

## 1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Akawaio, "Kapon" (sky, *kak*; people, *pon* ) is the Akawaio name for themselves, which they share with the Patamona, their neighbors to the south, The Kapon language is one of the Guiana Carib languages. They are also known as (Acaguayo, Acauayo, Acawai, Accawai, Acquewyen, Akawai, Akawaio, Akawoio, Capohn, Guaica, Guayca, Ingarico, Inkariko, Kapohn, Kapon, Kapong, Occowyes, Seregong, Serekon, Serekong, Serracong, Serrakong, Wacawaio, Waica, Waika, Wakawai, Wayca, and Wocowaio)<sup>1</sup> In their own language, the Akawaio people call themselves Kapon, which means "people of the sky."<sup>3</sup>

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): AKE<sup>2</sup>

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): The principal Akawaio territory is the upper basin of the Mazaruni River and the Essequibo tributary rising in the Pakaraima Mountains on the Guyanese-Venezuelan border. Lying between 60° and 61°20' W and 5°10' to 6° N, it covers approximately 10,207 square kilometers<sup>1</sup>

1.4 Brief history: They were first mentioned in writing in 1596

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Missionaries contacted and began to construct mission villages in their area in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century

1.6 Ecology: Rainfall averages 260 centimeters per year and is bimodal (i.e., there is a dry season and a wet season). Traditional sites were, for security, located inland from a navigable river, in a forest clearing, or in the preferred white-sand savanna areas. A nearby stream and forest with good soil for gardening are still mandatory.<sup>1</sup>

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: There is no reliable census, but unofficial estimates indicate a population of some 6,000 Akawaio in the upper Mazaruni and adjacent areas. Villages traditionally numbered from 60 to 80 people but now reach 600 to 800.<sup>1</sup> Population total all countries: 5,350<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): The staple is cassava bread made from bitter manioc, crops also include bananas, sugarcane, sweet potatoes, yams, taro, cotton, gourds, and calabashes.<sup>1</sup>

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: They hunt deer, peccaries, tapir, agoutis, pacas (*Cuniculus paca*), birds, and some fish which are somewhat scarce<sup>1</sup>

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: they traditionally used bows and arrows and blowpipes, but today they use shotguns<sup>1</sup>

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production: Work is strongly sex orientated and complementary, with some overlap and mutual assistance. Men cut and burn new gardens; women plant, tend, and harvest. Men hunt, fish, and engage in long-distance trade; women fetch firewood and water, care for the home and young children, and prepare and serve food and drink. Men are basket- and woodworkers; women work cotton and are potters. Men make houses, boats, hunting and fishing equipment, cords, ropes, baskets, storage racks, wooden stools, and simple furniture. Women spin cotton, weave hammocks and baby slings, bead aprons, and make clay bowls and pots.<sup>1</sup>

2.6 Land tenure: Members of a village and its surrounding settlements have a collective right to use of the land and resources of the neighborhood. Others use them only in collaboration or by paying. Vacant areas between villages, used for long-distance hunting and gathering, ensure that conflicting claims are rare.<sup>1</sup>

2.7 Ceramics: women make clay bowls and pots<sup>1</sup>

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: girls at puberty and women at other times have to use bitter medicines and avoid sweet things which cause a flow of blood, boys and men, to be successful, have to avoid sweet things which take away their hunting skill<sup>6</sup>

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

## 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: Marriage is confirmed on the birth of a child, and thereafter separation and divorce are deplored.<sup>1</sup>

**4.7** Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Sororal polygyny was common and a man generally espoused a brother's widow. Polyandry also occurred.<sup>1</sup>

**4.8** Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: The son-in-law is required to reside uxorilocally and to work for his parents-in-law. He often gives them his possessions, now including purchased goods and cash.<sup>1</sup>

**4.9** Inheritance patterns: Valuables such as shotguns, brewing pots, manioc graters, and boats are inherited by close kin of the appropriate sex, usually siblings or children of the deceased. A few personal items may be buried with the deceased.<sup>1</sup>

