

Canela

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ETHNONYMS: Canella (not the Canelos-Quichua of northeastern Ecuador), Capiekrans, Eastern Timbira (Mehim), Kanela, Ramkókamekra (Rancocamecra)

Orientation

Identification. Settlers called three almost identical, adjacent tribes “Canella” (cinnamon or shinbone in Portuguese): the “Kénkatéye,” “Apányekra,” and “Ramkókamekra.” “Canela” is modern; the Brazilian National Indian Foundation (Fundação Nacional do Índio, FUNAI) and some authors use “Kanela”; “Capiekrans” appears in early chronicles; “Rancocamecra,” “Eastern Timbira,” and “Ramko-Kamekua” appear in some ethnographic atlases.

Location. Since 1968 the Canela have lived in Escalvado village (6° 03' S and 45° 09' W) on a reservation of 1,252,120 square kilometers, about 10 percent of their aboriginal lands, in Barra do Corda municipality [2002: *município* of Fernando Falcão], Maranhão state, 650 kilometers southeast of Belém. Escalvado is in savanna countryside (*cerrado*, “closed” savanna). The climate differs from that of Amazonia, further west: rains are less (130 centimeters per year) and later (December), and relative humidity dips into the 30s during some June and July mid-afternoons with strong easterly winds and clear skies.

Demography. The Canela live in a large circular village (300 meters in diameter), which aboriginally contained 1,000 to 1,500 people. Reduced by diseases after pacification in 1814, their numbers are now increasing: 300 in 1930, 412 in 1960, 514 in 1975, 791 in 1986, and 903 in 1989. [2002: 1,337 on 9/01/2001.]

Linguistic Affiliation. The Canela speak Eastern Timbira, an eastern language of Northern Gê of the great Gê-Pano-Carib Family. Canela is almost identical to Apanyekra and Krahó. Krahó is spoken 350 kilometers southwest. Other Eastern Timbira tribes are the Krĩkatí, Pukobyé, and Tocantins Gavião (Gaviões); the Apinayé speak Western Timbira.

History and Cultural Relations

Decimated by the Cakamekra at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Canela surrendered to a regional Brazilian garrison for protection. They moved around until the late 1830s, when they settled in their present area. Since then, they have maintained continual, although sometimes hostile, relations with the surrounding rural Brazilian (“backland”) farmers and ranchers and with the urban political authorities in Barra do Corda, 60 kilometers to the north. The German-Brazilian anthropologist Curt Nimuendajú studied them from 1929 through 1936. The Brazilian Indian Protection Service (SPI) first sent a family to live near their village in 1938, causing accelerated acculturation.

In 1963 a full messianic movement occurred. It included cult dancing to bring about a total exchange in cultural roles—the Indians to live in cities and the Brazilians to hunt in forests. After the ranchers attacked because of extensive cattle theft, the SPI relocated the Canela to a

Guajajara Indian reservation. Although they stayed for five years in the forests, they did not adapt well. In 1968 Summer Institute of Linguistics missionary-linguists Jack and Josephine Popjes began their work, which ended in 1990 with the translation of the New Testament into Canela. In the 1970s FUNAI built brick-and-tile buildings (post, school, infirmary), demarcated their lands, constructed roads into the new reservation, installed a generator for pumping water and lighting the post and village, and established two-way radio communication with Barra do Corda and the state capital, São Luís, causing substantial changes in the Canela outlook on life, their self-esteem, and their self-awareness. In 1979 ethnographer William Crocker ended his long-term field research started in 1957. [2002: Crocker continues.]

In 1990 the Canela remained tribal, still speaking their language and performing their festivals. Very few have migrated. Located 250 kilometers east of the Belém-Brasília highway, they are in a stable, unendangered location. They have survived because of their remoteness from rivers and, later, from highways, and because little exists on their land to exploit: no rubber, gold, or brazil nuts, and few valuable hardwoods. Their farming and grazing lands are marginal. Merchants come to Escalvado weekly from backland communities 20 to 30 kilometers away to sell goods. Canela families frequently visit backland families, especially during the economically lean months (September through December), to earn food and equipment, usually through sharecropping and household work [no longer]. These economic exchanges generate cultural relationships, especially that of the *compadres* (co-godfathers). Through such contacts the Canela have absorbed some folk Catholicism and have learned to use money and to bargain for goods. The Canela frequently go to Barra do Corda to buy goods, walking or hitching truck rides. Occasionally, children and adolescents live and serve in homes there while attending school, a practice begun in the late 1800s. Most adult males have stayed in major Brazilian cities, where they go for goods.

