Notes on Xavante Age Sets

Xavante (shevente) of central Brazil. In the 1940s numbered some 2,000 but today 10,000 distributed among 50 villages. Trying to keep settlers out of lands for last 200 years and being pushed westward. Try avoiding whites yet will challenge them as well – their reputation has come to be most feared. In the 1980s successfully lobbied Brazilian government to grant own reserve. Today have kept settlers out and reestablishing selves in traditional horticulturalists and hunters.

Paulo, a 29-year-old man, son, husband and father. Tired life in big city. “There was no ‘together’ there.” “Everyone alone in life and death.” So he came back.

What makes Paulo’s village “an orderly place” are age-set rituals (rites of passage) that give each member a sense of belonging – like road maps situating individual in society – yet freedom to create a life. “One path for all, but each must walk it in his own way.”