**4.10** Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

**4.11** Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

**4.12** Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

**4.13** What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

**4.14** What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

**4.15** Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

**4.16** Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

**4.17** Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): The norm is real or classificatory cross-cousin marriage and the ideal is for two groups of siblings to marry each other<sup>1</sup>

**4.18** Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

**4.19** Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

**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: they practice couvades<sup>1</sup>

**4.23** Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

**4.24** Kin avoidance and respect? Children are brought up to respect seniors<sup>1</sup>

**4.24** Joking relationships?

**4.25** Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: The system is a cognatic one with self-focused symmetrical reference to both paternal and maternal kin.<sup>4</sup>

**4.26** Incest avoidance rules

**4.27** Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Marriage is formally recognized after a child is born<sup>1</sup>

**4.28** In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

**4.29** Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

**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: Ingroup, Anger and violence are censored. The customary response to conflict is separation, and village conflicts are usually contained by the aggrieved parties dispersing to their family settlements.<sup>1</sup>

**4.16** Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

**4.17** Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Externally they have many trading partners, they divide themselves internally by referring to river-valley settlements. Relations between river groups are marked by mutual suspicion, accusations of sorcery, and reference to

former raiding, but marriage, exchange, and mutual feasting between families in different river groups also make for friendly relationships.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.18 Cannibalism?

### 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: 60-80 people traditionally<sup>1</sup>

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): there is no class system, Status is relative to kinship position (with sex and age differentiation), individual competence, and prestige<sup>1</sup>

5.4 Post marital residence: uxori-local<sup>1</sup>

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: exceptionally able at making up nicknames<sup>6</sup>

5.8 Village and house organization: The settlement pattern is one of part-time occupation of a central village with family gardens nearby<sup>1</sup>

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: in hammocks<sup>1</sup>

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade: A traditional network of exchange relationships links the Akawaio with their neighbors and, via these, to more distant Amerindian groups. Notably, they obtain Yecuana cassava graters, blowpipes, and quivers; brewing pots from the Patomona; and curare from the Piaroa. They traveled to the coast to work and barter for metal tools, utensils, cloth, beads, guns, salt, and a great variety of exotic goods, which they also traded in the traditional network.<sup>1</sup> Referenced commonly as great traders in many early works on Amerindians, were vital to the survival of early settlers, they traded food for European tools and weapons.<sup>4</sup>

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

### 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): shamans<sup>1</sup>

6.2 Stimulants: they cause Hallucinations through dieting and the use of tobacco<sup>1</sup>

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Family ceremonies include the couvade, girls' puberty seclusion, and boys' rites to ensure successful economic enterprises<sup>1</sup> A girl receives her first tattoo patterns, usually on the arms, some years before puberty and I once saw a number of little girls lined up for the operation with an age range from 6 to 12 years. One girl had already had several patterns. The scorpion's tail pattern on the face, is also a sign of puberty and the process of tattooing it is usually reserved until then. Women may continue to add tattoo patterns from time to time after puberty and even after several years of marriage. At the time of first menstruation a girl is slung in her hammock away from the men who would have no success in hunting if they had contact with her - so it is believed. Often she is partitioned off with leaves of the purple heart or green heart trees. The girl may be given the ant frame to make her an energetic and good worker, like the ants. Boys have no definite puberty rituals as girls have but they do undergo intensive applications of hunting and fishing charms. Ant frames, incisions in the skin and the rubbing in of plant juices are part of the youth's training as a hunter and it is about the time of puberty that he begins hunting seriously. Unless he is a competent hunter he cannot acquire a man's status or take a wife<sup>6</sup>

6.4 Other rituals: There are masters and mistresses ( *esak* ) of species and resources, who figure in shamanic séances and dwell in special, privately owned stones. Offerings of tobacco, food, and beverages are made at the stones to propitiate the master or mistress so that a species or resource will be increased and released for human use.<sup>1</sup>

6.5 Myths (Creation): The conceptual system is founded on the belief that all material bodies are possessed by the sun's radiant light (*akwa*), which endows them with vitality, well-being, and knowledge. This possessed force (*akwaru*) may transmigrate, entering different bodies (as in dreams and acts of sorcery).