Settlements

Ideally, the Canela live in one village, although schisms have occurred (1903–1913, 1935–1936, and 1957–1968), largely because of the ambitions of potential chiefs. Besides the principal village of fifty-two houses in 1970, from the late 1950s through the mid-1980s five to fourteen different farm settlements have existed at the same time, some up to 30 kilometers away. They consist partly of sisters, “sisters” (parallel cousins), and their daughters with their adjacent farms and partly of unrelated families. A settlement’s leader, as a potential chief, gains some unrelated adherents, unlike in the sets of village-circle matrilineal lines that remain fixed in leaderless longhouses for many generations. Small circular settlements of five to fifteen huts are built near the farms along streams. All women old enough to have children should maintain separate farms. When a Canela village grows to more than about 500 people and about sixty houses, the palm-straw houses (and some mud-and-wattle ones) stand so close in some sectors that new houses have to be placed behind old ones, slowly forming an outer circle. By 1979 Escalvado’s second circle was half completed. [2001: 123 houses in two-to-four incomplete circles existed.]

Economy

Subsistence and Commercial Activities. Principal economic activities, varying over the decades, have been gathering and producing food; working with backland families [no longer]; manufacturing and selling artifacts; earning and sharing Indian service salaries; receiving Indian service iron implements, cloth, and medicine; and obtaining farmers’ federal retirement benefits [and many other government benefits]. Aboriginally, the Canela relied only about 25 percent on

horticulture, but now about 75 percent. Some aboriginal staples were sweet potatoes, yams, squash, peanuts, maize, and mildly bitter manioc. Today's staples are the backlanders' bitter manioc, dry-field rice, and beans. Soils are only sufficiently rich to raise crops in the "gallery" forests along stream edges after yearly slash-and-burn preparation of a new field. Most Canela raise some pigs and chickens for their families; cattle were introduced only in the mid- to late twentieth century.

Trade. Trade among aboriginal Timbira tribes was slight, because they were largely self-sufficient.

Division of Labor. Men prepare the fenced fields, but both sexes plant and weed. Aboriginally, women gathered fruits, nuts, and roots, whereas men hunted and fished. Today, women harvest the crops except for rice, which everyone gathers. Women fetch water and firewood; they cook, raise children, and clean houses, but men construct them. Either sex will do any work when necessary.

Land Tenure. The tribe owns all land, but fields and fruit trees planted by families are theirs until the shrubbery has grown tall years later.

Kinship

Kin Groups and Descent. Canela kinship is bilateral, not unilineal. Matrilineality occurs only in the transmission of certain rights to perform rituals and only in about one-quarter of the matrilines. Full matrilineality and clans probably never existed. The smallest kin group is the "hearth" unit (*hàwmrō*), which is based on two to seven closely related females, ideally a mother and two or three daughters and their husbands, children, and unmarried brothers. This group shares one hearth and most food. A row of hearths, in which females are related through all-female genealogical linkages, is called a "longhouse" (*ikhre-rùù*, house-long). Of the thirteen longhouses stretched around the circle in 1971, the longest included twelve houses and the smallest, one.

Ideally, all longhouse women of the same generation call each other "sister," being sisters or parallel cousins. These "sisters" call each others' parents "mother" or "father," and each others' children "children." Certain exceptions alter this terminological simplicity. Female personal-name transmission, formal friendship, informal friendship, and some differences of two generations or more are some of the terminological systems that alter the ideal longhouse terminology. Nevertheless, along the village circle, a series of genealogically extended female parallel cousinships hold together a longhouse. Across the village circle, cross cousinships hold together certain pairs of longhouses. Ego's father's sisters', mother's father's sisters', and father's father's sisters' descendants all live in genealogically related longhouses. Ideally, ego calls all women in his or her across-the-circle-related longhouses "father's sister," and the men "father" (father's sister's son) or "mother's brother" (mother's father's sister's son/father's father's sister's son), with many exceptions.

