

12-15-2017

Canela Shamanism: Shamans' Accounts, "Journeying," and Delimitation of Shamanic Terms

William H. Crocker

National Museum of Natural History-Smithsonian Institution, bilcroc@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>

 Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Nature and Society Relations Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Crocker, William H. (2017). "Canela Shamanism: Shamans' Accounts, "Journeying," and Delimitation of Shamanic Terms," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 15: Iss. 2, Article 3, 144-157.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol15/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Canela Shamanism: Shamans' Accounts, "Journeying," and Delimitation of Shamanic Terms

William H. Crocker
Smithsonian Institution
USA

Introduction¹

On my second-to-last field trip to the Canela in 2009, my 28th visit to these Brazilian people living just east of the Amazonian basin, I went with the special intention of studying shamanism. Thus, immediately upon arrival I sought out Raul Kupaa-khà, a young Canela whom I knew was pursuing the traditional role of shaman and curer among his people. It always has amazed me that there were still really active shamans in a tribe "pacified" by Brazilians two centuries earlier, and who now were proud to have eleven high school graduates. Raul, however, was just starting out in this profession. He was young and strong, which is essential to practicing shamanism. In this publication, I use his story, along with those of three other shamans, to answer certain important questions about shamanism.

Before taking up these questions, I want to remind readers that the Gê-speaking Ramkokamekra-Canela (Eastern Timbira) of central Maranhão state, Brazil, live east of the Amazon forest and were first contacted indirectly during the late 1600s. and were "pacified" in 1814. They subsisted then in their open savannahs (cerrados) and gallery forests, principally on hunting and gathering, but also with some elementary horticulture. They practiced annual warfare against other Timbira tribes² and lived in groups of 1,000 to 1,500. Trade with other groups was minimal and was mostly for ceremonial artifacts. The Canela are known professionally through Curt Nimuendajú's 1946 monograph, *The Eastern Timbira*, and through my 1990 monograph, *The Canela (Eastern Timbira), I: An Ethnographic Introduction*.

The questions I explore herein are the following: (1) Who is a shaman? (2) What is shamanism? Is shamanism better understood (3) as a process or a method that is carried out to achieve certain ends, or is it better understood (4) as a particular set of beliefs associated with particular cultures? Additionally, (5) are altered or shamanic states of consciousness found in Canela shamanism, and (6) are they brought about by certain practices? I do not attempt to answer questions regarding shamanism's efficacy, that is, how/whether it works.

The Scope of Shamanic Persons and Shamanic Powers

Who is a shaman, and what is shamanism among the Canela? To throw some light on these two points, I turn to the meanings associated with certain Canela terms. The pertinent term here is *kay*. This term describes a human quality but also a capability that a Canela might, or might not, possess. When possessed, it is quantitative. That is, a Canela may possess this quality—this ability, this state—to a greater or to a lesser extent. Possessing it greatly, a Canela is said to be *kay-pey*,³ but if possessing it only moderately, he or she is said to be *kay-kabàk*. Besides representing a state a person is in, the term *kay* also represents a "profession," one of the several professional activities the Canela recognize as being open to their young people. As such, *kay* clearly parallels and overlaps with the professional terms "medicine man" and "shaman." For instance, a Canela may say that a certain person is a maraca sing-leader, a great hunter, a persistent runner, or a *kay*.

To explain the second sense of *kay*—the professional or occupational one—we can examine its semantic coverage of potential Canela activities. For instance, a Canela may be an expert in forest and savannah medicines and therefore be a *mê-'ka'hê-katé* (them-cure-master),⁴ that is, a "herbal curer" professional. But a herbal curer is not always a *kay*. Thus,

curing through the use of such medicines is not an intrinsic aspect of being kay or of being a kay.

Continuing with our semantic focus of kay, let's consider the activity of hunting, which is a very important and evolved Canela "profession"⁵ for young men. A Canela youth may train extensively over several years to become a "great hunter." He does this mostly by observing a high level of abstentions from sex and rich foods.⁶ Such practices prevent what they believe to be pollutants from entering and building up in the body (Crocker and Crocker 2004:95; 2009:136). In addition, the hunter-in-training exposes his eyes to vapors coming from boiling water infused with certain herbs. This treatment is believed to eliminate pollutants from the body, a step beyond mere preventative abstentions above. They believe that a body purified in these ways is attractive to game animals, which therefore come to the hunter who can then shoot them easily.

The special state into which the trained hunter works himself through extensive abstentions and eye-steaming is called *intoo-kapôk*. This means eyes (*intoo*) flaming or brightly lit or seeing especially well. This condition might seem to be a state of altered consciousness, but the Canela do not consider it to be kay in nature.

Another Canela profession—for which extensive training was required—was becoming a great warrior in pre-pacification times. The effort and commitment to practicing a high level of abstentions to become a great warrior was the same as for becoming a great hunter, but no eye-steaming was necessary. Through this training, great warriors developed *hal-pey*, the ability to dodge arrows to a remarkable extent. Such ability would again seem to require a state of altered consciousness, and it may have been so perceived by the Canela. However, they do not consider *hal-pey* to be a kay state. Turning to examples in their mythology, the famous warrior Khlèt is not considered to have been kay, even though he invaded an enemy village alone, killed a warrior, took his headdress, and miraculously evaded a heavy barrage of arrows while escaping. In contrast, the warrior Pèp, who shot arrows that hit enemy warriors only in the eye, is said to have had kay abilities since he put a spell on each arrow, enabling it to hit an enemy's eye with every shot. The spell made the difference.

