

Making Sense of an Unfinished Masterpiece: Heinz Förthmann and the production of *Funeral Bororo* (1953)

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ABSTRACT Heinz Förthmann (1915-1978) was one of the most talented film-makers in the history of Brazilian ethnographic film. But the films that he made at the height of his powers, in the 1950s, now exist only in degraded or fragmentary form, or have been lost entirely, and for this reason, he has not received the recognition that he deserves. Following a review of Förthmann's career, and on the basis of an incomplete rough-cut lacking both soundtrack and titles, this article offers a reconstruction of *Funeral Bororo*, a film that he shot in 1953. If it had been completed, this film would surely now be regarded not only as Förthmann's masterwork, but also as a major contribution to the canon of ethnographic film, both within Brazil and across the world.

KEYWORDS Förthmann; Bororo; Brazil; ethnographic film.

Heinz Förthmann (1915-1978), sometimes referred to in Brazilian sources as Henrique Forthmann or Hans Foerthmann, was one of most talented film-makers in the history of Brazilian ethnographic film. But the films that he made at the height of his powers, in the 1950s, now exist only in degraded or fragmentary form, or have been lost entirely, and for this reason, he has not received the recognition that he deserves, even within Brazil.

The film that most exemplifies this unfortunate circumstance is one that Förthmann made in 1952-53 in collaboration with the leading anthropologist, politician and public intellectual, Darcy Ribeiro (1922-

1997). This film, which was surely Förthmann masterwork, concerns a funeral ceremony in the Bororo village of Córrego Grande in Mato Grosso State, on the lower reaches of the São Lourenço river. If the editing of this film had been completed, we believe that it would probably now be regarded as a leading work in the canon of ethnographic film, not only within Brazil, but also more generally, across the world.

But all that is certainly known to have survived of this film are four rolls of partially edited negative that were discovered by chance in a deteriorated condition in the late 1960s or early 1970s in a warehouse of the now-defunct Brazilian state film company, EMBRAFILME (Mendes 2006, 283). These reels, which are of a total duration of 41 minutes, were first sent to the Cinemateca Brasileira in São Paulo and then to the Museu do Índio in Rio de Janeiro. To its great credit, the museum subsequently digitized the material and put it up on the web.¹

The precise title given to this footage by the museum is *Funeral Bororo (Fragmentos)*. And indeed, when one first looks at the material, it does seem to be very fragmentary, from a visual point of view. There is also no sound-track, nor any titles or intertitles. But if one is aware of the background to the making of this film and if one reads the material in the light of the ethnographic literature on the Bororo funeral, it becomes clear that this footage consists of far more than mere “fragments”. In fact, it would be more accurate to describe it as an almost-final rough cut with a clearly identifiable narrative thread, though also with certain crucial scenes missing.

In the latter part of this article, we shall offer a detailed reading of this footage, in which we will seek to identify the coherence underlying the apparent confusion of the rough cut. But we begin with an overview of the career of Heinz Förthmann both to establish his place in Brazilian ethnographic film history, and to show how *Funeral Bororo* fits into his personal professional and creative trajectory.

¹ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Kdca9fgXMQ.

Heinz Förthmann as an ethnographic film-maker

If Förthmann's ethnographic film work has been saved from oblivion, even if only in part, this is in large measure due to the diligent scholarship of Marcos de Souza Mendes, of the University of Brasília, who was his student in the 1970s. Here we shall be drawing extensively on Mendes's writings, notably his doctoral thesis (2006) and his contribution (2011) to an edited volume of essays about the history of the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI), the principal government body responsible for indigenous affairs in Brazil in the period 1910-1967. Also of great importance to us has been the interview that Claudia Menezes, then of the Museu do Índio, conducted with Förthmann in 1976, probably the last interview that he gave before he died, aged only 63, in March 1978 (Menezes 1983).

Förthmann was born in Hanover, in Germany, in 1915, but as a teenager, he moved to Brazil with his parents and settled in Porto Alegre, in southern Brazil. Here, he began his adult life working in a photographic and design studio. Through family connections, he came to know Harald Schultz (1909-1966), a professional photographer and autodidact ethnologist who came from the same social milieu of families of German descent in Porto Alegre. Indeed, the two families were related by marriage since Schultz's brother was married to Förthmann's sister. Schultz was then working in the communications office of President Getúlio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro. But in 1942, he was appointed, on Vargas's recommendation, to be the head of the new Seção Etnográfica of the SPI and he invited Förthmann to join his team (Mendes 2006, 61).



Image 1: Heinz Förthmann, in February-March 1950, during the shooting of *Os Índios "Urubus"*, with the Kaapor "cast", Xiyra and Kosó, and their son, Beren. Photograph by Darcy Ribeiro. | © Museu do Índio, Rio de Janeiro.

Schultz was also a film-maker and he encouraged Förthmann to take a basic course in cinematography.² But initially Förthmann worked for the Seção de Estudos (as the Seção Etnográfica became known shortly after his appointment) exclusively as a photographer. Among the many indigenous communities that he documented photographically around this time were Pobore and Córrego Grande, the two Bororo villages where, a decade later, he would shoot *Funeral Bororo*. Arriving in December 1943, he took over 2000 photographs. A Bororo man died while he was there and he was permitted to witness the final phases of the funeral ceremony, from which outsiders were normally excluded. Not only did he take the opportunity to make audio recordings of around 50 funeral chants, but also to ask permission to film the event at a later date (Menezes 1983, 27; Mendes 2011, 235). Förthmann also acted as

² For an overview of Schultz's work as a film-maker, see *The Silent Time Machine*, the website about early ethnographic film prepared by Paul Henley, particularly at <http://www.silenttimemachine.net/film-makers/schultz-harald-1909-1966/>.

sound-recordist for other SPI film-makers, notably on *Excursão às Nascentes do Xingu*, a film made in 1944 and directed by his considerably less talented SPI colleague, Nilo Vellozo. As the title suggests, this concerned an expedition to visit the indigenous communities on the upper reaches of the Xingu River.

Eventually, in 1946, after Schultz had left the SPI, Förthmann began to direct and shoot his own films. At first, these consisted of propagandistic shorts about the work of the SPI, as delivered through its posts around the interior of Brazil. Notwithstanding the mostly banal subject-matter, his cinematographic talent is already evident in these films. Yet only in one case, *Os Carajá*, shot and released in 1947, is there any coverage of indigenous customary life. Even this is very brief, consisting of no more than the three-minute opening sequence of the thirteen-minute film. This offers a series of visually striking but very formal close-up portraits of individual Karajá men (Image 2), followed by a performance for the camera of the celebrated Aruanã ceremony (Image 3) and a few shots of domestic life showing one woman weaving an ornament, and another pounding maize. Moreover, as is typical of all Förthmann's early films, these images are accompanied by a soundtrack laden with heavy European symphonic music and a ponderously patronizing voice-over commentary.



