

YUKUNA, ARAWAK

1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Yukuna (or Yucuna), call selves “Camejeya,” (11) Arawak language family (1)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): ycn
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Traditionally between 70°31’ and 71°31’ W and 0°45’ and 1° S, which is currently in the Comisaría Especial del Amazonas in Colombia (1). This region lies along the Río Miriti and lower Caquetá river (1). The Río Apaporis is also considered a boundary (3).
- 1.4 Brief history: There are reports from the 18th and 19th centuries that the Yukuna inhabited the area of the upper Mirití, and archaeological evidence supports that the region of the Mirití-Paraná had been heavily populated by various groups for several thousand years (3). The Yukuna moved downriver during the rubber boom for economic reasons about 80 years ago (3). Today, the Yukuna tribe also includes individuals from the Urumi, Heruriwa, Kamejéya, Imike, and Piyotí tribes (3). The Urumi individuals speak Yukuna Arawak and have no contact with their parent group, which moved upriver to the old Yukuna homeland to avoid the rubber boom and escape contact (3). At the beginning of the 20th century, the Matapí (who had been Tukano-speaking allies of the Yukuna) emigrated en masse to Brazil. Those who stayed behind lived with and adopted the language of the Yukuna (3). The Arawak-speaking Yukuna and Matapí also share the region with many Tukano-speaking groups (3).
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Since the rubber boom of the early 1900s, the Yukuna have been displaced from their original territory in the upper Mirití and now live along the middle and lower parts of the river (3). Other groups have migrated to the north to avoid white society, but the Yukuna have remained for access to commerce, healthcare, and education systems set up by the whites (3). The Yukuna in the region of the lower Caquetá now live in single-family houses in the town of Puerto Córdoba near a maloca in which rituals are practiced (1). These Yukuna interact peacefully with the local mestizo fishermen (1). Other Yukuna in this same region live in the town of La Pedrera in mestizo single-family houses and work for wages (1). Even those Yukuna in this region living in the Komeyafu Reserve live in permanent housing, though they still sometimes will go to nearby malocas for ritualistic activities. The Yukuna of the Mirití region still live in dispersed, traditional settlements with the exception of a cluster surrounding the mission school in this region (1). Missionaries and government have outlawed the polygyny that was still common among more important headmen through the 1960s (1).
- 1.6 Ecology: The territorial lands are at the southern edge of the Guyana Shield (3). As such, the soil is very old and nutrient-poor. The Caquetá is “un río blanco” since it flows down from the Andes (3). The Río Mirití-Paraná and the Río Apaporis are both black rivers (4). The region is one of the wettest (rain-wise) in the Amazon, getting an average of 3.5 m of rain per year (3). Since the region is only one degree south of the equator, the temperature does not fluctuate very much during the year and remains near 25-26°C (3). The driest months are January and February, and the wettest months are April, May, and June (3). (These also match up with the actual wet and dry seasons in northern Colombia, though there is no real dry season in this southern region.)
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: The Yukuna exceeded 15,000 people at the beginning of the 20th century, but the rubber boom had brought their numbers down to 1,000 in 1989 (1). The Matapí numbered only 90 that year (1). The population was estimated to be around 1,800 in 2001 (2). Ten to 20 monolingual speakers are left (2).

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): bitter manioc (1)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Cultivated food is supplemented with hunted game and fish during the dry season (1). Wild fruits are gathered during the wet season, and additional game is found near the fruit trees (1). Fish and hunt river animals (11).
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Blowpipes used in hunting, called *uapana* (8)
- 2.4 Food storage:
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: The Yukuna practice swidden agriculture (2). Women each tend three to four horticultural plots full of tubers and produce manioc flour to sell to merchants in order to buy household items such as hammocks and cloth (1). Men sell dried meat and fish to buy hunting implements (1). Women make pottery; men make baskets (1). Men also build canoes, oars, malocas, and troughs used to pound coca leaves (1). Women grow, harvest, and process manioc, care for children, and cook (1). Men hunt, fish, gather, and tend coca, tobacco, pineapple and palms (1). Women occasionally help with fishing with poison (1).
- 2.6 Land tenure: Each maloca considers a specific area to be its territory, in which the group rotates residence as horticultural plots become fallowed (1). This region is also the area in which their ancestors have been buried (1). The government of Colombia has recognized much of the traditional land of the Yukuna to be Indian property (1). However, the subsoil, gold, mineral deposits, and waters of these “resguardo” regions are government property (1).
- 2.7 Ceramics: Monochrome, handmade pottery for everyday and ritual use (1)
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:
- 2.9 Food taboos: ant-eater bears (6). Also, jaguars, dolphins, and nutrias are considered ancestors and are not eaten (1).
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Known for prowess with canoes and navigation (11)