Every species, resource, and environmental sphere has akwaru, which is personified and in part anthropomorphic.<sup>1</sup>

**6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):** The Akawaio sometimes referred to bone flutes (today made of animal bones) as *wi-toto* ('my enemy'). Early literature describes these peoples as cutting off the arms and legs of enemy war victims and boiling them up to detach the flesh in order to make flutes of them.<sup>5</sup>

**6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**

**6.8 Missionary effect:** lead to Hallelujah which combines indigenous cosmology with basic Christian beliefs. Its sung and danced prayers are modeled on traditional forms.<sup>1</sup>

**6.9 RCR revival:**

**6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:** The spirit of a deceased grandparent may sometimes dwell in a grandchild.<sup>1</sup> Sickness and deaths in a village community are sometimes attributed to alienated and aggrieved families and, in rare instances, the deceased's kin may attempt assassination, both to avenge the dead and in self-defense. Sudden death is attributed to sorcery (*edodo*), whereas death after a long illness is attributed to a curse (evil taling). The body, in its hammock, is interred in a space between two sheets of tree bark, the head of the grave being orientated toward the sunrise. The family leaves the house for three months.<sup>1</sup>

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?**

**6.12 Is there teknonymy?**

**6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):** one example of a ritual is: Ritual blowing is a process whereby an Akawaio can cause an enemy to fall sick and perhaps die, or whereby he can help a friend or relative to recover from sickness. It can also be used for success in hunting, to keep away rain, to prevent or induce pregnancy, to cause an easy birth, to make the garden prosperous - in fact, it can be used to achieve almost any end, good or bad. People blow by forcing their breath through the mouth in short, sharp gusts; at the same time the blower has to utter certain words under his breath.<sup>6</sup>

## **7. Adornment**

**7.1 Body paint:**

**7.2 Piercings:**

**7.3 Haircut:**

**7.4 Scarification:** One of the most noticeable features of many Akawaio women is the characteristic pattern of tattooing on the lower half of the face, in the region of the chin and mouth. There is also some tattooing on the limbs, particularly the forearms. The patterns are achieved by cutting or pricking the skin and rubbing in a black dye, these are cooking charms. Tattooing is what is called an *urichang murano*, that is, a 'woman's charm'. A few men also have some tattoo marks round the mouth in the scorpion's tail pattern, but the ingredients of the dye differ, being a compound of charred plant roots. These 'men's charms', are hunting charms.<sup>6</sup>

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

**7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:**

**7.7 Sex differences in adornment:**

**7.8 Missionary effect:**

**7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:**

## **8. Kinship systems**

**8.1 Sibling classification system:** Most kinship terms indicate sex difference; sibling terms indicate relative age.<sup>1</sup>

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:**

**8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):** Terminology is of the bifurcate-merging Iroquois type. The system is a cognatic one with self-focused symmetrical reference to both paternal and maternal kin. There is a concept of interlinked, three-generation cycles, each generation of grandchildren replicating the grandparental one. The spirit of a deceased grandparent may sometimes dwell in a grandchild. There is a strong notion of complementary

lines of same-sex kin, a man being considered a replica of his father and grandfather, and a woman of her mother and grandmother.<sup>1</sup>

**9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

1. Physical punishment of children is rare<sup>1</sup>

**Numbered references**

1. <http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Akawaio.html>
2. [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=ake](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ake)
3. [http://www.native-languages.org/akawaio\\_culture.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/akawaio_culture.htm)
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5. Beyond the Visible and the Material: The Amerindianization of society in the Work of Peter Reviere Edited by Laura M. Rival and Neil L. Whitehead
6. Symbolism and Ritual Among the Akawaio of British Guiana, Audrey J. Butt, <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/nwig/article/viewFile/5199/5966>