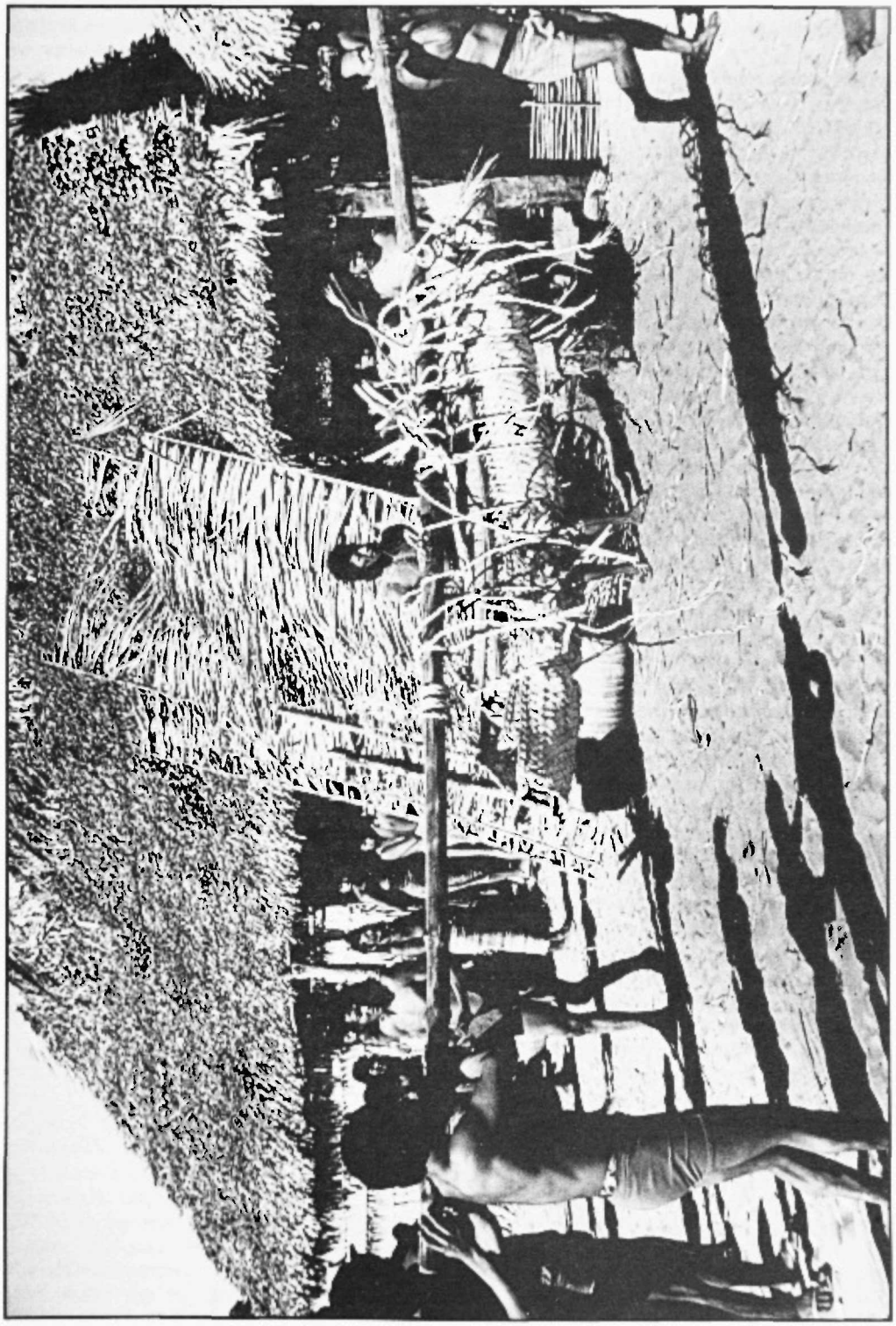

Figure 3. Removing a body from a Canela house to the burial site.

POTENTIAL AMAZONIAN GENERALIZATIONS

Are there similar shifts in reliance–in this-worldly to otherworldly projections of beliefs–among other Amazonian peoples? Such shifts may be measures of the inexorable change in cultural balance from an earlier independence to a more current dependence on the impinging national society.

Focusing on a potential cultural variable, I ask the following question. Since the Canela are cognatic–that is, since they have bilateral kindred–can they be contrasted through the shift from this-worldly to otherworldly projected reliance with peoples of the Northwest Amazon who usually have shallow lineages and a recognized line of ancestors?

In addition, as incipient horticulturalists before they were pacified, can the Canela be contrasted through the shift from this-worldly to otherworldly projected reliance with sedentary agriculturalists?

Another striking Canela and early Timbira difference from many Amazonian peoples lies in the structure of the Timbira chieftainship. Waud Kracke points out that many Amazonian leaders base their leadership on their ability to control the families of both their sons and their sons-in-law, and on their ability to extend this form of domestic control to other followers (1978:35). The Canela chieftainship is not based on the extension of such domestic structures. It is based on competitive leadership during long festival performances among a number of young men appointed to quasi-military command positions. Those young men who are seen to be the best leaders in carrying out these roles, if they continue exerting their influence as leaders of their age sets for two decades, are the ones who are more likely to be chosen as the chief of the tribe by the council of elders, when a vacancy occurs.

While I think that the Canela absence of even shallow lineages is related to their this-worldly emphasis, and that their having been incipient horticulturalists might be related, I think that the particular structure of their chieftainship is not related at all. I am just raising some Canela characteristics that contrast with some largely pan-Amazonian characteristics to identify the kinds of differences that might be brought up, if and when we debate the merits of this- to otherworldly shifts in belief placement as a measure of an Amazonian people's culture change in the direction of the national culture. Of course, some Amazonian cultures change in parallel with rather than in the direction of their national culture, and my questions would apply less to such parallel culture change.

NOTES

1. The case of the Canela messianic movement of 1963 raises two exceptions to earlier patterns, probably because of culture change. Informants spoke of culture heros as living and acting in the past, in an other world of the past. However, Awkhêê during the messianic movement was reported as living in the present. Secondly, the prophetess, Khêê-khwèy, did not go away to some other world and come back with her "ceremony." It came to her as she was working in her farm on the Canela lands in a manner that is more in keeping with folk Catholicism, though her predicted transformations are more characteristic of the abilities of Canela culture heros.

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