Data from Canela Shamans on the Acquisition of Kay Powers

Raul's Story

Raul's life story illustrates how the Canela obtain kay powers. In the Canela village in October 2009, one of my long-term research assistants, Raimundinho Pààtsêt, brought a youth called Raul Kupaa-khà, probably twenty-eight years old, into the room I used for research. Raimundinho said that Raul may be the only kay-pey living among the Canela today.

Raul told me that as an adolescent, he was determined to become a great hunter with *intoo kapôk* abilities, so he maintained a high level of abstentions and steamed his eyes frequently over several years. Several ghosts, observing his extensive efforts, admired and liked him.⁷ They conferred with one other and determined that he should become a kay, or one of them, but only in certain respects. All ghosts have kay abilities. Ghosts are Canela who have died within the previous few years. Such beings (i.e., ghosts) visited him in his dreams and required him to undertake even more extensive abstentions, which he did. Then, over the period of a year, ghosts visited him three times more, and each time they gave him a new "power." On the first visit, the power was to heal dysentery, on the second it was to cure vomiting, and on the third it was to counter the venom in snakebites. The latter power is by far the most important of the three, making him an important kay.⁸ Raul then pointed to his upper arm, declaring to me that his powers existed therein.

Raul allowed that sex several times a month with his wife would not reduce his powers significantly, but he had to eat selectively and carefully, avoiding grease and fats. He had to keep his hands and fingernails clean, bathe consistently, and maintain a neat appearance. Raul is in the seventh grade in the village school and expects to keep his special powers, even though he wants to graduate from high school and get a job, as do many young Canela these days. My earlier studies with other Canela kay individuals support the concept that such people must be personally clean and neat. Ghosts like them better that way.

To supplement Raul's story with in-depth descriptions of the process of becoming a

shaman I present two taped interviews from the 1970s and the case of an older man from 2009. These accounts provide evidence, despite the changed material circumstances in which the Canela find themselves today, that the current process of becoming a shaman appears similar to past times. The testimony of Sabino Mĩkhrô, a well-recognized kay with whom I had a special relationship, dates from 1975. He was my name-giver and my ceremonial role-governing person. Moreover, we liked and knew each other well. I had a sixty-two-minute tape-recorded interview with him in addition to many hours of discussions about shamanism on different days. That Sabino knew I was familiar with these materials already may be why he was able to be so open with me. The translation of the first part of the taped interview is somewhat discontinuous, jumping from occurrence to occurrence, as it did in the interview. For our interview, Sabino and I sat comfortably in my office room, while I talked to him about speaking continuously into my microphone. He was used to doing this with me, so we had little trouble, though he stopped and started, as I well remember him doing decades earlier.

Following Sabino's narrative, I reproduce an interview with another kay, Alcibiades Tsùùkhè, taped in March 1979. Finally, I present a write-up of a 2009 interview with a man of about seventy years named Pebrêl. Together with Raul's story, these three in-depth interviews provide a picture of how shamanic abilities are acquired. However, to fully understand the interviews some ethnographic background is needed. This is provided in a summary section following the testimonies.

Sabino's Narrative

CROCKER: [To tape recorder:] Here we are today on August 4. I am speaking with my uncle Sabino, who will teach me about things kay. He is telling me about his very own experiences.

SABINO: [To tape recorder:] It seems that I was undergoing a high level of restrictions [avoiding rich foods and sex], when, one day, I was racing with a buriti log, and it fell on my knee and twisted it, making it hurt badly. Later, in my room in my house, a dove (tut-l-re) arrived. The dove was my ancestor taking the form of a dove to be able to appear before me [and be seen by me. Later,] two butterflies (jũn-l-re) came and sat on my arm. These butterflies were also my ancestors. One butterfly was a female ancestor on the side of my father, but the other one I did not know. It summoned me to go down to the stream.

CROCKER: How could you walk to go down to the stream since your knee was hurt?

SABINO: It was already all right. I was completely all right.

CROCKER: Had they cured you right there?

SABINO: Yes there, right in my house.

CROCKER: But did your parents arrive, almost preventing it?

SABINO: They almost prevented it. But when they left, the "birds" soon came back again, and I became all right.

CROCKER: Was it the butterfly that cured you or was it the dove?

SABINO: It was all the birds, all four of these persons. They arrived, and they cured me. The leaves they used [during the curing], they threw into the woods. Then they went down to the stream, and I went after them. There were two Indians there.

[After] I had gone up on the other side of the stream, there was a tique-tique [*té'té*] bird in the hollow of a tree, and it went *tsbééiu tsbééiu*. [When] I turned around, two of the ghosts confronted me and painted my body. [Soon,] I found myself on a cleared road, like those of Maria Castello.⁹ [Then,] I went into the woods and sat there, quietly, where there were a lot of dead animals and dead Indians. They had been killed, with their heads split open, and they had died from arrow wounds. They were all suffering badly. Two of my male ancestors were there, as well as a female one. They called to me.

CROCKER: Did they appear to be in a human form?

SABINO: In a human form.

CROCKER: Was the dove still there?

