

## **Baniva Ethnography**

### 1. Description

1.1) Baniva; alt: Avani, Ayane, Abane<sup>1</sup>

Dialects: Baniva, Quirruaba<sup>1</sup>

Classification: Arawak, Maipura, Northern Maipura, Inland<sup>1</sup>

1.2) BVV<sup>1</sup>

1.3) (2.71, -67.55)

1.4) In the 1950s, the majority of the Baniva converted to evangelical Protestantism, introduced by missionaries of the New Tribes Mission.<sup>4</sup> Until the 1960s the Baniva lived in their traditional settlements on the Guainia and Atabapo rivers, but today the majority of the group has migrated to Puerto Ayacucho.<sup>3</sup> Today, after half a century, evangelicalism is now the predominant form of religion in over half the Baniva communities, although there is a growing movement among non-evangelicals to revitalize the initiation rituals and mythic traditions.<sup>4</sup>

1.5) In the 1950s, the majority of the Baniva converted to evangelical Protestantism, introduced by missionaries of the New Tribes Mission. Their mass conversion was historically continuous with their participation in prophetic movements ever since the mid-nineteenth century; however, evangelicalism provoked a radical break from their shamanic traditions, as well as serious divisions and conflicts with Catholic Baniva and those who sought to maintain their ritual traditions. Today, after half a century, evangelicalism is now the predominant form of religion in over half the Baniva communities, although there is a growing movement among non-evangelicals to revitalize the initiation rituals and mythic traditions.<sup>4</sup>

1.6) Venezuela, Bolivar State, Cedeño District, Municipality of La Urbana, on the right bank of the Orinoco, opposite the Apure State; Amazonas State, village of Maroa, along the Guainia River; in the settlements of La Comunidad and Tirikín on the Lower Guainia; along the Atabapo River; Puerto Ayacucho.<sup>3</sup>

1.7) 2408 individuals<sup>2</sup>. Average of about 30-40 individuals per village.<sup>11</sup>

### 2. Economy

2.1) Manioc<sup>8,9</sup>, maize<sup>9</sup>

2.2) Fish<sup>6</sup>; deer, duck<sup>7</sup>; tapir, peccary, monkeys<sup>9</sup>

2.3) Blowguns, firearms (recent)<sup>8</sup>

2.4) Coiled-type pottery ranging from small drinking vessels to 24-gallon capacity jars<sup>9</sup>

2.5) [In the making of the alcoholic drink caxiri] The native potato, boiled and chewed by the men, is added, and the mass is squeezed between the hands of the women.<sup>9</sup> Men are responsible for cutting and burning new gardens; both men and women plant and weed new gardens; women harvest, replant, and process manioc and other plants. Both men and women fish with hook and line and participate in collective fishing expeditions, but men fish more often and use a greater variety of techniques, whereas women more often process the catch. Men are responsible for hunting, gathering in the forest, building and maintaining houses, manufacturing weapons, making canoes, weaving baskets, and cutting manioc graters. Women are

responsible for preparing and cooking animals and forest products, some gathering, preparing adobe for houses, making ceramics, and setting stones in manioc graters.<sup>11</sup>

2.6) Most villages are built near the banks of rivers and streams. Seasonally occupied shelters are often built near garden lands or fishing lakes.<sup>11</sup>

2.7) Coiled type with wood ashes mixed with the clay. The cooking vessels are black or dark-colored; the food and drinking bowls usually have a white or cream-colored slip with the decoration painted upon it in red. The decorating is done with a stick frayed into a sort of brush at one end by biting it between the artist's teeth. The bowls have a glazing of some kind of gum.<sup>9</sup>

2.9) At her first menstruation a Baniva girl must pass several days and nights in her hammock, almost motionless and getting nothing to eat and drink but water and a little manioc.<sup>5</sup>

2.10) Canoes<sup>6</sup>, boats<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Anthropometry

"Their physical constitution places them about their fellow creatures- they are robust in body, with solid limbs, a physiognomy denoting intelligence and with no facial depression, a noble blood that flows under their reddish skin, and with fiery eyes that are slightly oblique."<sup>6</sup>

### 4. Life history, mating, marriage

4.1) Begin at different times.<sup>13</sup>

4.6) In cases of infidelity or maltreatment, the affected party simply leaves his or her spouse.<sup>11</sup>

4.7) Marriages are usually monogamous.<sup>11</sup>

4.8) Bride service<sup>13</sup>

4.9) Traditionally, houses were abandoned after the death of their owners and garden lands could later be used by other family members. An individual's few possessions are either buried with the deceased or divided among his or her children.<sup>11</sup>

4.10) Elderly parents may reside with one of their married children.<sup>11</sup>

4.12) Exogamy<sup>11</sup>

4.17) Mother's brother's daughter/father's sister's daughter<sup>10</sup>

4.22) None

4.25) Descent is traced through the paternal line.<sup>13</sup>

4.30) Parents of the bride and bridegroom arrange the marriage<sup>11</sup>

### Warfare/homicide

4.14) Oral histories indicate the existence of supreme war leaders in precontact times, but warfare and raiding were abandoned by most groups by the late nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

4.16) Exploiting the resources of another clan<sup>11</sup>

4.18) No evidence found

## 5. Socio-political organization and interaction

5.1) Average of 30-40 people per village.<sup>11</sup>

5.3) Society is divided into five or six exogamous clans, each consisting of four or five patrilineal sibs ranked according to the order of emergence of mythical ancestral brother-spirits. In the past, sibs were categorized according to a system of ritual roles as chiefs, shamans, warriors, dancers, and servants; today, these roles are virtually nonexistent.<sup>11</sup>