Kinship Terminology. The Canela kinship terminology is generally considered to be Crow in type [though "parallel transmission" (Scheffler and Lounsbury 1971:110) may be a better solution]. Special characteristics are that father's sister, father's mother, mother's mother, and all female lineal ancestors are classed together terminologically, as are mother's brother, mother's

father, father's father, and all male lineal ancestors. The reciprocals of father's sister and mother's brother are in one category.

Marriage and Family

Marriage. Marriage is always monogamous and takes place between unrelated individuals of the opposite sex and between "distantly" related ones. Longhouse exogamy is almost always respected, even for affairs, and exogamy is also maintained for cross-cousin-related longhouses. No prescriptions or preferences were or are (1990s) practiced for first marriages. Residence is uxoriocal; exceptions are temporary. It is neolocal when overcrowding occurs and older daughters with several children erect a house beside or behind their mother's. Sororate occurs when a widow's kin succeed in retaining her widower for their children—ideal but infrequent. Levirate is not practiced. Hearth females rarely accept related husbands into their unit. Such combined outsider strength is undesirable. Parents arranged most marriages and childhood engagements, but now couples initiate marriages. Loss of virginity to a man without children constitutes marriage, but the union is weak and often broken, with significant material restitution made by the husband's kin. The seriousness of a marriage grows as a succession of rites strengthen it. Childbirth cements a marriage, and divorce seldom occurs while the children are growing. Extensive extramarital sex is the alternative, and this practice, individual- or group-based, is sanctioned in several festivals. Marriage is for raising children. [2002: The extramarital sex system almost no longer exists.]

Domestic Unit. The hearth economic unit is also the domestic unit, with any of its women carrying out most mothers' roles for any child.

Inheritance. Inheritance is minimal in a society that had few nonperishable items and little individual wealth. Generally, daughters inherit from mothers and sons from fathers.

Socialization. Socialization is very permissive for both sexes until puberty, except for severe punishments for fighting and incest. At puberty "uncles" and "aunts" took over the disciplining from parents, scolding and shaming their "nephews" and "nieces" into conformity more harshly. Acculturation has considerably weakened this control over adolescents.

Sociopolitical Organization

Political Organization. The Canela have a relatively strong chieftainship for Amazonia, but a council of elders checks the chief's power. The chief derives some power from his natal longhouse and some from his wife's, but most of his power comes from his age-set and from his ability to lead the men. The chief leads the council of elders in their twice-daily meetings in the center of the village's circular plaza, selectively summarizing their decisions reached by consensus. The three oldest age-sets make up the council, but a specific one dominates it and may surpass the chief in power while he is still in his late 30s and relatively inexperienced. Some of the dominating age-set's other roles are to manage the festival-pageants, bestow awards for good performance on youths, and receive meat pies from prestigious "wetheads," maintaining their high status. The Canela also have a developed judicial system based on inter-extended-family hearings and restitution, not punishment. Most problems surface first during the elders' meetings. These cases are tried at interfamily hearings run by the principals' "uncles." If unresolved, the uncles refer such cases to the chief for binding decisions at tribal hearings.

Social Organization. The kin groups and the political system constitute major aspects of the overall social organization; the tribally based festival-pageants and the kin-based life-cycle rites constitute important additional aspects. Five great, largely secular festivals and several minor ones involve the following socioceremonial units: five moiety systems, five men's societies, six plaza groups, a high-/low-ceremonial dichotomy (wetheads/dryheads), and numerous matrilineal- or personal-name-based ritual memberships. Because of this complexity, every man has at least six memberships, all of which provide different settings for male cooperation and bonding. The crosscutting nature of these various ties breaks down political oppositions, enhancing communication and inhibiting factionalism. The age-set moiety system provides the most important male membership by far, because it operates daily.

All boys and adolescents spanning ten years are socialized into an age-set for life through four initiation festivals over a ten-year period. The dominating age-set in the council of elders appoints six youths of the age-set being initiated to military-like positions of leadership over their age-set mates in each festival. These leaders are reselected three different times, mostly for their improving leadership competence. Later, some become competing potential chiefs or the tribal chief. Life-cycle rites unite an individual's kin. The members of an individual's along-the-circle, parallel-cousin, matrilaterally-structured longhouse join the members of the same individual's across-the-circle, cross-cousin, "patrilaterally"-structured longhouses to perform the rite for him or her.