SABINO: Yes, but she appeared in the human form of my deceased grandmother. She summoned me. Also, my late grandfather, Kô'khrètswa, whom the whites called Pacará, addressed me with a: *hèè hèè* asking, ordering, and telling me that I had to perform a task. They began to cure me, and two of them put things [powers] into my arm.

[Then] I came to another place, where I caught and threw things.

CROCKER: What things?

SABINO: The head of a macaw. I threw it at them, and they fell down immediately. I threw the thorn of a buritirana palm into this woman as well, and she too fell down immediately. I told her that she was physically depleted.

CROCKER: What woman was this?

SABINO: This was the late wife of my grandfather. She too fell "dead."

CROCKER: She was a ghost?

SABINO: She was a ghost.

CROCKER: So, you "killed" ghosts?

SABINO: Yes, I killed ghosts. I was trying out my new powers. The old Indian, the commandant, was ordering me to do this: "*Haku baku* boy" [do it, do it boy], he commanded. He ordered me to cure them.

[So,] I pulled out the head of the macaw [from a male ghost], putting it on a leaf and showing it to him. [Then] I pulled out the spine of the buritirana [palm frond] from the woman [ghost].

[Then] my deceased grandfather asked, "What have you there?" I answered, "The two things."

[Then] my deceased grandfather said: "One of them makes a person not urinate well, and the other one makes a person feel very tired. Now, you [my descendent, Sabino] are completely cured."

Alcibiade's Narrative

When I was small, I always thought of being a curer, a curer of illnesses. I was not thinking about or hoping for anything else. Nevertheless, I ate all kinds of meat, including bad meat without thinking about it at all, of becoming a shaman. This continued for some time until I caught a fever and got very yellow, thin, and ill. After this, more days went by, and I began to dream about things, about the things that were moving around above me in the air. I kept dreaming and dreaming about the things flying in the air without talking about this to anyone, until my people went away to our farm [swidden plots located some distance from the main village where Canela construct secondary residences]. Then the moon¹⁰ began to appear to me. When I was alone, the moon arrived and became fixed on top of a post of the house. From there the moon descended three times to where I was, but it did not speak to me. And after these three times, it went back up again. During the fourth time that it appeared, it spoke to me.

At night, all my people were lying down in their house. It was a large house, and many people were there. The moon, when it appeared, remained fixed on the post of the house, and it lighted up all the people in this house, which was the house of my birth. I was sitting there, looking at my people—all lit up. And I was watching them, sleeping on and on.

On another night, when the moon appeared, it invited me—by day this time—to go to a certain place in the savannas. The moon indicated the place and the time, and then it rose up again. And so I went there to the indicated place and the moon was there, fixed in a locust tree. When I arrived, the moon asked:

“How is it? What is the matter with you?”

ALCIBIADES: “I am this way, sick.”

THE MOON: “What is it? Do you want to be a shaman or not? Do you want it or don't you?”

ALCIBIADES: It asked me twice, and I listened and said:

“I do not know. It is you who knows. I am not the one who controls this kind of thing. You control this. It is you who knows what you want to do with me, if you want to make anything of me. Anyway, I am silent. I wait for you to do something.”

So then the moon said to me:

“Very well, I have heard you. Later we will talk again.”

It was on this day that I found that I did not have a fever any more. I was better. But I just kept remembering the moon. I kept thinking about it during the whole day. Then, on another day, the moon arrived again and marked the time for another meeting, and then went away when it got dark. In the morning I went to the designated place, and the moon was there. The moon asked me:

“How are you?”

And then it told me:

“You must respect meat. You must stay away from eating meat for five months.”

Then it seemed that the moon would work out something for me—that the moon would give me a *hũũtsù*, a witchcraft power. So I bore up under the restrictions for two months, and when I could not do this any more, I ate some meat of a male deer, and later still, I ate more meat. This set me back, eliminating my good condition, so I became sick again. Thus, I did not see the moon anymore and much time passed by.

And yet, during a still later period in my life, I went to the Campestre area on the reserve and then on to the Buzina area [farm areas] with my people. We were hunting. When we got out into the savannas, a snake bit me. From there I returned to my house, not feeling any pain. And when I arrived in my house, I said to my wife that a snake had bitten me, but she did not believe me, saying that if a snake had bitten me, I would not be in the good condition I was in. But I insisted that a snake had bitten me. Thus, I continued to go around the village without telling anyone about the snakebite that left me feeling no pain.

On another day, when I went to bathe and was approaching the stream, I saw a little lambu [Order Tinamiforme, genus *Crypturellus*] bird crossing the path. So, I picked up a small stick and threw it at the lambu, but the stick scratched me just a little bit on a finger, and a splinter stuck in this finger. When I got back to my house, it was hurting, and Khen-Khwèy took it out, but it kept hurting a lot for some time. We were in the Campestre farm village.

After some days, at night, the late Antônio Grosso, a father of snakes and a curer of snakebites, presented himself to me. He said that tomorrow night I must have all the people of my house go away to other houses and that I must be left alone in my house, and that this would be good for me. Then his ghost went away.

I passed that night there and during the next evening, as it was getting dark, I said to my people that they should all leave to go to the house of Isai Kô'kanāl, which they did. So, I remained there all alone in the farm hut. I stayed there, sick and lying down. My hand was very swollen. Soon the late Antônio Grosso came again. He asked me:

“How is it? Is it the finger that is hurting?”