Images 2-3: The opening sequence of *Os Carajá* (1947). A formal portrait and a dance performed for the camera. Frame-grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

It was around this time that Förthmann encountered two figures who would have a major influence on his subsequent work with the Bororo. The first was Marshall Cândido da Silva Rondon (1865-1958), a charismatic figure of national importance in Brazil at that time. Rondon, who was of part-Bororo descent, had been responsible for the

foundation of the SPI in 1910, and for the next twenty years, he had been the leading figure in the management of the relations between indigenous populations and the national society. With the arrival of Getúlio Vargas as President in 1930, his star had been temporarily eclipsed, but in 1940, he had been rehabilitated and appointed the head of the Conselho Nacional de Proteção aos Índios (CNPI), the body which oversaw the work of the SPI.³

Förthmann often accompanied Rondon on his travels as his official photographer, particularly to Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso State, where Förthmann was living at the time since his wife was from the city, and to Mimoso, the ranch that Rondon owned, and which lay at some distance to the south of Cuiabá. Förthmann also photographed Rondon at certain very personal moments, including a visit to his mother's grave and his attendance at the wake for his wife. According to Ribeiro, Förthmann was also a witness to the celebrated encounter, probably in 1944, between Rondon and the leading Bororo chief Cadete, at which the latter, noting that Rondon was now very old (he was in his 79th year), encouraged him to come and live at Córrego Grande, Cadete's own village, so that when Rondon died, the Bororo could give him a funeral that would be far more elaborate than any that the Whites could manage (Image 4, Mendes 2006, 270-1). In the event, Cadete died first, in 1953, and it was his death that motivated Förthmann, at Rondon's instigation, to shoot *Funeral Bororo*. Rondon, for his part, lived until 1958 and was buried with full military honours in Rio de Janeiro.

³ See our brief summary of Rondon's career in an earlier publication (Caiuby, da Cunha and Henley 2017: 115-119).



Image 4: Cadete and Rondon, probably in 1944. Photograph by Heinz Förthmann (see Mendes 2006: 311). | © Acervo do Museu do Índio – FUNAI, Brasil.

The other person with whom Förthmann came into contact around this time and who would have a major influence upon him was Darcy Ribeiro. A former student of Herbert Baldus (1899-1970), a foundational figure in modern Brazilian anthropology, Ribeiro was also a great admirer of Rondon. He was recruited to the Seção de Estudos in 1947 as part of a more general initiative at this time to manage the integration of indigenous groups into national life on the basis of first-hand research by anthropologists (Pereira Couto 2011, 227). In the coming years, with Förthmann contributing his cinematographic skills and Ribeiro his anthropological expertise, they collaborated on the

making of two films which represented a major advance on *Os Carajá*, both in terms of ethnographic substance and cinematographic quality. One of these films was *Funeral Bororo*. But this was preceded by *Os Índios “Urubus”*, a film about the Tupi-speaking indigenous group more commonly referred to today as the Kaapor or Ka'apor, who live in the northeast of Brazil, on the border between Maranhão and Pará states. This was shot at three different Kaapor villages on the middle reaches of the Gurupí river, in February and March 1950, and released that same year.

The filming expedition was one of several visits that Ribeiro made to the Kaapor between 1949 and 1951 (Mattos 2011, 216). As he would describe almost fifty years later in a diaristic account of his Kaapor fieldwork, Ribeiro initially had very ambitious plans for the film. He envisaged that it would culminate in a sequence showing all the different stages of a child's naming ceremony, the most important public ritual occasion for the Kaapor. He also wanted to show all the labour that went into the hunting, gathering of wild fruits and harvesting of agricultural produce that was required to prepare all the food and drink consumed during these ceremonies. He further envisaged that the person who bestowed the name in the ceremony would be one of his principal informants, Anakanpukú, a headman with a prodigious genealogical memory. Anakanpukú would also relate his experiences of warfare to the assembled company, handing round cigars (Ribeiro 1996, 181-3).



Image 5: Darcy Ribeiro with Kiyra and Beren during the shooting of *Os Índios “Urubus”*, February – March 1950. Photograph by Heinz Förthmann. | © Acervo do Museu do Índio – FUNAI, Brasil.

In actual practice, Ribeiro and Förthmann were obliged to scale down the project considerably. When they arrived, the Gurupí river valley had recently been struck by a measles epidemic and many indigenous people had died. Although the film-makers provided medical attention as best they could, the general social dislocation caused by the epidemic meant that the celebration of a naming ceremony was out of the question. The film-makers also had to contend with frequent days of rain and low light that made filming impossible. An additional consideration was Förthmann's preferred way of working, which was to shoot according to a carefully prepared script, covering any given scene with multiple takes from various different angles. He even had a make-shift dolly constructed by a local carpenter in order to execute travelling shots. Although this way of working produced images of excellent visual quality, it was extremely time-consuming. It also required the

indigenous subjects to perform the same actions for the camera over and over again. If anyone looked at the camera, the take would be abandoned and another one started. While some subjects showed exemplary patience, others soon tired of these requests (Menezes 1983, 26-7; Mendes 2006, 178-9).

In order to finish within the time frame available, Ribeiro concluded that they should structure the film around a fictive day-in-the-life story of a young couple, Kosó and Xiyra, and their two-year-old son, Beren. This small family became what Ribeiro referred to as the “cast” of the film (Ribeiro 1996, 205). The day-in-the-life device had the great advantage that it enabled the film-makers to yoke together different aspects of Kaapor life within a single narrative story line. But it also made the subjects’ daily life seem unrealistically full. The film opens with Kosó and Xiyra returning from a hunting trip, laden with game and forest fruits. But before the morning is out, they have set off for the gardens where they collect a large basket of manioc roots. By the putative midday of the film, they have returned and have begun to wash these roots in a stream. Kosó is then shown making arrows, while shortly afterwards, he and Xiyra are to be seen processing manioc flour and baking cassava bread on a large griddle. Even the most diligent young indigenous couple would never be able to complete all these tasks in a single day! There was also the problem that in confining the film to a particularly young couple – Kosó was 22, Xiyra only 18 – the day-in-the-life device offered only a limited perspective on Kaapor society. The older people who feature prominently in Ribeiro’s writing about the Kaapor were almost entirely excluded.

In its final edited form, the film carried a soundtrack consisting of an informative, ethnological voice-over commentary written by Ribeiro and an extradiegetic music track featuring *La Mer*, a symphonic sketch by Claude Debussy. The latter now seems a rather strange choice, since Förthmann had taken a Pierce Wire audio recorder to the field and had recorded Kaapor flute music and other sound effects. The reason may simply have been that if the sound recorded on location had been used, the sound-editing process would inevitably have been lengthy and therefore too costly for the Seção de Estudos budget. Also, as noted above in relation to *Os Carajá*, all the films that Förthmann had previously made for the SPI had featured European classical music on the soundtrack, so it was clearly a strategy with which he was familiar.

Unfortunately, the master copy of the sound version of *Os Índios “Urubus”* was destroyed in a fire at the Cinemateca Brasileira in 1982. The original material was shot on 35mm black-and-white stock but the only copy of the complete film of 38 minutes now known to exist is a silent 16mm print held by the Museu do Índio, which is in very poor condition. Also still extant is an abbreviated version of only 17 minutes which features an introduction and informal voice-over commentary by Ribeiro and which is ordered in a somewhat different manner. The transcript of Ribeiro's original, more formal, voice-over text also survives and is reproduced by Mendes (2006, 199-218).⁴ But very much more tragic than the fate of the film was the fate of the “cast”. Ribeiro reports in his diary that not long after the film-makers left, first the baby Beren died, then shortly afterwards, both Kosó and Xiyra, devastated by their loss, seemingly lost the will to live and died also, of mysterious causes (Ribeiro 1996, 11).

