

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

The Macushi are a society in the Carib language family. They speak “Macushi” and have several alternate names including, Macusi, Makushi, Makusi, Makuxi, Teueia and Teweya. Most of the Macushi also speak Portuguese, the seemingly dominant language of the area now. (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

MBC (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Macushi inhabit the banks of several rivers, including the Contingo, Quino, Pium, and Mau rivers, the northeast Roraima and the Rio Branco along the Brazilian, Venezuelan and Guyana borders. The tribe is primarily in the Roraima province of Northeastern Brazil, but is also in Guyana and Venezuela. The closest major city near the Mucashi is Boa Vista, Brazil, which is at 2.81972 degrees north and 60.6733 degrees west. “In Brazil, the Macushi are primarily located in the Raposa/Serra do Sol, one of the world’s largest Indian reservations, with an area of 1.7 million hectares and home to approximately 20,000 indigenous peoples.” (1,2,3,5)

1.4 Brief history:

The Macushi “believe that they, and their neighbours the Ingarikó, are descended from the children of the sun, who left for their descendants the gift of fire, but also disease and the hardships of nature.” The Macushi were contacted by the Portuguese in the mid-18th century, when the Portuguese were looking to put a buffer between French settlements in Guyana and their own further south. The Portuguese set up missions that they would try to have Indians settle under Portuguese governance. Only a couple of Macushi tribal groups came to the missions, and those that did quickly left. In the 19th century, the Portuguese started exploiting the area for rubber and got natives to become rubber plantation workers, sometimes by force. The Portuguese actually conducted slave raids. Eventually, cattle ranchers came into the southern area of the Macushi and had state-sanctioned power to do whatever they wanted with the Macushi, including the power to make them into slaves. This practice continued even into the 20th century before declining and dying out. The slave raids conducted by ‘whites’ led the Macushi to flee north into the more wild and uninhabited areas. In the 1970s, the Macushi finally began to get organized and requested the help of FUNAI to get their land recognized and protected. After a 35-year legal process and court battle, the Macushi finally gained full recognition of their land and won the “Raposa Case,” leading to the exit of the farmers and cattle ranchers who had previously been occupying their land. “Unlike many other indigenous groups, the Macushi population has increased significantly since the time they were first documented. In the 1800s, there were reports of only a few thousand Macushi in Brazil and from 1910-12 there was a series of malaria outbreaks and a severe drought that significantly reduced their population (Hemming 1990). By 1943, the Brazilian Macushi population was estimated at a little more than a thousand. In the 1970s, it was reported that the Macushi population had doubled to 3,000 and by the 1980s had tripled (Hemming 1990). The Macushi population in Brazil has now reached 16,500 (Lewis 2009).” “Notably, this spatial distribution of the Macuxi has remained unaltered over a continuous stretch of lands since at least the era of the first available historiographic records for the Branco river valley region in the 18th century.” The Macushi are a group of Carib Indians a little more inland than most Caribs and are closely related to several neighboring tribes in terms of social characteristics and rituals. Their grouping of closer Carib groups falls within a Carib sub-group called Pemon, though their language is not comprehensible with the Pemon language. (5,6,10)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

The Macushi neighbor the Arawak speaking Wapishana and have been intermarrying since at least the 19th century. They also have southern Carib-speaking neighbors who they have been intermarrying with called the Taurepan and Ingariko. The Machushi also trade actively with the Carib speaking Yekuana. In the north, Macushi are fairly isolated, but in the south, some of them actually live in modern towns and work as ranch hands. The Macushi have been in contact with Brazilians or Portuguese for at least 200 years, but they are still fairly isolated and live in one of the world’s biggest Indian reserves along

with several other tribes. Their land is airable and is perfect for cattle-raising, bringing the Macushi into constant conflict with Brazilian ranchers and leading some of them to actually work as ranchers. Missionaries are actually somewhat responsible for providing health care and potentially some immunity to diseases that has contributed to the Macushi population growth. In the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the Macushi had to deal with a lot of violent entrances by farmers and cattle ranchers onto their land, which was accentuated by rice farmers taking land by force in 1996. They won a major court case in 2009 that reinforced their ownership of land and forced the farmers out. (5,6)