So, I told him everything, completely. And then, Antônio Grosso took out the ghost of the snake from my finger, and he said to me:

“You remember where you threw that little stick? You are to go there to find it, and you will sleep with it, with the little stick that you threw at the lambu.”

I answered that I would do so. Thus, in the morning I went and found the little stick I had thrown at the lambu. It was there in the same place. When it got dark, I laid down with it. And so, after being cured this way, I got better, and the ghost of Antônio Grosso went away.

The next night, I heard ghosts shouting and singing, so I went out and walked down to the stream, and there on the other side of the stream were

many snakes, sitting there summoning me. They were all dressed up with beautiful artifacts, with headdresses made of the fibers of the pineapple. And so I went towards them and joined them, and they took me far away to where their people lived in a city. There they hurt me so that I became sick, and I passed out among them. After many hours, when I woke up in their midst, I saw that they had many artifacts, including a small ceremonial lance and a large one too. They offered to give me one of them. It seemed that the large one was for rattlesnakes and that the small one was for small snakes, ones with just a little poison. They spoke to me about my receiving one of them, the little one, so I received it. I would not have been able to cure with the big one anyway.

Then I went back to my house, and when I got there, my people asked me:

“Where have you been; it took you so long?”

ALCIBIADES: “I have been defecating in the woods.”

After that I came back here. This is how I learned to cure the bites of small snakes, and I keep doing this even today. I do not cure the poison from the bites of big rattlesnakes.

And so, I kept on living, passing time, but I never revealed to others that I had this ability of being a curer. I just went around seeing things and watching but not telling anyone. I was noticing that people were sick but not saying anything about it. However, when some Canelas moved to the village of Rodeador [1953], the son-in-law of Agostinho, called Krekrel, was very sick and had been hurting a lot for some time, suffering continuously. He was just about to die. Thus, when I was walking around there where he was lying, I recognized what his sickness was. It was the spell of the wild boar that was working within him, killing him—killing the protective microbes¹¹ within him. And so I said to myself that on this day I would cure him, and I decided that although I had never tried this before, I would take out the illness from this young Canela. So I asked Tomais¹² to make me a cigarette so that I too could “see” and also cure Krekrel. So Tomais made a cigarette and gave it to me. And so I began to cure Krekrel. He was already mute. So I kept curing and curing, until Krekrel become relaxed. So, I sat there and pulled out and kept pulling out the boar’s spell, taking out the microbes, and the juice of the meat and everything, and all the blood there.

When I had pulled out everything, the youth became calm. Then I said to the boy’s parents that they should wait and that when he woke up, he would be all right, and that nothing would happen to him. Soon, Krekrel moved his foot and opened his eyes and stood up. He said:

“Give me some water.”

They gave him water, and then he said that he was hungry. So they gave him food too. He could remain sitting there only because of my cure. I had pulled out a great deal of the boar’s spell. Then after a while, I sat down beside him and took out even more of the boar’s spell and more bad liquids. Thus, the flesh of Krekrel became clean, very clean, getting better and healthier. He is still going around here, and by now he is fully grown up. And he has his good health just because I was able to pull out the boar’s spell that would have killed him.

It was at this time that I showed everyone that I knew how to cure, that I

had this kind of knowledge, and that everyone could know about it. Before this, no one knew that I could cure. I did this not by the order of anyone, but on my own initiative. It was done because of the pity that I had for the youth.

Thus, now that I had shown that I could cure, and everyone knew it, people asked me to do it for their cases too. Thus, I kept helping people get better, and everybody needed me. And even now I keep curing people, and I keep maintaining my restrictions. I cannot eat everything. And so I keep curing and helping people feel better.

Recently the wife of Rafael Khlúwa-tsè became sick, and many curers tried to cure her headache, but no one could do it. She was suffering and continued to suffer until I went there. I was asked to cure her because many had tried curing her, but none had succeeded. So I entered there, and I began to cure her, and I kept curing her for some time until she got better. She, Yât-ka'hi, was sick because she had eaten Rhea meat a few days after her baby was born, while she still had blood there. It was this bad blood which went up to her head and stayed there that was hurting her. Thus, it was her own blood that was hurting her, because she had not completed her restrictions. She had broken them off in the middle before their completion. So it was her own blood itself that was hurting her. So I cured and kept curing her, taking out this blood, and I showed her that it was this blood that had hurt her.

She and her husband offered me a payment, but I would not take it, so I was not paid. I never asked them for anything. Today Yât-ka'hi is well. She is not suffering from a headache any more. It was her own blood that was harming her.

I have cured a lot of people, but I have never seen a spell of witchcraft in anyone. I have just been finding illnesses and curing persons with them, but I have never seen a person harming another person by putting a spell in him or her. And I myself have only been curing illnesses, not withdrawing witchcraft spells. I have never seen or found a bad thing of this sort in another person.

Pebrêl's Story

An old Canela man called Pebrêl, age about seventy, presented a contrasting acquisition of kay powers when he was brought into my Canela room in 2009 by my Canela research assistant, Raimundinho. His story begins with his hunting at age twenty. He had just killed a deer, when suddenly he developed a high fever and fainted. When he came to, he vomited and had a severe pain in his stomach, but he managed to reach the house of a Canela called Kuykhô, who cured him. (Kuykhô happens to be the malevolent kay, Tomais, mentioned in Ni-muendajú's *The Eastern Timbira* [1946:238].)