5.4) Patrivirilocality, uxorilocality<sup>11</sup>

5.5) Members of other clans could freely travel within a given clan's territory but not systematically exploit its resources without obtaining permission from the local clan. <sup>11</sup>

5.6) In Catholic communities, young mission-trained catechists often conflict with the authority of leaders and elders.<sup>11</sup>

5.8) Settlements traditionally consisted of one or more multifamily longhouses (or roundhouses on the Guainía), divided into separate family compartments and a central space used for work or ritual purposes. Longhouses were oblong/rectangular constructions (e.g., 20 meters long by 17 meters wide by 7 meters high). They are organized in linear fashion or distributed around a rectangular plaza, facing the river, and with a network of trails behind the village leading to gardens and the forest.<sup>11</sup>

5.9) Larger villages have schools, chapels, and community houses.<sup>11</sup>

5.10) Hammocks<sup>5</sup>

5.12) Commercial activities have included the production of artwork (baskets, manioc graters, hammocks, feather ornaments) and manioc for sale to merchants, missions, and the government. Archaeological and historical evidence suggests that the entire upper Rio Negro Basin was connected to other areas by an immense network of riverine and overland trails used by both Arawak and non-Arawak peoples for trade and that specialization existed in the production of trade items. Manioc graters were important trade items in both pre- and postcontact times. Trade with Europeans was limited in the eighteenth century but, by the early nineteenth century, had become an integral part of the economy. <sup>11</sup>

5.13) Society is divided into five or six exogamous clans, each consisting of four or five patrilineal sibs ranked according to the order of emergence of mythical ancestral brother-spirits. The hierarchical system of rank is based on relative age, regulating social and economic relations and balanced by reciprocity and exchange.<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Ritual/ceremony/religion

6.1) There is a hierarchy of shamans differentiated by levels of knowledge and capacity, from the most powerful "seers," prophetic and sometimes messianic figures, to lesser shamans able to perform limited kinds of cures. There is also a class of specialists, "spell-owners," similarly differentiated by degrees of knowledge, whose function is to perform spells and chants, from the most elaborate set of chants and spell blowing at rites of passage to the simplest curing spell. A third specialization is that of the ritual-dance leader, who leads ceremonial dances and songs in the annual cycle of festivals.<sup>11</sup>

6.3) The traditional ceremonial cycle consisted of a series of festivals of exchange, named in accordance with the principal dance instrument used, and held whenever there was a surplus of wild fruits, fish, or game, generally among affinal groups. The most important of these were the initiation rituals were held in the early wet season.<sup>11</sup> The initiation rituals are celebrated during the time of the first rains and the maturation of certain forest fruits, when there is a group of boys between ten and thirteen years of age who are considered ready to be instructed about the nature of the world. It is absolutely prohibited for the women and uninitiated to see the sacred flutes and trumpets, under pain of death by poison.<sup>13</sup>

6.4) Another important ritual celebrated by the Indians of the region is the pudali (or dabukuri in língua geral), principally during the times of the ripening of forest fruits, but also on other occasions such as the piracema, when fish migrate upriver in great numbers to spawn. These are occasions when kin and affines get together to drink caxiri (either manioc beer or fruits such as pupunha) and dance. On these happy occasions, whatever conflicts that exist among affines, for example, can be settled.<sup>13</sup>

6.5) A Transformer/Creator/Trickster/Seer-Shaman who dwells in the highest level of the cosmos, about whom there is an elaborate mythology organized in several cycles; the Creator's son, an extraordinary human/animal/spirit being whose body consists of all material things, who imparts sacred knowledge to humanity and whose song opened the world to its present form; the patron of shamans; the owner of the earth, who began the cultivation of gardens; the Anaconda Lord of Earthly Waters; and a legion of lesser water, earth, and air spirits that both help and harm humanity.<sup>11</sup>

6.6) Ceremonial singing, ritual chanting, the playing of ritual instruments, myth telling, ornamentation and body painting.<sup>11</sup>

6.8) Christian missionaries have greatly modified these beliefs—in many cases undermining them altogether, in others superimposing Christian notions on preexisting beliefs (e.g., millenarianism), reinforcing the latter rather than completely destroying them.<sup>11</sup>

6.10) Serious illness and death are believed to be the result of sorcery, malevolent spirits, or the failure to observe ritual restrictions. At death, the two parts of a person's soul separate, the collective animal-shaped soul becoming integrated to sib ancestral houses of animal souls, whereas the individual, human-body-shaped soul, after passage through a dark netherworld of shades, is purified by fire and then journeys to the celestial paradise of the Creator, where it is reunited with its collective ancestral soul. A similar process of polarization of souls is believed to occur with animal and bird species.<sup>11</sup>

6.12) No evidence of teknonymy found.

## 7. Adornment

7.1) Men paint themselves black during initiation ceremonies. The initiates are painted red.<sup>13</sup>

7.3) Indication that men have shorter hair, while women's is longer.<sup>13</sup>

7.4) No evidence found

7.6) Feather crowns and heron down are worn by initiates during puberty rites.<sup>1</sup>

## 9. Other interesting cultural features

- The Baniva make manioc graters that are used by several tribes in the area.<sup>12</sup>
- Several sources including the Ethnologue claim the Baniva are extinct.<sup>1</sup>
- Other than language, there seems to be little distinction between the Baniva and the Baniwa.

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