Social Control. The principal force controlling a man is the cooperation and pressure of his age-set, whereas the principal force influencing a woman is the approval or criticism of her longhouse female kin. The second most compelling force for both sexes is the favor of individuals of the opposite sex who are sexually available through the extramarital-sex system. Other forces are fear of witchcraft (little operative these days), fear of general slander and gossip (more effective with women), and fear of not being favored by the chief (more effective with men).

Conflict. The village's central plaza is sacred. No direct conflicts or aggressive language should occur there, although subtle competition does. Outside the village, and especially on farms, life is less controlled and moderate factionalism develops. Most judicial hearings focus on marital problems.

Religion and Expressive Culture

The Canela were comparatively this-worldly oriented. They lived for the present and had few or no ceremonies (before 1963) to request supernatural entities to improve worldly situations for them. Now, with their overlay of folk Catholicism, they rely increasingly on the supernatural.

Religious Beliefs. The Canela believe in the worlds of the great birds above the sky, of the dead to the west on the earth, and of the fish and alligators under the earth. Today, this cosmology includes the folk-Catholic heaven. They believe that all animals, plants, and materials have a soul or essence (*karō*). They are convinced that if persons avoid polluting foods and most sex, they will grow strong and be able to carry out certain adult activities (e.g., running, hunting, and shamanism) well. The only culture hero active in modern times is Awkhê, whose support was invoked in the messianic movement of 1963. Other culture heroes were Sun and Moon, who set

most parameters for living, and Star-Woman, who showed the Canela maize, other staples, and certain fruits.[2002: Awkhê is still active, but fused with Jesus and their folk-Catholic God.]

Religious Practitioners. The Canela have many shamans—some who cure, and a few who also “throw” illnesses. They do either activity through “powers” received from the souls of the recently dead (*më-karõ*, ghosts). Men (and rarely women) become shamans through carrying out specific instructions (mostly restrictions against “pollutants”) received during a series of visitations by ghosts, who first appear as animals. Ghosts visit some youths who are seriously trying to become shamans but not others. They may visit a person unexpectedly when he is sick to make him a shaman. Shamans travel in the other world in dreams, and often go to the land of the dead to bring a wandering soul back to its body, saving its life. A shaman’s knowledge may be based either on what he has “seen” or on information from ghosts. He can predict the future and state why a person became sick or died. Such declarations are final and are made on the shaman’s, not the ghost’s authority. A shaman’s political influence as a shaman is minimal, but a political chief’s power is enhanced by being a shaman, because people fear his potential for casting illnesses. [2002: Since some time after contact, shamans journey through inhaling tobacco.]

Ceremonies. The principal ceremony involves a shaman holding a mass curing in the plaza against an epidemic. People pass through the smoke made by burning certain leaves.

Medicine. The Canela believe in urban pharmaceutical medicine, in their own herbal medicines, and in the rural backlanders’ herbal remedies. Many individuals who are not shamans know and use herbal medicines well.

Arts. The Canela esteem recreation and devote much time to it, venting most hostilities this way. Almost daily athletics include track events around the village boulevard just inside the circle of houses and team relay racing to the village from 2 to 12 kilometers outside by individual runners carrying 100-kilogram logs. Recreation also includes the formal (festival-sanctioned) and informal (personally arranged) activities of the extensive extramarital-sex system.

Music (choral sing-dancing) and drama (festival-pageants), rather than painting and decorating objects or the human body, are the developed arts. Festival-pageants are frequent and varied, and their dramatizations model all social roles and traditional values for the young to learn and the old to maintain.

Death and Afterlife. People die naturally from various causes, including diseases. Their souls used to go to the land of the dead, but now go to heaven since most Canela are baptized. In the ghost’s village, souls did the things the living did but in a milder manner. After some time, ghosts became large animals, then smaller ones, and finally tiny entities such as gnats. Then they disappeared entirely. A soul was not eternal. Ghosts usually injure the living when they meet them, but they like to help the shamans who are maintaining stringent restrictions against pollutants.

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