Pebrêl wanted to become a kay. Therefore, he undertook severe restrictions, which made him feel very happy. Later, his spirit left him during a dream, and he woke with a pain that continued for days. In the dream, a strange person said that he wanted to meet with him. Thus, he had his family go away from their farmhouse so that he could be alone there. In such a solitary situation, ghosts would not be afraid to come to him. It was then that Pebrêl saw a bright line of "electricity" extending from a hill about twenty kilometers away in the savannahs. The bright line came to him in the farm village, and a light bulb was attached to its end. He wanted to throw the bulb away, but it got caught in his hands.

Then the man who wanted to meet him appeared and said that still another man had condemned him. Nevertheless, the first man gave him a "medicine" (*a hũũtsũ*) that made him feel very good. Then the second man came and stared at him and took some of his sali-

va and put it in a piece of cloth. He did not like this second man, who had robbed him of some of his saliva. Consequently, he was so afraid, he said, that if he died then and there, that would be all right. Soon, his vision was lost and he “died,” that is, he passed out. The first man came back and spoke to him only in Portuguese, since he was a white man’s ghost, and he gave Pebrêl some more “medicine.” The white man asked him what he had to give in payment for the two doses of medicine. Pebrêl said that he had nothing to pay because he was poor. So the white man said he would take two of Pebrêl’s sisters. My research assistant Raimundinho told me that the sisters lived for only two or three months after this before they withered away and died.

This is how Pebrêl got his kay state from the medicine of a white man’s ghost. The medicine provided good vision and an ability to cure through touch. He said that he could “see” all that was happening everywhere. He called it *ñit-pey* (sight good).

I was stunned that Pebrêl could declare before me, quite calmly, that he had caused the death of two of his sisters, as if he had done something quite normal and acceptable. However, during the course of the interview, this apparent normalcy became more understandable, when he mentioned half a dozen individuals who had sacrificed relatives to obtain their white ghost’s kay state. The kay individuals who had received their powers in this negative way included the Canela’s model chieftain, the great Chief Kaarà-khre. He also had sacrificed two sisters according to Pebrêl, who even gave the names of these sisters. Regardless of these revelations, my research assistant Raimundinho did not appear to be shocked. I quickly realized that we were dealing with what must be common knowledge among the Canela. I remembered that I had learned years earlier about the negative source of Chief Kaarà-khre’s powers, and I recalled also that I had heard how some other Canela had obtained their powers from the ghosts of white men.

Years later, Pebrêl, in a farm area, put his hand in a scorpion’s hole, and a snake bit him on the first finger of the right hand. He claimed that the snake would have killed him but for his powers to ameliorate a snake’s venom. When he got back to the village, he went to a Canela kay called Enrique Iromkuukhre, who cured him. Enrique said that kay power might come to him again, if he went through a course of strictly observed abstentions.

Raul said in his interview that a Canela did not have to pay for receiving his powers if they were earned from Canela ghosts, but that if they were obtained from a white’s ghost, large payments had to be made. He commented on a temptation he had experienced when he was passing time up in the hills south of the Canela village. There a white’s ghost offered great riches, but he had refused them, knowing and fearing the payment he would have to make to receive them.

Summary

Other data on Canela shamanism support these accounts on three points. 1) Becoming a *kay* requires one or more visitations by ghosts; 2) the ghosts give specific powers for curing only certain problems; and 3) an individual Canela, male or female, may be visited by a ghost, or ghosts, and be “transformed” even though he or she has not sought the visitation. Some individuals seeking such powers obtain them, and others are refused such powers by the ghosts even though they have gone through all the traditional steps to earn them. It is the ghosts who decide and who take the initiatives to transform an aspirant into a kay, as with Alcibiades. Canela say that ghosts “have to like” the aspirant. Canela ghosts are independent and capricious (Crocker 1995).

The crucial point is not just the visitation, or visitations, which may result merely in further instructions to work harder; it is whether during a visitation the ghosts have given a “power” (a *hũũtsũ*) to the Canela aspirant. Only upon receiving powers is a Canela considered being kay, or a kay. Then, if his having received powers becomes general knowledge, the elders of the tribe invite the new kay to test his powers in a public curing. If he is successful in the open plaza before the elders and others, the demand for his curing abilities may become extensive as in the case of Alcibiades. Much depends on his desire to continue as a curer and to maintain the demanding way of life that is necessary to retain his powers. Some Canela have preferred to accept the powers after a visitation, while others have preferred to extinguish the powers by having sex frequently, especially with young women, and

by eating certain rich foods. My best long-term research assistant, Raimundo Roberto Kaapêl-túk, explained that he quickly got rid of his powers in this way.

It is pertinent here to realize that the Canela have no traditionally established schools or apprenticeships through which a young Canela aspirant can learn the art of becoming and being a kay. For them, it is just a matter of learning the public body of knowledge through listening to others. Canela kay persons are not supported by the tribe in any way nor do they become political leaders themselves, though political leaders may have kay abilities, which help them maintain their leadership (cf. Dole 1973).

The Canela word for kay in the local Maranhão state Portuguese is *curador*, and it is *curandeiro* more generally. Most kay individuals are expected to be able to cure in some way, but some do not. A kay's powers are expected to be strongest while he is young and new in the practice, as with Raul, and to diminish through time and aging, as we will see with Enrique later. The powers can be retained to the extent that their owners maintain careful food and sex abstentions, though not as strictly as was necessary to obtain the powers in the first place. With too extensive involvement with sex or certain rich foods, the powers weaken. They can be strengthened again, however, not as much by further abstentions as by further ghost visitations during which the visited individuals receive new powers.