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f):
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: many, though double-sister-exchange marriage transactions between groups decreases frequency (1)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: 0% (Outlawed by missionaries and Colombia law) BUT was common among headmen through the 1960s (1)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Males live with parents-in-law for a short period of time before taking his bride back to his own village (1). Bride-price is now mainly merchandise (1).
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Mothers pass down manioc strains, plant seedlings, and horticultural and birthing knowledge to their daughters (1). A woman learns maloca rules and how to grow and process manioc in her mother-in-law's field until having a child, at which point she begins to run her own plot (1). Men pass down hunting/gathering/fishing territories (1).
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Exogamy between malocas (9)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? Male passes down his "essence" to son (1). Men are the "real procreators" (13). I could find no explicit mention of paternity, but considering the presence of violence against women in Yukuna myths and since overt sexuality is highly discouraged, my best guess would be that instances of partible paternity (and condoned extramarital affairs) do not occur among the Yukuna.
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") Female passes down her "essence" to her daughter (1). Women nurture the fetus in the womb (13).
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? yes (1)
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Yukuna women are threatened with death if they see the Yurupari trumpets or the feathers of ritual crowns when the crowns are not being worn (13). Other cultures in the area who share the same views of the ceremonial trumpets punish women who try to see or use the trumpets with gang rape. There is no mention that the Yukuna also punish women with gang rape, but judging by the occurrence of violence against women in Yukuna myths, it is likely that the Yukuna also use gang rape as a punishment.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Matrilineal cross-cousin (1)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Menstruating and post-partum women are not allowed in the maloca (3). Either a shaman must "cure" them before admission into the maloca to avoid contaminating the group, or they must stay in separate houses behind the maloca built for the purpose of keeping these women away until it is safe for them to re-enter the maloca (3). Overt sexuality (in both sexes) despised (1). HOWEVER, Jacopin mentions that men are banned from the women's gardens because that is where they meet their extramarital lovers (13). Men must follow the paths to cross clearings instead of cutting through the women's private gardens (13).
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: None.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): No evidence of multiple fathers.
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- 4.24 Joking relationships? The Yukuna joke during the short break in the initial Yurupari ritual (13). Also, they jokingly named the anthropologist after a tall, strong, clumsy, moody, simple wild animal (13).
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: patrilineal, also children speak father's language (1) Fathers pass male knowledge to sons; mothers pass female knowledge to daughters (1).
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: There is a rule that forbids the "repetition of a marriage between two families" (9). Incest is despised (1).
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? No major ceremony (1). A man clears a plot near his maloca as a sign he will take a wife, asks his future father-in-law for his daughter, and then the wife moves in with her new husband (1).
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Children given ancestor's name shortly after birth (1).
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Preferred marriage is a sister-exchange with the Tankimuka (1). Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, bride-service and bride-price transactions also frequently take place (1).
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Traditionally went to war if could not solve conflicts; used shields made of tapir hides, poisoned arrows, and spears (1).
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Sedentary, but move between a number of different maloca sites as fields become fallowed (1).
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): The shamans and chanters for the maloca are typically brothers of the headman (1). The youngest brother is the aggressive shaman, and the intermediate brothers are the defensive shamans (3).
- 5.4 Post marital residence: virilocal (1)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Each maloca considers a specific area to be its territory, in which the group rotates residence as horticultural plots become fallowed (1). This region is also the area in which their ancestors have been buried (1). The

government of Colombia has recognized much of the traditional land of the Yukuna to be Indian property (1). However, the subsoil, gold, mineral deposits, and waters of these “resguardo” regions are government property (1).

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Women are subordinate to men (13).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: Like many groups of the northwestern Amazon, the Yukuna live in a communal structure called a maloca constructed of wood and palm (3). The Yukuna live in dispersed settlements either in malocas or in smaller, single-family structures on stilts (1). The maloca is round, 16 to 20 meters in diameter, with a tall (roughly 20 meters high) semi-conical roof (1). There are no walls inside, though the space is very rigorously divided (1). The center square is set aside for ritualistic activities. Daily work takes place in the next ring. Closest to the outside wall lies the domestic space reserved for sleeping, cooking, and burial. The headman’s area is in the western side of the maloca, and the unmarried men are located in the eastern side of the maloca closest to the main door. The females have the western side of the maloca. Kin reside on the southern side, and the northern side is reserved for the Yukuna’s allies. The space for the shamans lie at the intercardinal points on the southern side of the maloca (1).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Hammocks (1).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: The fraternal, sibling-group malocas interact with neighboring malocas in the kin-group to share extra work, food, and information (5).

5.12 Trade: The Yukuna relocated to live along the river in order to facilitate trade with the whites (1). Yukuna trade products they make for modern products (1).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Birth order determines brothers’ status as senior or junior (5). The eldest brother is the “senior” and becomes the headman. The younger brothers are “juniors” and become shamans or ritual specialists (5).

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR: The Yukuna have (mostly) stopped celebrating the major rituals, and only celebrate the minor ones, which presumably means they take less time than they did (13).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Shamans present (3). The shamans and chanters for the maloca are typically brothers of the headman (1). The youngest brother is the aggressive shaman, and the intermediate brothers are the defensive shamans (3). The Yukuna believe the shamans can foresee both future available resources and potential required energy expenditures to guarantee the group’s survival (3). In making these predictions, the Yukuna invoke a detailed memory based on past history (which is a distinctly Arawakan trait according to our readings) (3).