The fate that befell the material that Förthmann and Ribeiro produced during their subsequent collaboration on *Funeral Bororo* was also disappointing. As in the case of the Kaapor shoot, the production took place in the context of the outbreak of an epidemic, in this case of smallpox. Although Ribeiro was present at the beginning of the shoot, he soon returned to Rio to organise the dispatch of medicines. He was also very busy at this time since he had been promoted to the position of director of the Seção de Estudos the previous year, and in this capacity, he had set up Museu do Índio which first opened its doors in 1953. As a result, Förthmann was left to shoot most of the footage entirely on his own.

Once the shoot was over, Förthmann produced a two-hour assembly of the material, including a ten-minute fine cut of the penultimate stage of the ceremony, in which a skull of the deceased person is decorated with

⁴ Both surviving versions of the film are available on the web. The longer version is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMeYmyxKRDY&list=PLXjOjQuQ72zTYoYxm_ec30OkslOu1W0Ys&index=29&t=376s, while the shorter version can be accessed via www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekFY1IYgFUM. Mendes reports that in the mid-1970s, Förthmann sent a copy of the film to UNESCO in Paris, who sent it on to the Comité du film ethnographique (Cfe) at the Musée de l'Homme for evaluation. In his capacity as general secretary of the Cfe, Jean Rouch responded, saying that although the committee considered it the best film so far made in South America, the soundtrack should be changed. Although there is some evidence that Förthmann set about doing this, replacing *La Mer* with Kaapor flute music, it is not clear whether this re-sounding project was completed, nor what happened to the resulting film (see Mendes 2006, 190-94). Following an enquiry made to the Cfe in November 2021, the current general secretary, M. Laurent Pellé, reported that there is no trace of the film in the catalogue of works currently held by the Cfe. It is possible, however, that a copy may be languishing somewhere in the film archives of UNESCO.

feathers. Under the title *O Enfeite dos Ossos*, the latter was screened, without sound, at the 31st International Congress of Americanists which took place in São Paulo in August 1954. Amongst the audience was Claude Lévi-Strauss (Menezes 1983, 28; Mendes 2006, 324). But due to the chronic underfunding of the Seção de Estudos, Ribeiro then asked Förthmann to move on to another project before he had finished editing the Bororo material. This new project was to be funded by a grant from UNESCO to investigate “racial democracy” in Brazil and in particular, the integration of the indigenous population into the national society. It was to involve a major feature documentary to be directed by Förthmann and provisionally entitled *Fronteiras da Civilização*. This would explore the impact of different fronts of national expansion on the indigenous peoples of Brazil, going back to the earliest days of European colonization. In effect, this film would have served as a visual complement to the text-based ethnographic and historical research that Ribeiro was simultaneously carrying out and which would be presented in his major work *Os Índios e a Civilização*, eventually published in 1970.⁵

Even before the filming for the UNESCO project began, budgetary problems arose. Ribeiro was obliged to turn to a US academic, James W. Marshall, who was not a professional producer but who could draw on substantial private sponsorship to support the making of ethnographic films. To Förthmann’s frustration, this entailed a change of objectives: the wide-ranging historical and comparative dimension of the original project was replaced with a proposal to make a series of films for US television, on 16mm colour stock, about the peoples of the Xingu Park. Although Marshall thought of these as being educational, Förthmann’s view was that in comparison with the original project, they were of no serious academic value (Menezes 1983, 25).

Nevertheless, in 1955, Förthmann travelled to the Upper Xingu to make the films, accompanied by Marshall and the well-known *sertanistas*, the Villas Bôas brothers. Here he made four films, all of which seem to have disappeared almost in their entirety. The first, *Txukahamãe*, of which only a few production stills and a short clip survive, chronicled the first contact established by the Villas Bôas with the Kayapó subgroup of the title, while the second, *Kwaryp*, of which only a few black-and-white fragments remain, offered a comprehensive coverage of the funeral

⁵ For a summary and critical appreciation of this work, see Henley (1978).

ceremony of the Kamayurá. The third film, *Xingu*, of which nothing but a few production stills and the original treatment are still known to exist, offered a more general treatment of Xinguano life, covering a range of topics, including ceremonial activities, pottery production and house construction. The final film, *Jawari*, equally lost, concerned a ceremony of symbolic warfare that involved various different Xinguano groups (Mendes 2011, 247-9).

For the editing of these films, Marshall invited Förthmann to go to the US. But there were few buyers for the films since they had not been shot in a manner that suited the US educational market, and the editing dragged on for a long time. Meanwhile, back in Brazil, Ribeiro, frustrated by further budgetary cuts, left the SPI in 1957 without ever returning to the Bororo material. When Marshall Rondon died in January 1958, Förthmann no longer had any supporters within the SPI and he was dismissed three months later for neglecting his responsibilities in Brazil. He remained in the US for another eighteen months in the hope of getting funding to finish the Xingu films, but by November 1959, he was back in Brazil. Although Marshall managed to sell a few episodes to US television before he died in 1960, Förthmann himself reported that when Orlando Villas Bôas made enquiries about the films during a visit to the US some ten years later, they had “evaporated” (Menezes 1983, 25; Mendes 2006, 367-81).

After his return to Brazil, Förthmann worked on a broad variety of film-making projects, including historical documentaries, tourist films about Rio and Brasilia, as well as films about the University of Brasilia where he was appointed to a position in the Department of Communication in 1965.⁶ At no point, however, did he come back to the Bororo material. Ribeiro, meanwhile, had become a national figure: in 1961, he was one of the founders of the University of Brasilia and subsequently became its first rector. He later became the Chief of Staff to the Presidency of Brazil and during this time, according to Förthmann, there was talk of transferring the Bororo material to the University of Brasilia (Menezes 1983, 28). But nothing came of this and when the Goulart presidency was brought down by a military coup in 1964, Ribeiro went into exile. In 1967, the SPI itself was closed down amid accusations of corruption.

⁶ Although incomplete, a listing of Förthmann's films, including those from this stage of his career, is available on the website of the Cinemateca Brasileira.

What happened to the Bororo rushes during this politically unsettled period is unknown. Mendes suggests that in the early 1960s, Nilo Vellozo, who had by then become the head of the Seção de Estudos, planned to commercialise the Bororo material for “a private project” (Mendes 2006, 283). But if so, it is not clear what the outcome of this was. How the four reels of edited negative came to turn up some years later in the EMBRAFILME warehouse remains a mystery.

Yet although Förthmann never returned to the Bororo material, he did occasionally make ethnographic films about the indigenous population during this period. Among various projects, he returned to the Xingu Park to make two films about the Kamayurá funded by the Instituto Nacional do Cinema Educativo (INCE). In the first of these, *Kuarup*, which was shot in 1961 and released the following year, he collaborated with the anthropologist Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1928-2006) to make a film about the same funeral ceremony as he had covered for James Marshall in 1955. However, a series of logistical and technical problems hampered the coverage on this occasion, with the result that it was much less comprehensive than his earlier film and some parts even had to be staged. Indeed, Förthmann considered the results so unsatisfactory that he only edited the film because he was pressurised to do so by INCE (Menezes 1983, 28).⁷ Although *Kuarup* is very well shot, in colour, albeit in a very formal manner, it is only 20 minutes long and unsurprisingly therefore offers a very superficial account of its subject matter. Moreover, the soundtrack consists of extradiegetic music of the kind that had become conventional in feature films of the period to suggest the “mysteriousness” of indigenous life. This was certainly an improvement on the European classical music that had featured in Förthmann’s earlier films, but even so, this music too now sounds rather ridiculous.