Method for Curing

Another important aspect of Canela shamanism is their method for curing. I tried learning about this method by working with Enrique Iromkuukhre, the oldest and most-esteemed shaman of the Canela village in October 2001. Enrique Iromkuukhre was the late father of Raul, whose acquisition of kay power was described in the earlier part of this essay. Before presenting Enrique Iromkuukhre's curing method, however, I must clarify the Canela concept of illness.

An illness that the Canela believe is not a Brazilian one in origin, as cancer is believed to be, must be caused by some "intrusion" into the body, which the kay has to remove to make the cure. These intrusive materials are said to be similar to beetles and lizards in size and shape, or in the case of Sabino, the head of a macaw and the thorn of a buritirana palm. The kay accomplishes the removal of such intrusions through several techniques. One of them is a kind of laying-on of hands, during which curative energy passes through the body and hands of the curer to the area of the intrusion in the patient. In talking with one Canela kay about his use of curative energies, I came to believe that he was practicing something very similar to what I have learned to be Reiki, which I practice, or Donna Eden's Energy Medicine. Another technique is blowing smoke over the painful area, which the smoke penetrates and therefore cures. Another technique is sucking the intrusive element out of the body. The kay does this by placing his lips over the hurt area and sucking loudly (see Crocker and Crocker 2004:88–90). When the item is removed, the kay usually holds it up for all to see—a minute piece. One kay said that looking too precisely at such a piece of illness would cause blindness. I was told about this danger long after I had stealthily retrieved such a piece, only to find that it was a folded bit of my own writing paper. It is a coincidence that Nimuendajú had a similar experience (cf. Nimuendajú 1946:238).

In 2001, the late Enrique Iromkuukhre claimed that journeys made possible by tobacco smoke inhalation to the point of dizziness were essential to successful curing. He did this once in my presence. During a state of obvious tobacco intoxication, he cured a number of babies who had been brought to him. He also "saw" Canela in the town of Barra do Corda's hospital some eighty kilometers away, and he predicted who would be getting well enough to leave the hospital the next day. I checked this information later, and he had been correct. Enrique provided a Canela word for his tobacco-induced journeying, namely *i'tēm tsà*, which is the expression to be expected, since it means "a going thing/experience"; thus, a trip. (See Crocker and Crocker 2004:92.)

Enrique, who was named Pedro in the Canela video (Schechter and Crocker 1999), described how he journeyed in the following phrase: *i'kbrũ kbãm intoo to ku'te hompun tsà* (in the head by the eyes is the seeing place). He said that when he starts to see things on his eyelids this way, he may hear things as well, but that when he sees things far away, he cannot hear anything at all. He also said that tobacco was necessary for journeying, as was a certain to-

bacco holder made from the leaf of paiti (“paty” in Nimuendajú 1946:237).

Enrique’s son Raul said that he needs neither tobacco nor journeys to cure. This is because, as he says, he is in a constant state of being kay. He added that he does not have to “change his awareness” to “see” things, whether these things are illnesses in people, lost objects, or seeing embarrassingly through people’s clothing. Like Raul, other kay people and research assistants, who have instructed me about shamanism or witchcraft in the past, have not gone on journeys to see the illness (the “intrusion”) or the evil spell in a person. Apparently, a good young kay, such as Raul, sees illnesses and spells in his day-to-day living state. Enrique said to me then that when he was young, he did not need tobacco to “see.” Maybe Enrique needed tobacco back in 2001 to reinforce his waning abilities, since he was already old. He died in 2003.

When talking about the use of tobacco to cure, Canela research assistants point out that the powerful kay Yawè, in the mythological story, did not use tobacco to journey. In early times, the Canela did not even have tobacco. Yawè went on his journeys using his own powers, they said. On his mythical journey, he turned himself into an ant and journeyed to where his wife and her lover were having sex. Once there, he bit his wife in her vulva and her lover on his penis until they cried out in pain and stopped having sex (cf. Nimuendajú 1946:247).

The Canela’s use of tobacco may have been learned from the neighboring Guajajara-Tenetehara forest Indians, who grew and used marijuana traditionally (see Wagley and Galvão 1949). Or, more likely, it was borrowed from the neighboring backland Brazilians with whom the Canela have had peaceful contacts since about 1840. Nevertheless, whether most Canela curers need tobacco to cure, or need it to go on journeys to “see” things, is a question for further research. From the narrative of Alcibiades, we can observe that he believed he needed a cigarette of tobacco to carry out his first cure.

Shamanism involves a set of particular beliefs that are characteristic of the culture, and which include a particular method for journeying, as revealed during my work with Raul. It was significant to me that Raul did not need to journey to be able to “see” and cure. He said that he was in the kay state all the time; he did not need to practice a method to get there. However, he did need to practice a method to attain his original kay state—a high level of restrictions against certain foods and sex in general.