6.2 Stimulants: Banisteriopsis liana (7); lick tobacco (12), snuff a mix of coca and tobacco in high doses (12), and smoke tobacco cigars rolled in “uva de monte” leaves during ritual dances (12)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): The Yukuna divide the year into 15-20 different seasons of both wild and domestic fruits (3). Secret male initiation called Yurupari (9).

6.4 Other rituals: Sacred flute ritual lasts seven days (10). Only men are allowed to see or use the flutes, which are called “wakaperi” (10). Everyone is allowed to hear the music made by the flutes. After the seven day ritual, the Yukuna fast for three to eight weeks. The fast is broken during a large celebration, which celebrates the initiation of boys and girls in the tribe (10). Drinking accompanies this celebration (10). According to legend, the women originally owned the flutes, but the men took them away and now forbid the women to see them (10).

6.5 Myths (Creation): Oral tradition states that the Yukuna originated in the headwaters of the Mirití (3). “Anthropocentric worldview” (5). Myths involve the forest more than the rivers, since the Yukuna traditionally did not live along the rivers (they have since settled near the rivers to facilitate trade with the whites) (9). The creation myth involves four creators, “Kahipu-Lakeno,” who made the existing world livable (9).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Yukuna stage theatrical performances during rituals with plots involving major social tensions (1). Chants and songs are used during rituals (1). The Yukuna paint their bodies, make masks, and decorate other objects as a means of cultural expression (1). Yukuna carve designs on their dance staves (8).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Theme of violence against women (5). Women cannot be shamans or headmen (5). Women cannot participate in certain rituals (13). Women cannot see initiates during initiation, because it puts the lives of the initiates at risk (13). Women are believed to be dangerous and untrustworthy (13).

6.8 Missionary effect: “Brought Christianity and European diseases” (11), now have forgotten the meanings of ceremonial songs (13)

6.9 RCR revival: After Jacopin’s stay with the Yukuna, they now have a revived interest in the major ceremonies (13).

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Death is thought to be due to an enemy shaman, illness brought by whites, or through an upset in the balance between Nature and the victim (through the improper exchange of natural resources) (1). Deaths are a natural part of the payment to Nature for sustaining the Yukuna as a tribe (1). Bodies are wrapped in a hammock and buried facing east under the location in which they slept in life (1). One year later, an end-of-mourning ceremony is held (1). Bodies decompose in Earth Mother, and the spirit then travels along the cosmic river. Once the spirit reaches the maloca in the sky of the dead, they are given any earthly possessions that were either burned or thrown away during the burial (1). If the Master of Death determines that they were not guilty of incest, a pot is placed over the spirit (1). However, if the death was due to an infraction against Nature, the spirit becomes a force working for Nature (1).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No, children given names of ancestors (1).

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): The Sun is a Senior brother, and the Moon is a Junior brother. The Yukuna cosmology is mirrored in the maloca structure and function. Constellations, stars, planets, and rainbows are said to be spirits of ancestors which can be contacted via the shamans and asked to change the seasons. Sun directs initiated men, while Moon

is responsible for helping shamans and menstruating women. The universe is made up of maloca units/networks. Earth is between “the five skies of male Thought in the heavens and two female underworlds.” Tufana (God) lives in the apex of the skies. The four Founding Ancestors and the spirits of birds live in the other skies. One of the female underworlds contains the spirits of past ethnic groups. In the other underworld, spirits hang upside down and sleep during the day like bats. Namatu (Earth Mother) controls the underworld. Male Yurupari and female Namatu forces empower males and females respectively. Nature must be paid for the use of any resources. (1)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: yes (1)

7.2 Piercings: wear a long palm spine as a pin through the cartilage of the nose (8)

7.3 Haircut: Personally judging from videos of the Yukuna today, their modern-day haircuts look just like any haircut you would encounter in a big city in South America.

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): masks (1)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: masks (1), feathered crowns for men (13), body paint (1), feathers are worn in major ceremonies (13)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: only men wear the feathered crowns, and women risk death by vaginal bleeding if they see the feathers while the crown is not being worn (13)

7.8 Missionary effect: Personally judging from videos of the Yukuna today, the Yukuna primarily wear modern, Western clothing. This is not surprising, as the Yukuna have been in close contact with whites since the beginning of the 20th century.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Yukuna do not distinguish between cousins and siblings. Cross-cousins (potential mates) are distinguished by the language spoken or their place of residence, not by a kinship term (9).

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Dravidian (1)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

- The name “Yukuna” was given to the group by Europeans and is derived from a word meaning “storytellers.” (1)
- The Yukuna, Matapi, and Tanimuka now all share common cultural traits due to alliances formed through marriage. (1)
- The Matapi now speak Yukuna because the Matapi men were drafted into military service for Colombia during the Peruano-Colombian War of 1933-34. During their service, the Yukuna took care of the Matapi children. The Matapi men contracted measles and almost all died, and their language died with them (9).
- The Yukuna define different peoples by language (9).

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