Förthmann’s other INCE film, *Jornada Kamayurá* was released in 1966 and appears to have been shot the previous year.⁸ This film was made in collaboration with the anthropologist Roque de Barros Laraia (born

⁷ This film is available at www.bcc.org.br/filmes/443484.

⁸ This film is available at www.bcc.org.br/filmes/443490. In her interview with Förthmann, Menezes (1983, 28-9) states that both films were made in 1965, but this is not entirely correct. Förthmann mentions that the shoot for *Kuarup* was disrupted by the effects of the resignation of President Jânio Quadros, which took place in August 1961, while the end credits indicate that the film was released in 1962. In the case of *Jornada Kamayurá*, on the other hand, the release date is given in the end credits as 1966, so it is quite possible that it was shot in 1965.

1932) and is structured around the same day-in-the-life narrative device that Förthmann had used back in 1950 for *Os Índios “Urubus”*. As with *Kuarup*, it is in colour and cinematographically accomplished. However, in this case, the soundtrack, whilst also entirely asynchronous, is composed of a mixture of wild sounds and some music evidently recorded on location, even a brief snatch of conversation. The voice-over commentary written by Laraia is unpretentiously informative. Whilst only 11 minutes in duration and therefore inevitably still relatively superficial in its treatment of Kamayurá life, this film has worn considerably better than *Kuarup*.

Förthmann's last ethnographic film, *Rito Krahô*, released posthumously, was made in collaboration with the anthropologist Júlio César Melatti (born 1938), and concerned the celebration of the sweet potato festival at the Krahô village of Pedra Branca, Tocantins State. In making this film, Förthmann was in effect following in the footsteps of his former patron, Harald Schultz who, after leaving the SPI had made a remarkable 28 films among the Krahô, albeit mostly very short.⁹ With the assistance of Carlos Augusto Ribeiro Júnior (1949-1995), Förthmann shot this material in 1971-1973, again in colour with asynchronous location sound. However, the project was never properly funded by Förthmann's then employer, the University of Brasilia, and it was not until 1993, some fifteen years after his death that the editing was completed by Francisco Sérgio Moreira and Marcos de Souza Mendes. The film was then re-released in 2015 in a digital form on the centenary of Förthmann's birth.¹⁰

The ethnographic context of *Funeral Bororo*

As Cadete sought to remind Cândido Rondon, the Bororo funeral ceremony is a highly elaborate event. One of the authors of this article has previously written extensively about this ceremony (see, *inter alia*, Caiuby 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2008; 2016). Although we shall be drawing

⁹ See the discussion of Schultz's work on *The Silent Time Machine* website, at <https://www.silenttimemachine.net/film-makers/schultz-harald-1909-1966/>.

¹⁰ A brief interview with Júlio César Melatti describing the shooting of this film is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=krFoAapMFYM.

freely on this work, only the most summary account of the ceremony can be given here.

One of the most distinctive features of the Bororo funeral is that it involves two stages of burial. When a Bororo person dies, they are initially buried, provisionally, in a shallow grave in the centre of the village plaza, accompanied by the singing of elaborate chants known as *bacororo*. The body is then left in this grave for a number of weeks, until all the flesh has rotted, a process encouraged by frequent dousing of the grave with water. During this period, an extensive series of ceremonial events takes place, often involving symbolic exchanges between the two exogamous moieties that typically make up a Bororo village. This first burial and the ensuing ceremonial events represent the first stage in the process of turning the deceased into a spirit.

Another distinctive feature of the Bororo funeral is that it is thought to be attended by certain named ancestral spirits as well as by the spirits of the dead generally, known collectively as *aroe*. The ancestral spirits are said to become embodied in the living participants: their precise identities are indicated in a variety of ways, including by the body decoration and headdresses worn by those who embody them, the dances that the latter dance and the musical instruments that they play. Even the spirit of the immediately deceased person is thought to attend their funeral: the dancer who embodies this spirit, the *aroe maiwu*, wears a distinctive mode of dress designed to hide his identity symbolically, primarily by means of a yellow feather visor covering the face. This dancer is always a member of the moiety opposed to that of the deceased. The *aroe maiwu* also has a ritual “mother” and a ritual “father”: it is their role to burn the deceased’s possessions at a given moment in the ceremony.

One of the most important events that take place following the first burial involves men of opposed moieties attempting to outdo one another in dancing with large circular discs on their heads. These discs are made of palm branches and are known as *mariddo*. They are about 1.5m in diameter and can weigh up to 60kg. Also important is a ceremony in which a group of boys are initiated into adulthood by the visiting ancestral spirits in a secluded place outside the village. This ceremony not only marks the moment after which the boys may have a legitimately active sex life, but also instructs them as to the women with whom it is appropriate to have these relations. It is following the initiation ceremony that the deceased’s possessions are burnt in the

centre of the plaza. In effect, as death takes a life away, the initiation ceremony generates new adults who are capable of reproducing Bororo society.

The second stage of the Bororo funeral is more intense but much shorter, though it still takes at least ten days. It begins with the disinterring of the rolled-up mat in which the body had been buried but which now contains no more than a skeleton and disintegrating palm leaves. The mat is carried to a marshy area beyond the village and the bones are carefully washed and dried. They are then placed in a basket and brought back to the village. Here, in the *baimanagejewu*, the large ceremonial house in the centre of the village, the skull of the deceased is decorated with feathers in a design that evokes their clan and moiety membership. This decoration takes place behind a palm-leaf screen and involves men only since it is thought that this completes the process of turning the deceased into an *aroe*, a spirit, and that women should not witness this. However, at a given point, a basket containing the decorated skull and the bones is passed out to the public area of the house. As chants are performed by the men, female relatives of the deceased wail in grief, and lacerate themselves so that their blood falls on the basket containing the bones, as if to restore some degree of bodily substance to them.

Finally, once the chanting in the *baimanagejewu* has concluded, the now-decorated bones are taken to the house of the couple who have acted as the “mother” and “father” of the *aroe maiwu*. Here, they are allowed to “rest” for a week or so, before being placed in a larger basket and taken from the village to be submerged in the centre of a nearby lagoon. The *aroe maiwu* is then responsible for hunting a jaguar, whose hide he will offer to the family of the deceased. This may take some time, but when he finally completes the task, the period of mourning formally comes to an end.

The production context of *Funeral Bororo*

Prior to *Funeral Bororo*, two ethnographic films had been made of the ceremony. In 1916 – remarkably, also at Rondon’s instigation – the ceremony had been filmed by Luiz Thomaz Reis, then the official cinematographer of the SPI, in the village of São Lourenço. This village was subsequently abandoned, but it lay very close to Córrego Grande, where Förthmann would shoot his film almost forty years later (see the map in Image 6).