1.6 Ecology:

The Macushi hunt, farm and fish as well as raise cattle on the southern part of their land as well as keep some domestic animals. The Macuxi practice slash-burn agriculture, basically cultivating manioc, maize, yam, sweet potato, banana, watermelons, pineapple and a smaller amount of other crops that vary from village to village. "Today the Macuxi communities established in each village collectively owns small herds of cattle, obtained through projects launched by the Diocese of Roraima, Funai and the Roraima state government. Breeding cattle, kept in pens and enclosures, as well the poultry and swine kept by individual families, is today considered indispensable given the increasing scarcity of wild game... The herd is entrusted to a cowboy, who calls on the community when larger-scale work is required." (6,10)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

The population is 29,100 people in all countries, with 19,000 of the Macushi living in Brazil, 9500 living in Guyana and 600 living in Venezuela. The people living in Guyana inhabit 20 small settlements up to the foothills of the Pakaraima Mountains, which actually stretch from Roraima in Brazil through Guyana and into Venezuela. The mountains are located at 6.07 degrees north and 60.23 degrees west. The Macushi live primarily in Savannah lands leading out from these rivers and towards the foothills of the mountains. Most villages consist of about 6 to 10 huts, with each hut having about 5 or so families living in it. "It is estimated that today 140 Macuxi villages exist in Brazil, but no precise information exists on their number. For the Guianese area, the estimate is that around 50 villages are located in the Maú(Ireng)-Rupununi interfluvial region." (1,4,8,10)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

They eat cassava bread, bananas, yams and fruit that they plant themselves. "The root of the Cassava is like corn" for the Macushi – it's their basic sustenance. They most often grow the bitter (poisonous) Cassava (Manioc), ground it up and mill it to make bread. The Macuxi practice slash-burn agriculture, basically cultivating manioc, maize, yam, sweet potato, banana, watermelons, pineapple and a smaller amount of other crops that vary from village to village. (8,10)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

The Macushi hunt and fish, with fish being the most important source of meat in their diets. (8)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The Macushi use bow and arrow, with the bows between six and seven feet long. They also use war clubs and blowguns. The blowguns can be more than 15 feet long and can take a year to make. The Macushi's most desired possession and coveted weapon/tool is actually a hatchet, with a metal blade. (8)

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

The men hunt and fish and provide food. The women make pottery. Women are 'slaves,' who cook, clean, and do all the basic tasks at the men's bidding. The women are beaten – especially initiation rites – and eat leftovers that men give them. Women also do field work, while it seems the men hang out and play games if they are not out hunting. They also spin the cotton to make hammocks. The tasks of felling the trees, burning the swidden area and planting are carried out by men. After this work, women are primarily responsible for keeping the swidden clear of weeds and harvesting the crops, as well as cooking the foods. Men devote themselves to hunting, fishing and collecting wild fruits, undertaking expeditions far from the village. (8,10)

2.6 Land tenure:

The land is primarily made up of Savannah, with the keeping of Cassava plants for bread. The Macushi in the southern part of their reserve actually raise some cattle through ranching. (5,8)

2.7 Ceramics:

They have pottery that resembles ancient Etruscan vases. They have fashioned a few very basic utensils and earthen vessel storage containers. The women make the pottery, which are distinct from non-Carib pottery because their ornamentation is made up of straight, circular and non-straight/crooked lines as opposed to the pottery made by other language groups, which only have straight-lined ornamentation. These pieces of pottery are made from clay found in forest brooks, are dried in the sun, are cured and held together with plant sap and are finely tied together with bark. (8)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

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):

Girls are married right after their first period. Boys are pre-contracted to marry who their parents choose and are married whenever their bride reaches the marriage age. (7)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Marriages are usually monogamous, but there is sometimes sororal polygamy. (5)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

The husband gives the bride a lot of gifts when they first marry. (8)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Inheritance is matrilineal. (8)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

The mother carries her baby with her no matter where she goes. She does not give him or her any names of affection though and never kisses him. The father's affection is a bit more removed. There is a practice where couples with multiple children can trade or sell a child to a married couple within the village that does not have a child. (8)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