It is instructive to compare the Canela shamanic method for attaining a kay state with the “Harner Method” for journeying that I learned by taking several weekend courses from Harner practitioners during the late 1980s. In these workshops, as a drum beat a specific rhythm, we “descended” or “ascended” within ourselves as instructed, and participants said that the images projected onto the insides of their eyelids were more vivid than normal sight. It seems that Enrique may have been doing a similar thing. A tobacco stimulant rather than a drum beat provoked his altered state, but the mode of “seeing” in this alternate state appeared to be similar: With his eyes closed, he was seeing what was appearing on his eyelids.

Altered States of Consciousness

An important question in my mind is whether shamanic journeying took place during the many occasions of curing that I have seen performed in the Canela plaza and elsewhere among them. From my observations of these cures, there was no visible evidence of such journeying, except in the case of Enrique, though the curers usually smoked cigarettes to produce smoke to breathe over the patient’s body. Maybe these kay persons became imperceptibly intoxicated from the smoke in order to carry out their cures, or maybe like Raul, they were in a state of “seeing,” and therefore able to cure, all the time.

In any case, I know from their stories that Raul, Sabino, Alcibiades, Pebrêl, and Enrique were all involved in achieving altered states of consciousness to obtain their powers, and from this it may be inferred that they also entered such a state for their curing activities.

Turning again to the interviews with Raul, Sabino, or Pebrêl, we find no descriptions of curing, whereas Alcibiades reports on his curing Krekrel. In this case, the procedure seems to be one of repeatedly pulling injurious material out of Krekrel. But it is not clear that Alcibiades went into an altered state of consciousness to do it. Thus I only have evidence that Enrique did journey and that he did get into an altered state of consciousness to cure. More

field research is needed to support this observation.

Utility and Meaningfulness: Adequacy of Terms

Another important question is whether certain anthropological terms employed herein are useful and meaningful in broad generic ways when employed among indigenous people, or whether their use distorts the indigenous reality they are employed to clarify. It seems worthwhile to single out the following terms for examination: shaman, shamanism, shamanic method, and shamanic states of consciousness. Taking them up in turn, the anthropological term “shaman” is similar to the Canela term *kay*, in that it involves curing and the use of powers to “see” broadly. Similarly, the term “shamanism” has its Canela equivalent in a Canela body of knowledge, some of which was discussed here. Thus, I believe that the terms “shaman” and “shamanism” are meaningful and do not distort indigenous reality unnecessarily, as long as the researcher finds and uses the indigenous terms that are similar and establishes the parameters of these indigenous terms and researches according to these parameters. The researcher should not use the anthropological profession’s parameters for “shaman” and “shamanism” and expect exact correspondence with the indigenous society’s terms.

Similarly, “shamanic method” must be used with care and great understanding of the local culture and its language. I have reported on several Canela curing procedures, but whether the Canela have a method for journeying to make a cure is not clear. In certain cases journeying is involved and others not. Thus, the utility and meaningfulness of the expression “shamanic method” remains open. More field research is necessary here.

I think that in the Canela case the terms “altered states” or “shamanic states” adequately describe one aspect of the *kay* state in that this state is in some way removed or different from ordinary reality. “Altered states” is so general, however, that it could be applied any time an indigenous person attained a different state of awareness. Thus, it could be applied to the Canela’s great hunter’s state of sharply illuminated vision (*intoo kapôk*) or to the great arrow dodger’s state (*hal-pey*). Consequently, this expression must include curing and “seeing” to fit the Canela *kay* state. Possibly, “shamanic states” should be redefined and limited to include just curing and journeying. In any case, the researcher must be aware that there are likely to be other indigenous altered states of consciousness beyond the shamanic ones. Inebriation may be such a state.

The Wider Scene and Findings

By 2011 the Canela had confidence in pharmacy medicine and city hospitals. Nevertheless, they still turned to forest medicines and shamanic cures partly because they lacked funds for city medicines and because government sources of medicines for them were so limited. Shamans still provided essential care beyond the abilities of Western medicine. Violating customs, such as restrictions against eating meat soon after childbirth, for example, result in illnesses that are only susceptible to cure by shamans. Alcibiades’s account of his curing *Yâtka’hi* may be taken as an illustrative case. A shaman who found himself on the spot might be able to effect a cure for a snake bite, a common affliction in Canela lands. But today, even with the availability of shamanic treatment, Canela are likely to send the patient to the hospital in the city anyway. Considering the great extent to which the Canela have become integrated into Brazilian life, as indicated by the presence of eleven high school graduates in 2011, it may be somewhat surprising that the personal experiences of young shamans, such as Raul, show such striking continuities with those of past shamans. Moreover, research has established the scope and meaning of the phenomena of “shaman,” “shamanism,” and “altered states of consciousness” or “shamanic consciousness” among the Canela. If shamanic journeying results in enhanced abilities of sight similar to the well-known Harner Method, it still remains unclear whether every shaman engages in steps to induce enhanced sight in order to cure. In some cases, the power to cure may simply be part of the ongoing preternatural abilities some shamans exhibit.

Acknowledgements

I want to give great thanks to my wife Jean Crocker for her careful editing of this paper, including discussions clarifying some of the issues.

Notes

¹This essay is based on a paper given at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia in 2009, which was dedicated to honoring Michael Harner. References to him in the original paper have been modified to suit the purposes of this piece.

²For annual warfare among the early Timbira tribes and background materials on early Canela existence, see Crocker 2003:13–17.