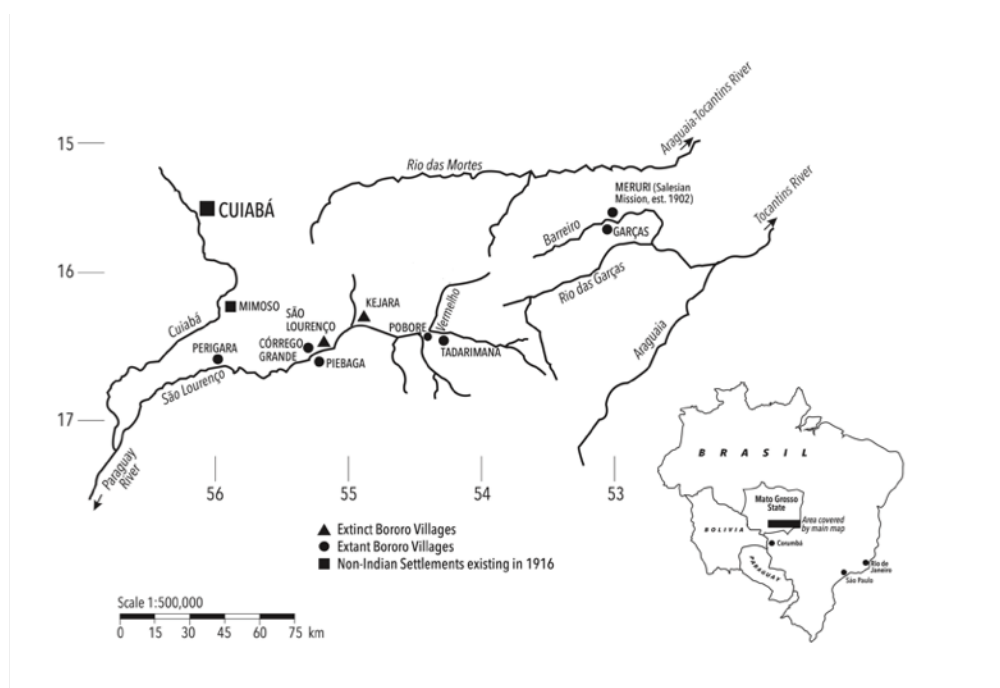


Image 6: General map of Bororo territory. | Courtesy of Paul Henley.

This film, *Rituais e Festas Borôro*, which has a duration of 31 minutes, represents a very early example of the documentary film form. Together with our colleague Edgar da Cunha, we have published an extended analysis of this film in which we show that although the coverage of the event is very impressive for the period, Reis manipulated the chronology, so that the first burial comes *after* the ensuing ceremonial events, while the second burial processes are entirely absent.¹¹ We suggest that the main reason for this was that the scenes of washing and decoration of the bones, and the self-laceration of the women, would have alienated the urban audiences whom Rondon wanted to convince of the importance of the indigenous cultural contribution to Brazilian national identity. By omitting these scenes and ending with the first burial, the film presented the ceremony in a form that would have been much more amenable to those audiences (Caiuby, da Cunha and Henley 2017, 137-8).

The other previous film of the Bororo funeral was made by Claude and Dina Lévi-Strauss in 1935 in the village of Kejara. This village no longer exists, but it then lay upstream from Córrego Grande, on a tributary of

¹¹ This film may be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ein6eKqMBtE.

the São Lourenço (see the map in Image 6). The film is only 7½ minutes long and was originally shot merely for documentation purposes rather than to make a narratively structured documentary. As such, it shows only a very limited number of isolated moments in the ceremony. Also, the technical quality is very poor as Claude and Dina Lévi-Strauss were shooting on a miniature 8mm camera and neither had any previous cinematographic experience.¹²

Förthmann shot the material for *Funeral Bororo* during visits to two different Bororo communities. His first visit took place in November and early December 1952, when he travelled, by himself, to Pobore, on the middle reaches of the São Lourenço (again, see Image 6). At this stage, the agenda of the production was to address the issue of primary concern to the Seção de Estudos at that time, namely, the relationship of the indigenous population to the national society. More precisely, as Förthmann himself later explained, the aim was to show the contrast between the new values that young Bororo were developing due to their contact with the national society and the traditional values held by the older people still living in relative isolation within the local SPI post (Menezes 1983, 27).

In a letter to Ribeiro reporting on this visit, seemingly written in early 1953, Förthmann states that he had shot some 2000m of black-and-white 35mm film (around 70 minutes) on a variety of subjects, mentioning particularly various fishing activities. Although he had also filmed certain ritual events, including a ceremonial combat between the two moieties, he does not mention the filming of a funeral. Moreover, at this point, Förthmann apparently did not envisage any further filming with the Bororo since he ends the letter by commenting on the film stock that will be needed for a forthcoming film to be shot in the Upper Xingu region (Mendes 2006, 278-80).

But the agenda of the production then changed radically, when Rondon received a telegram saying that Cadete had died and inviting him to attend the funeral at Córrego Grande. As he was by then in his late 80s, Rondon asked Ribeiro to go on his behalf. He also recorded a message,

¹² This film is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4ns4OiuqMA. For further discussion of the films made by Dina and Claude Lévi-Strauss in Brazil in 1935-36, see www.silentfilmachine.net/films/amazonia-films/kadiweu-and-bororo-assembly-1930s-claude-and-dina-levi-strauss/.

in Bororo, on a Pierce Wire audio field recorder, telling the people of Córrego Grande that they should consider Ribeiro to be his eyes, ears and mouth, and asking them to allow him and Förthmann to make a film so that he could see the funeral, even though he was not able to attend in person. When Ribeiro and Förthmann arrived at Córrego Grande and played back Rondon's message, their Bororo hosts were overwhelmed with emotion and allowed them to begin filming right away (Mendes 2006, 272; 2011, 241).

However, the film-makers had also arrived at the moment when an epidemic of smallpox had broken out in the village. It is not entirely clear how long Ribeiro remained in the field after that point. In a filmed interview that he gave to the Anglo-Brazilian film-maker Maureen Bisilliat in 1990, Ribeiro says that he stayed in the village for twenty days and identifies the witnessing of the Bororo funeral as the most intense and profound experience of his entire career as an anthropologist. He also describes very vividly the smell of putrefaction that pervaded the village as Cadete's body began to decay in the days after the first burial. Given that among the surviving footage, there is a sequence of the first burial of Cadete, this suggests that Ribeiro must certainly have been present during filming of the early part of the event. On the other hand, in Förthmann's version of events, it is implied that Ribeiro returned quite promptly to Rio in search of medicines to combat the epidemic and did not return thereafter (Menezes 1983, 27).

Whatever the exact timing of Ribeiro's movements, it is clear that Förthmann shot most of the material on his own. During the shoot, events happened very quickly, so he was not able to control the action through a careful *mise-en-scène*, as was his preferred practice, and as he had deployed in shooting *Os Índios "Urubus"*. Instead, he found himself obliged to shoot hand-held, simply following the action as it unfolded. Nevertheless, he still found time to take a large number of photographs and to record some eight hours of music, whilst also continuing to provide medicines to the sick.¹³

¹³ What happened to the full eight hours of audio recordings is also unclear. Mendes reports (2006, 306 n.25) that amongst Förthmann's personal archive, he found a 20-minute roll of audio tape containing recordings of chants sung at the penultimate stage of the funeral, when the skull is decorated. However, it is not clear whether these recordings were made in 1953, or during the visit that Förthmann made to Córrego Grande ten years earlier (see above).