The Macushi are endogamous, marrying within their ethnic group and using cross-cousin marriages to do so. (5)

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)

Yes, the preference is cross-cousin. (5)

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

The ratio is 90% - or .9 men per women... "Demographic data and genetic information concerning 40 genetic systems are reported for three populations of Macushi Indians, and have been compared to those already obtained for three other communities of this tribe. These are young populations (mean age, 19 years), with a low sex ratio (90), low percentages of non-Indian ancestry (1-2%) and of marriages between locally born persons (34). Intertribal unions (14%) are less frequent than among their neighbours, the Wapishana. Fertility is high (average of 8.2 children per woman who completed reproduction), but the variance in family size and the frequency of premature deaths relatively low for populations at this cultural level. This conditions the lowest Index of Opportunity for Selection (0.45) calculated thus far among South American Indians. No variation was observed in 20 genetic systems, limited variation in 3, and larger variability in the remaining 17. In 13 of the 29 comparisons (45%), the Macushi gene frequencies present values in the middle third of the range observed among South American Indians. The previously reported private genetic polymorphism of esterase A was

encountered in one of the three villages. A comparison of the genetic distances between villages with and without this polymorphism, and a similar comparison for the villages of the neighbouring Wapishana, yields no clue as to the tribe in which this polymorphism originated.” (9)

<http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03014468400007241>

(9)

4.22 Evidence for couvades

“With the Makusi and Wapisianas, both parents engage in a "lying-in" for a shorter or longer period after the appearance of baby. The Makusi father takes to his hammock placed near that of his wife, until the navel-string falls off; but before doing this, if he has no separate building, he will prepare a palm-leaf partition in the hut. When the partition was finished the husband hung up in it both his own and his wife's hammock, and therein they lay to "take to bed" like the Makusi. During the lying-in of the mother, or couvade of the father, they are considered equally unclean, such uncleanness being occasionally regarded as persisting for long afterward. Thus, the Mainland Carib is obliged to devote himself to the service of an old Indian and to leave his wife for some months; during this period he has to be submissive and regard himself as a real slave. When in couvade, if a visitor enters his house, that visitor's dogs will soon die.” Before a man marries his bride, he cannot leave his hut for a week or go hunt or go fish. (7,8)

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

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Descent is matrilineal. The daughters of the chief also claim the power of the tribe as it runs through them, not the sons of the chief. (8)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

The uncle on the father's side is not allowed to marry his niece – as he is called father. If, as a member of the tribe, you call someone your “father” or mother” – as with the bifurcate-merging mode – you can't marry that person. (8)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Yes, there is a marriage ceremony, but it is not done in the same way that Americans might think of it. The puberty rituals coincide with the marriage ceremony, as they are kind of one and the same. Sexual union is not publicly recognized as permanent prior to the initiations into womanhood or manhood. The men and women both go through physical trials, ritual beatings and purifications and scarifications and are eventually put together. Marriage is arranged by the parents. There is no formal marriage ceremony outside of the initiation rites. This marriage is not totally binding though. (7,8)

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

When a baby is born, his relatives breathe on him right away. After a few days, the grandparents name the child, giving him the name of a family member, to keep family member names alive. If the grandparents are dead, the task falls to the father. (8)

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

Marriage is almost always preferred to be within the community and is usually endogenous and between cross-cousins. (5)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Yes, parents arrange the marriages. (8)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15/4.16 Outgroup vs in-group cause of violent death and reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

Outgroup killing comes as largely from violent attacks at the hands of farmers and cattle ranchers and people who look to exploit the land of the Macushi. (5,6)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

They live in one of the world's biggest Indian reserves on the Brazil side of the border, with neighboring tribes, but make up by far the largest percentage of the population of those tribes, totaling 15,000 of the 20,000 Indians there. Neighbors are three other Carib tribes with whom they are currently generally at peace – and an Arawak tribe with whom they are also generally at peace. There is now good evidence genetically that the Macushi have been intermarrying and interbreeding with these other

tribes for quite some time. They have also had violent conflicts with Brazilian rice farmers and cattle ranchers wanting to use their land but have been legally victorious over them since 2009. (5,6,7)