³The orthography herein for words and names in Canela follows that found in the online version of my 1990 monograph *The Canela (Eastern Timbira), I: An Ethnographic Introduction* and in my 2004 book coauthored with my wife, Jean G. Crocker, *The Canela: Kinship, Ritual, and Sex in an Amazonian Tribe*. The phonemic glottal stop is represented by an apostrophe.

⁴The word order in the translations from Canela to English follows the word order in the Canela phrase to facilitate the understanding of individual Canela expressions.

⁵The word that the Canela use here in Portuguese is *profissão*, which can be “profession” in English. This word is in keeping with the underlying meaning of the word in the Canela language.

⁶The importance to the Canela of the practice of abstentions, which is the practice of certain timely restrictions against food and sex, cannot be underestimated. Through avoiding certain foods perceived as being “rich,” as well as too much sex, especially with young girls, Canela individuals (especially men) believe that they are building up strong personal characteristics in themselves. At almost every new stage of life that they enter—puberty, childbirth, becoming kay—they practice these restrictions to fortify their attainment of the new stage they have entered. I compare in Crocker (1995) this aboriginal Canela way of building reliance in self-help to the new way of obtaining help through faith and prayer that they had been learning from the folk Catholic backlanders surrounding them in the Brazilian interior.

⁷Colleagues have questioned my use of the term “ghost” in this context instead of “soul” or other possibilities. I use “ghosts,” nevertheless, because of their nature. The moment a Canela has died, he or she goes through a change in nature. The recently dead Canela has the ability to move around freely in the world of the dead and the world of the living. Returning to the world of the living, deceased Canela can appear easily to shamans but only in special situations to non-shamans, such as when enabling them to receive kay abilities. Thus, Sabino was visited by his late grandfather Pacará and Alcibiades was visited by the late Antônio Grosso, a great snake curer. In other contexts, dead Canela return to chastise their live relatives and to enforce certain customs, such as not going around alone at night, which has the effect of enhancing group solidarity. Thus, recently deceased Canela seem to the living to be capricious and destructive. In this major role, I find calling them “ghosts” is appropriate and fitting and compatible with our usage in English.

⁸In the Canela part of Brazil, south-central Maranhão state, there are few disasters—no hurricanes, floods, fires, or great droughts that far west. Thus, the post-settlement personal danger that has been the most significant has been snakebites, which cause the injury or death of several individuals each year. Considering this, the Canela emphasis on snake-curers should not be surprising.

⁹Maria Castello was the prophetess of the Canela messianic movement of 1963. She ordered straight and relatively wide roads made between principal points in the tribal area (Crocker 1967).

¹⁰There is a question in my mind about whether the translation here ought to be “the moon” or “Moon.” Alcibiades in no place in the original interview indicated whether the celestial being in question was the moon itself or a deceased ancestor taking the form of the moon. Considering the traditional practice, it should be “Moon,” an ancestor, but since this is not stated, I am settling for “the moon,” the celestial body itself. In the Canela myth of “The Sun and the Moon,” Moon was a Canela man in the human form. This is not the case here.

¹¹It might strike the reader that Alcibiades could not have used “microbes.” I doubt that he did, but his translator Raimundo Roberto did use the Portuguese word *micróbios*. The Summer Institute of Linguistics Bible translator Jack Popjes brought in films to the Canela during the 1980s that instructed them about microbes and the need to wear sandals. In any case, the Canela have a belief that the body has internal agents that fight off harmful intrusions, which might be like microbes.

¹²On page 238 (1946), Nimuendajú writes about a snake shaman among the Canela named Kwuikō, whom I knew as Manuel Tomas Khuykō. Alcibiades was asking for the help of this venerable snake master to make his first cure using tobacco.

References

- Crocker, William H.
- 1967 The Canela Messianic Movement: An Introduction. In Herman Lent (ed), *Atas do Simpósio sobre a Biota Amazônica Belém, Pará, Brasil, Junho 6-11, 1966*. Rio de Janeiro: Conselho Nacional de Pesquisas (CNPQ).
 - 1990 *The Canela (Eastern Timbira), I: An Ethnographic Introduction*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, n. 33.
 - 1995 “Canela Relationships with Ghosts: This-Worldly or Other Worldly Empowerment.” *Latin American Anthropology Review* 5(2):71–78.
 - 2003 “War and Peace among the Canela.” *Antropológica* 99–100:13–29.
- Crocker, William H. and Jean G. Crocker
- 2004 *The Canela: Kinship, Ritual, and Sex in an Amazonian Tribe*, 2nd edition. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
 - 2009 *Os Canelas: Parentesco, Ritual e Sexo em uma Tribo da Chapada Maranhense*, trans. Julio C. Melatti of Crocker and Crocker 2004. Rio de Janeiro: Museu do Índio.
- Dole, Gertrude E.
- 1973 Shamanism and Political Control among the Kuikúru. In Daniel Gross (ed), *Peoples and Cultures in Native South America: An Anthropological Reader*. New York: Doubleday, /Natural History Press, pp. 294–307.
- Nimuendajú, Curt
- 1946 *The Eastern Timbira*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 41. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schechter, Steven and William H. Crocker
- 1999 Mending Ways: The Canela Indians of Brazil. Video, color, 49 minutes. Schechter Films and National Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Princeton: Films for the Humanities and Sciences.
- Wagley, Charles and Eduardo Galvão
- 1949 *The Tenetehara Indians of Brazil: A Culture in Transitions*. New York: Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology n. 35.