Making sense of the *Funeral Bororo* footage

Having established the various contexts in which the *Funeral Bororo* footage came to be shot, we are now better placed to make sense of it. As presented on the Museu do Índio website, the footage runs to approximately 41 minutes.¹⁴ What the exact relationship is between this version and the two-hour assembly prepared by Förthmann and to which he refers in his interview with Claudia Menezes (1983, 27), we are unable to say. But as Förthmann does not appear to have touched the material after 1954, one can only assume that the reduction was carried out by some unknown third party. Whoever was responsible for the short version, we suggest that in terms of content, it can be divided into four parts, of not greatly dissimilar lengths which, by analogy with a theatrical work, we shall refer to here as “Acts”:

ACT 1 – The impact of contact with the outside world (8½ mins.)

This Act clearly corresponds to the early part of the shoot, when Förthmann was based in Pobre in late 1952, and when the agenda of the production was the exploration of generational differences in the nature of the contact between the Bororo and the national society. Not only is there no direct reference to the funeral theme, but also, in contrast to the largely observational style in the remainder of the cut, this part is structured around a skilfully constructed series of *mises-en-scène*, with apparent references to well-known cinematic works.

The Act begins with a dramatic shot, set on a wide river, of a young boy being ferried to school in a canoe paddled by an elderly man. This boy is clearly being set up as a character – whom we shall refer to as “The Boy” – whose role will be to guide the audience through the film, in the manner, as Mendes suggests, of the boy in Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948), then relatively recently released (Mendes 2006, 287). We then see The Boy sitting at his school desk surrounded by other pupils.

¹⁴ The analysis of *Funeral Bororo* carried out by Mendes for his doctoral thesis was based on a 37-minute copy of the footage held in the archives of the Centro Técnico Audiovisual (CTAV), Rio de Janeiro. He suggests that the version held by the Museu do Índio should be used to fill any lacunae in the CTAV version (2006, 285). However, the description that he then offers of the CTAV footage suggests that it is identical to the Museu do Índio footage. We surmise then that the four-minute disparity in running times is simply the result of technical differences arising from the transfer of the material from the original negative to two different video formats.

Close-ups establish that they represent the three principal groups that make up the “racial democracy” of Brazil. While most of the children are clearly indigenous, with some even wearing face paint, one shot shows two boys, one white European, the other Black, sharing a desk (Images 7-8).



Images 7-8: Brazilian “racial democracy” in the schoolroom: indigenous, White and Black children sit side-by-side. Frame-grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

The Boy looks out of the window to watch a line of peasants walking past, with their digging tools over their shoulders, as if they were soldiers. We suspect that this is a reference to an almost identical scene in *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), the classic anti-war film directed by Lewis Milestone, with which Förthmann would surely have been familiar and in which German school boys are encouraged to fulfil their duty to the Fatherland and join the army. The message here is analogous: apparently to the film-maker’s regret, the children are being encouraged to join the ranks of the Brazilian peasantry. A few shots then show young indigenous men herding cattle on horseback and a young indigenous woman pounding maize (Images 9-10).



Images 9-10: The future for indigenous people? Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

But this is for the future, and the film now moves on to an idyllic scene in which the indigenous children head off in a large canoe and are shown at a bathing place upriver. This scene is quickly followed by another in which The Boy is ferried downstream by the same elderly canoeist as we saw in the opening sequence in order to take part in a fish poisoning. This scene is very brief, but it is set up by an intriguing shot in which The Boy swims across a stream holding a bow out of the water. This is no ordinary bow, however: rather it is a ceremonial bow, as indicated by the feathers dangling down from it (Image 11). This shot would appear to anticipate the principal theme of the film since it seems to be indicating that the fishing expedition has a ceremonial purpose, i.e. that it is the fishing expedition that customarily takes place prior to a funeral ceremony (and with which Luiz Thomaz Reis's film opens at some length).



Images 11-12: The ritual bow suggests that the fishing expedition has a ceremonial purpose. Later, The Boy arrives at Pobore with the fishermen, still carrying his ceremonial bow. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

After the fishing scene, The Boy, still carrying his ceremonial bow, is shown arriving at a village, which is probably Pobore. He is accompanied by a line of men carrying large fishing nets (Image 12). The Boy is then shown seated beside a senior man with a heavily lined face, who will re-appear at various points in the film. This man, whom we shall refer to as “The Elder”, draws out the celebrated circular plan of the typical Bororo village in the sand, with the large ceremonial house, the *baimanagejewu*, in the middle, and the matrilineally-defined clan houses around the periphery (Images 13-14). He then shows The Boy how to make a *tucum* rope by rolling the fibres on his thigh. In his interview with Bisilliat, Darcy Ribeiro comments that this scene was intended to serve as a

counterpoint to the scene at the school, where the children do not learn about Bororo culture.



Images 13-14: The Elder explains the typical Bororo village layout to The Boy – rectangular ceremonial house in the centre, matrilineal clan houses on the periphery. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

But as The Elder gestures around the perimeter of the settlement, his expression becomes solemn, as does that of The Boy. There is then a sequence of two young men in traditional dress, also looking very serious. One of them is looking very intensely, apparently at a group of men sitting in a line some distance away in front of the *baimanagejewu*. This sequence is followed by a lengthy series of shots of a flock of domesticated macaws perched in a tree in the centre of the village. This seemingly mysterious sequence, we suggest, was intended as a segue into the funeral theme since the Bororo believe that the *aroe*, the spirits of the dead, take up residence in the macaws that are present in almost every Bororo village. A girl then raises a macaw on a pole so that it can join the others in the tree, suggesting symbolically that the number of *aroe* has also increased by one. And sure enough, in the next shot, we discover that the line of men that we have just seen in the distance are now laying down a mat containing a corpse at a graveside (Images 15-20).



The funeral theme is introduced. Images 15-16 (top): The Boy and The Elder become solemn; Images 17-18 (middle): a young man looks intensively at a line of men sitting in front of the *baimanagejebu* ceremonial house; Images 19-20 (bottom): the *aroe*-macaws are increased by one, then the line of men delivers a corpse. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

ACT 2 – The first burial and the subsequent ceremonies (14 mins.)

This is longest of the four extant Acts and in editorial terms seems to be the least finished in that there is a certain degree of redundancy in the sequence of images, and possibly some chronological inversions. But if

there is an element of confusion in this Act, this is hardly surprising since, in reality, the ceremonial processes that follow the first Bororo burial are many and various, and take place over several weeks. For any editor, it would be a major challenge to cover and order all these diverse events within the time constraints of a film. Given that this part is only 14 minutes long, there is inevitably much that is missing, though whether this is because Förthmann did not film these events or they were simply left out of the cut, we cannot say. It is also possible that due to the smallpox epidemic at the time of filming, some parts of the ceremony simply did not take place.

After the distant shot of the men unloading the corpse at the graveside shown in Image 20, the second Act begins with a sequence shot from much closer to the action, showing a corpse being carefully wrapped up in a mat. The camera is intrusive in a manner that some modern viewers will surely find ethically disturbing, particularly since the corpse is clearly identifiable as that of Cadete. Some wider shots then indicate that visitors have begun to arrive. We also see a man beginning to construct a *mariddo* disc. Ancestral spirits are arriving too, in this case in the form of two men who dance together in wasp-like masks (Image 21). In a scene which also appears in Reis's film, two men in fine *pariko* headdresses mourn in a dramatic public manner, striking jaguar hides on the ground while periodically throwing their heads back in grief (Image 22). A more personal moment of grief is represented by an elderly woman, who has pulled her hair out as a sign of mourning and who stands alone, chanting beside a house, possibly the *baimanagejwu*. We surmise that this may be Cadete's widow.