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

There are about six to 10 big huts in a village, with each hut containing about five families. In the 19th century, these villages contained between 30 – 70 people each, while today, they contain between 100 – 200 people each. (8,10)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

There are 2 seasons, wet and dry, where the Macushi live. During the dry season, the Macushi live together in larger villages and primarily fish as their means of sustenance. During the wet season, they spread out in smaller, kin groups and grow manioc and fruits for sustenance. They are always hunting in both of these times, but hunting is the secondary part of their sustenance. During the summer months, they build more and are more dedicated to group activities like making pottery items. (10)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

Each village is generally its own, autonomous unit. There is a local chief who leads each village. But that chief is determined by strength and earned reputation in the village. When a chief dies, the power can go to another family and it is not an insult to the daughters (who carry the inheritance) or their family and does not lead to violence or war in the group. In the 20th century, there became a need to have intermediaries between the Macushi and national governments. The intermediaries go around to different villages and talk with chiefs, then represent the villages to the governments. There are now several elected councils that are based in the city of Boa Vista in Brazil and consist of people from 7 regions of Macushi settlement. Within the villages, the groups of huts that are clustered based on kinship ties, there tends to be one male leader of a group of huts. The prestige of the people living in the hut clusters depends on how well that male manipulates ties within the rest of the village. Within the villages, father-in-laws are kind of rulers and leaders over son-in-laws, and all men tend to rule over the women. (8,10)

5.4 Post marital residence:

The Macushi have a matrilocal society, with post-marital residence ideally being in the wife's family's village. (5)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

They live in huts with mud walls about 7 feet high that include palm fan roofs that are round, poke up and look like Chinese houses. The huts have a small entrance on one side and are pretty dark inside, except for a fire. There are also bell-shaped houses made of palm fans. There are also square huts with mud walls and palm roofs as well in the villages. Each village also contains one great house for receptions with visitors and travelers. Several families live inside of any given hut, usually matrilocally. Huts are organized by kinship clusters in the villages. In the forest, the huts/houses resemble the communal huts of other tribes, while in the Savannah, the huts are smaller, dispersed versions of the communal huts/houses. (8,10)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Traditionally, the Macushi sleep on hammocks raised up off the ground inside their huts. (7,8)

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

5.12 Trade:

The Machushi trade actively with the Carib speaking Yekuana. (5)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

In any social situation where one kingroup requires village help or assistance from another kingroup to get work done, the needy kingroup offers the other caxiri and pajuaru – drinks made from fermented manioc. This includes when the entire group of a village might need to help their 'cowboy' with ranching their cattle. (10)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

“The young people of both sexes can not enter into permanent sexual partnership until they have successfully undergone the puberty ordeals; in others, the betrothal or perhaps even the consummation of the marriage follows as a direct consequence of such ordeals. The result has been that some authors have referred certain marriage customs to puberty ceremonies, while occasionally the reverse has happened. As a matter of fact they would seem to be more or less identical. The puberty ordeals include more or less rigid fasting, combined with exposure to the bites of ants, etc., severe scarification, or sound flogging—all to be borne without visible signs of suffering. A careful study of these leads one to the conviction that with both sexes the effect is to ensure the young people being healthy and strong, willing to work, skilful, and industrious. In the case of the female, the general tenor of the facts points to a belief in her being possessed by some Spirit prone to evil, whose influence so far as practicable, has to be counteracted and destroyed. Hence the *piai* blows on and mutters over the Makusi girl and her more valuable belongings so as to disenchant her and everything she has come into contact with. Some of the ordeals may be repeated, though in a less degree, at the second, perhaps at the third menstrual period... On returning from her first bath [after the first menstrual period] the Makusi girl must during the night sit upon a stool or stone, to be whipped by her mother with thin rods without raising the slightest cry to wake the sleeping occupants of the hut, an occurrence which would prove dangerous for her future welfare. The whipping takes place also at the second menstrual period, but not subsequently. As a rule the puberty ordeal is brought to a conclusion with drink-and-dance party, in which the girl herself neither drinks nor dances, though she constitutes of course the central object of attraction.” The man abstains from eating meat for some time before the marriage as well. There are also specific marriage ordeals, which the would-be suitor has to successfully surmount before gaining permanent possession of his wife, in addition to the puberty ordeals that had previously to be passed. These marriage ordeals at the can be taken as omens or tokens of what the father-in-law or his daughter might reasonably expect from the husband in the future. To become men, boys will have to go through a lot of painful ordeals. One is where a net is filled with ants by a shaman of sorts who blows *paiwara* all over the ants and puts the net on the boy. If the boy shows any signs of pain, he fails the test, so he keeps his face the same no matter how excruciating the pain. Girls have to do this as well, but are exposed to potentially 22 different nets of ants at the same time. Showing pain and failing the test means that the kids have to go through the process all over again. (7,8)