Images 21-22: Ancestral spirits arrive (left) while a man wearing a *pariko* headdress (right) makes a dramatic statement of his grief while striking a jaguar skin on the ground. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

Shortly afterwards, the burial mat containing the corpse is lowered into a shallow grave and, as in the Reis film, a woman pours water over it to speed up the process of decomposition (Images 23-24). Other women then use hoes to fill the grave with earth. But Cadete was seemingly not the only person to die at this time, since we now see another corpse being wrapped up, followed by a sequence of a young man chanting beside it. In contrast to most of the sequences in this Act, this seems to have been subject to a careful *mise-en-scène*. The sequence ends with a shot of a group of women digging a second grave, with another elderly woman who has pulled her hair out standing beside it.



Images 23-24: The corpse is lowered into its grave and water is decanted over it to speed up its decomposition. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

These first burials are followed by the singing of *bacororo* chants around the graveside by men wearing *pariko* headdresses, shaking large maracas and dancing in the characteristic Bororo manner, jumping up and down. There is then a very well-executed sequence of the competitive dancing with the *mariddo*, (also a prominent feature of both the Reis and Lévi-Strauss films). Intercut with these dancing sequences, there are many fine portraits of those attending the ceremony, as well as perceptive shots of ethnographic detail. The latter include the impressive range of headdresses worn by the participants. One of these identifies the wearer as the *aroe maiwu*, the representative of the deceased's spirit, since it incorporates a visor of long yellow feathers covering his face and thereby symbolically hiding his identity (Image 28).



Images 25-26 (above): the singing of *bacororo* and the *mariddo* dancing. Images 27-28 (below): this 'Act' features a variety of headdresses, including that of the *aroe maiwu*, right, with a feather visor hiding the eyes. Frame grabs. | Source: Museu do Índio – FUNAI.

There are also other manifestations of the presence of the *aroe*, for example, in the close-up shot of a young man playing a *powari-aroe*, the small gourd mounted with a reed that functions as a musical instrument evoking the voice of a particular deceased relative. Another close-up shows a four-chambered *pana*, a sort of trumpet made from gourds glued together with resin. This is thought to reproduce the voice of Itubore, the ancestral spirit that rules over the eastern part of the Bororo village. A two-chambered version of the *pana* is also shown being played (Images 29-30).



Images 29-30: The *powari-aroe* (left), the voice of a deceased relative; the *pana*, the voice of the ancestral spirit Itubore (right). | Source: Museu do Índio – FUNAI.

The second Act concludes with a sequence of men drinking from large gourds. What they are drinking is *noa kuru*, that is, water mixed with white *tabatinga* clay and sweetened with honey or grated palm heart – the preferred drink of the *aroe*. Finally, there is a shot of a group of women who are observing the event, the first time that women have been shown participating as a collectivity in the ceremony (as opposed to their presence as individual mourners, or as gravediggers). This is indeed the normal order of events at a Bororo funeral since it is only after the men have begun to refresh themselves with *noa kuru* that women become collectively involved (Images 31-32).



Images 31-32: A man refreshes himself with *noa kuru*, the preferred drink of *aroe*; after this point, women become collectively involved in the ceremony. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

Yet although this Act is extremely rich ethnographically, there are also some very significant absences. One of these concerns the performances whereby dancers demonstrate by their dress or form of movement that they are embodiments of particular ancestral spirits. There are a number of these performances in the Reis film, and to a limited extent even in

the Lévi-Strauss film. But with the exception of the sequence in which the two men in wasp-like costumes dance together (Image 21), they are absent from Förthmann's film. Also missing are the large collective dances, involving both men and women, that take place after the women are admitted to the proceedings, and which are a prominent aspect of the Reis film. Nor do we see any evidence of the swinging around of bullroarers, the *aije*, which are a very important feature of the ceremony since they are said to evoke the voices of certain ancestral spirits. The *aije* are also particularly significant within the male initiation ceremony. Though it is misidentified, the latter is represented at some length in Reis's film. But here, although the event that typically follows on immediately afterwards – the drinking of *noa kuru* – is represented, the initiation ceremony itself is missing. Also absent is the burning of the deceased's possessions by the 'parents' of the *aroe maiwu*, the deceased's spirit representative, though this is missing from both the earlier films too.

Another, more editorial, absence in this Act is that of The Boy, who is seen only briefly, in a single shot. The role of providing narrative continuity between the various Acts is in effect assigned to The Elder from this point on, since he appears not only in this second Act at various points, but also later in the film, whereas The Boy disappears entirely.

ACT 3 - The exhumation of the skeleton and the washing of the bones (10 mins.)

The subject matter of the third Act is unique to Förthmann's film: neither Reis nor the Lévi-Strausses covered this or indeed any subsequent stage of the funeral. From an editorial point of view, this Act is very straightforward as it consists of a simple linear process narrative. It begins with the exhumation of the corpse, now no more than a skeleton. This is wrapped in a fresh mat and carried on a pole to a marshy savanna outside the village. As the group of men pass through the long grass on the way, our earlier suggestion that more than one person was being buried in the course of this funeral is confirmed, since it is clear that the men are carrying at least two burial mats. Once in the marsh, the mats are opened, and the skull and all the other bones are very carefully washed and placed in a basket. Clearly, no bone is too small to be

preserved. There is then a scene in which a young man, wearing a remarkable headdress, is shown sitting by a skull. This has been placed next to a smouldering fire to dry it out (Images 33-34). A considerable number of men are clearly involved in this process, some of whom are wearing Western clothing. There are even a number of boys. But although there are some fleeting shots of The Elder, there is no sign of The Boy.



Images 33-34: After the skull and other bones have all been very carefully washed, the skull (bottom right) is dried out next to a fire. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

As in the previous two Acts, the cinematography is excellent: Förthmann follows the washing of the bones with great care and skill, and makes good use of the long reeds of the marsh to show human figures appearing and disappearing evanescently. However, editorially speaking, there is a certain element of redundancy in this Act and some awkward transitions, suggesting that it is still a work-in-progress. Nevertheless, narratively speaking, it ends in a very classical fashion, with the action returning to where it began, i.e., with the men returning to the village, where they deposit the baskets of washed bones in the centre of the plaza.

ACT 4 - The decoration of the bones (8½ mins.)

This Act concerns the penultimate stage of the funeral, which takes place within the *baimanagejewu*, the ceremonial house at the centre of the village. It begins with a brief strip of grey leader, which, coupled with the generally polished nature of the editing, and the fact it is approximately the same length, suggests that this Act is simply a reproduction of *O Enfeite dos Ossos*, the short film that Förthmann

prepared for the Congress of Americanists in São Paulo in 1954. The cinematography in this Act is again impressive, with the processing of the bones clearly visible and the subjects' faces subtly and obliquely lit by means of the artificial lighting that Förthmann was allowed to introduce (Menezes 1983, 27). By contrast, Reis was unable to film this stage because he was not even allowed to increase natural sources of lighting (Caiuby, da Cunha and Henley 2017, 137).

The Act begins with a series of shots that cut back and forth between the decoration of the skulls of the deceased (Images 35-36), and the highly dramatic scenes of their female relatives scarifying themselves with dogfish teeth, lacerating their arms, bodies and even faces, wailing for the dead in a display of excruciating pain (Image 37). Among the mourners is an elderly woman who appears to be the same person whom we saw at the beginning of Act 2 and whom we presumed to be Cadete's widow. Her face is covered in blood from scarification, and she is both crying and chanting (Image 38).



Images 35-36 (above): The skulls are painted with annatto and decorated with feathers; Images 37-38 (below): female relatives wail and lacerate themselves, including an elderly woman who appears to be the widow of Cadete. Frame grabs. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

Some women are clapping, while a man strikes a small drum, together providing the rhythm for a line of other men, dressed in magnificent headdresses and with a large maraca in each hand. They are chanting, addressing the community of dead spirits, urging them to receive the souls of the deceased into their village to begin their new life there. A leading figure among the singers is The Elder, who chants energetically (Image 39). There is no sign of The Boy, but fulfilling a similar narrative function as younger-generation witnesses of ancestral tradition are shots of some young women, and even a small child, who all watch with wide-eyed concern (Image 40).



Images 39-40: The Elder chants energetically (left). There is no sign of The Boy, but a young woman fulfils the same narrative role as a younger-generation witness (right). | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

As the end of the Act approaches, the rhythm of the editing intensifies, evoking the increasing tempo of the ceremony itself. Women continue to lacerate themselves, clap and cry, but the principal focus is now on the singers, led by The Elder (Image 41). Intercut with magnificent portraits of the individual singers, there are shots of the maracas being rhythmically shaken. Even though there is no sound, one can almost hear their rattle. In the final sequence, an elderly woman, perhaps Cadete's widow, is seen cradling a basket of bones, while other relatives crowd around, lacerating themselves and spattering the basket with blood (Image 42).



Images 41-42: Led by The Elder, the singing becomes more intense as an elderly woman cradles a basket containing the bones of her deceased relative. | Source: Acervo do Museu do Índio/FUNAI – Brasil.

But at this point, both this Act and the footage as a whole suddenly comes to an abrupt end.

ACT 5 – The second burial and the end of mourning

In reality, there would then have been a fifth Act to the ceremony, in which the second and final burial in the lagoon would have taken place and, some time later, mourning would have brought to an end by the presentation of jaguar hides to the families of the deceased by the deceaseds' representatives, the *aroe maiwu*. But, sadly, no footage of this Act is known to exist. Förthmann had certainly witnessed the lagoon burial in 1943, but it is not clear whether he did so in 1953, and if so, whether he was able to film it. The lagoon burial was also described very graphically by Ribeiro in one of his novels (cited at length in Mendes 2006, 307-08), but again, there is no firm evidence that he witnessed this in person, be it in 1953 or on any other occasion. Neither Förthmann nor Ribeiro appear to have witnessed the presentation of the jaguar hide, let alone filmed it.

If some footage of this final Act were one day to miraculously appear, and the missing sound recordings be located, it might be possible to construct a version of *Funeral Bororo* that would be in some senses more complete. But as a work conceived and realised by Heinz Förthmann and Darcy Ribeiro, *Funeral Bororo* will remain forever unfinished since no one can say exactly how they would have finalised the film if they had had the opportunity. Förthmann himself considered that in comparison to the rich personal experience that he had had in making this film, the

final result was “poor” (Menezes 1983, 28). We can only hope that even in its unfinished form, with the aid of the analysis offered here, future viewers will find the footage more readily comprehensible and thereby gain a stronger sense of the experience that Förthmann sought so skilfully to capture with his camera.

The filmic legacy of Heinz Förthmann

Those who knew Heinz Förthmann personally report that he was a physically diminutive figure who was also very shy and retiring. He suffered from a stammer, retained his German accent throughout his life and was not given to writing extensively about his work. But he was also very calm, polite and usually spoke very quietly. According to Orlando Villas Bôas, who travelled with him to the Upper Xingu in 1955, it was these qualities that allowed him to develop such a good rapport with the indigenous subjects of his films (Mendes 2006, 249). However, it may also have been on account of these same qualities of personal modesty that so much of his work remained unfinished or has been lost, as he allowed those with whom he worked most closely – Schultz, Vellozo, Marshall, and even Ribeiro – to impose their interests on their joint ventures with him at the cost of his own.

Whatever the reasons for the loss of so much of Förthmann’s work, it is a loss not only in relation to his personal legacy but also, more generally, both to the canon of ethnographic film and to the descendants of the subjects of his films. In offering this analysis of *Funeral Bororo*, our aim has been to encourage, even if only in a small way, a greater appreciation of his legacy for what it really is, namely, a contribution of great value to the visual ethnography of the indigenous peoples of Brazil, realised by a cinematographer of great technical skill and refined aesthetic judgement.

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- Cerimónias Funeraes dos Índios Bororó*. Dir. Claude and Dina Lévi-Strauss. Departamento de Cultura, Município de São Paulo, 1935. b&w, silent. 7½mins. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cb5aWbyBLzM.
- Excursão às Nascentes do Xingu*. Dir. Nilo Vellozo. Sound recordist, Heinz Förthmann. Seção de Estudos, SPI/ Ministério da Agricultura, 1944. b&w, sound. 52mins. www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC-SIIo9AyI&t=26s.
- Funeral Bororo*. Dir. Heinz Förthmann and Darcy Ribeiro. Seção de Estudos, SPI/ Ministério da Agricultura, 1953. Rough cut. b&w, silent. 41mins. www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Kdca9fgXMQ.

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Os Índios “Urubus”: A Vida Diária numa Aldeia Indígena da Floresta Tropical. Dir. Heinz Förthmann and Darcy Ribeiro. Seção de Estudos, SPI/ Ministério da Agricultura, 1950. b&w, sound. 38mins. www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMeYmyxKRDY&list=PLXjOjQuQ72zTYoYxm_ec30OksIOu1W0Ys&index=29&t=376s.

Rito Kraho. Dir. Heinz Förthmann. Editing completed by Marcos de Souza Mendes and Francisco Moreira. Anthropological consultant, Júlio Cesar Melatti. Polo de Cinema/ Vídeo do Distrito Federal, 1993. col., silent. 30mins.

Rituais e Festas Borôro. Dir. Luiz Thomaz Reis. Conselho Nacional de Proteção aos Índios, 1917. b&w, silent. 31mins. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ein6eKqMBtE.

Dando sentido a uma obra-prima inacabada: Heinz Förthmann e a produção de *Funeral Bororo* (1953)

RESUMO Heinz Förthmann (1915-1978) foi um dos cineastas mais talentosos da história do cinema etnográfico brasileiro. No entanto, os filmes que fez no auge de seu prestígio, na década de 1950, agora existem apenas de forma degradada ou fragmentária, ou se perderam inteiramente e, por isso, Förthmann não recebeu o reconhecimento que merece. A partir de uma revisão da carreira de Förthmann, e com

base em uma versão incompleta e sem trilha sonora e títulos, este artigo oferece uma reconstrução de *Funeral Bororo*, um filme por ele realizado em 1953. Se tivesse sido concluído, este filme certamente seria considerado não apenas a obra-prima de Föörthmann, mas também uma importante contribuição para o cânone do cinema etnográfico, tanto no Brasil quanto no mundo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Föörthmann; Bororo; Brasil; filme etnográfico.

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