6.4 Other rituals:

The Macushi often play games that involve large circles of men using sticks to try to stop a ‘ball’ from hitting the ground. Whoever loses gets made fun of a lot. There are also lots of ritual dances that copy the movements and noises of animals, including tapirs and dogs among others. These dances are sometimes used to scare away evil spirits. (8)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

The Macushi believe they descended from two warrior/explorer/hero sons, Makunaima and Pia. They were the unborn children of a woman and the sun, when the woman went into the tiger’s house and was killed. But the unborn sons were taken and raised by tiger, eventually growing up and killing him after they found out that tiger had killed their mother. The mother was resurrected. The two travel on different journeys, hunting and coming across the ‘toad’ and the alligator. Much of the creation story explains how the men made waterfalls and were involved in making the animals – who all had very human traits – the way they appear in current form. They explain how the stars are made up of the men and they explain that Mount Zabang is like Mount Olympus and is a holy place where Makunaima still resides. They explain that Pia eventually left hunting and went on to teach – leading to a whole classification of spiritual teachers and wise-men called Pia-men. There is a taboo of snakes – women during their puberty/pre-marriage preparation cannot go into the forest in order to avoid snakes and their impurities. There is also the belief that women’s periods – especially a girl’s first one – carry evil spirits that must be removed. Males are warned to stay away from women at these times or the men’s legs will swell up and the men will become sick. After babies are born, the parents avoid eating certain foods for fear of affecting their kids. They avoid turtles to avoid their kids getting fat and dumb and avoid parrots to avoid their kids having big noses and avoid crabs to avoid their kids having awkward, long legs. (7)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

This is a sort of shamanism that explains the world around them. The shaman leaders (Pia-men) conduct all sorts of rituals and lead dances. There is a strong belief in spirits controlling the actions of the animals and weather around the Macushi. “The Macuxi universe is basically composed of three planes superimposed in space that meet on the horizon. The terrestrial surface where we live is the intermediary plane: below this surface, there is a subterranean plane, inhabited by the *Wanabaricon*, beings similar to humans but small in size, who plant swiddens, hunt, fish and build villages.” (8,10)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

They pierce many parts of their body, both men and women. (8)

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

Scarification is common, and includes things like lip plates and stretching of body parts. Scarifications take place usually right after birth and during initiations into manhood or womanhood. (8)

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

They typically wear an 'apron' to cover their loins. They are also decorated with beads and feathers. Women wear a 'salempor,' a small swimming trunk like garment made of blue cotton cloth. For the most part, the Macushi and other Carib groups go either fully or almost fully naked – often covering the loins and nothing else - with a lot of ornamentation and decoration of the hair. They do use lip plates. (8)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Women will tend to cover just a little bit more than the men, as the salempor covers a little more of the legs than the apron. (8)

7.8 Missionary effect:

Missionaries came around early and often in the 19th and 20th century to the Macushi, Christianized and them with either Catholicism or Anglicanism. The missionaries would cloth the men in shirts and short pants and put cloaks on the women, but when he missionaries left, the Macushi would go back to their own garb. (8)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

The Macushi use a bifurcate-merging kinship system like that of the Iroquois people. In this scenario, the father's brother is called father and the mother's sister is called mother, while the father's sister is called aunt and the mother's brother is called uncle. (5)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

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

They practice cross-cousin marriage. (5)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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