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1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Language: Maléku Jaíka (Malécu Lhaíca)

Society: Maléku Jaíka (Maleku, Guatuso, Watuso), *Malécu maráma* ('our persons')

Language Family: Chibchan, Rama

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

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Maléku people live in north central Costa Rica within the 2994-hectare (7398 acre) Guatuso Indian Reserve. The reserve "lies within the Río Frío watershed, ranging from the foothills and lower ridges of the Tilarán Cordillera to the alluvial lowlands...living in three neighboring communities along the banks of the Río El Sol: Tonjibe, Margarita, and El Sol," (Vásquez 36).

1.4 Brief History

Evidence shows that the Maleku had been living in the Río Frío watershed for thousands of years with little genetic or linguistic disruption. Other hypotheses suggest that the Maleku are descendants of Huetar, Corobicí, or multiple indigenous tribes, making it a hybrid group. The Maleku are one of three tribes of Costa Rica that were never conquered by Spanish colonizers; they had gone unnoticed until the 1750s and then were able to defend themselves and their territory once the Spanish had discovered them. Before the colonization period the Maleku had a number of maize fields and plantain and cacao fields alongside riverbanks and streams, where other wild plants and fruit trees with economic value were left standing to also be cultivated. (1)

What was most devastating to the Maleku was the arrival of rubber tappers, which took place between 1868 and 1900. Protective of their territory the Maleku battled armed rubber gatherers, which led to many deaths and enslavement of the Maleku. Many ancestral settlements were also abandoned. The enslavement and killing of the Maleku was largely decreased and ultimately ended due to the aid of the Catholic Missionaries led by Bishop Thiel. Thiel and the missionaries gained the trust of the Maleku in the late 1800s through protection as well as the giving of metal tools, clothes, cooking utensil, and firearms. With the trust of the Maleku, the missionaries had begun to bring the Maleku into the economic market by urging them to farm and sell cacao and maize along with crops that were introduced such as rice and beans. This also began the loss of the Maleku's indigenous culture, though culture and language was hardly affected by the missionaries of the early 1900s. (1)

The Maleku now only partly depend on small-scale agriculture, fishing, hunting, and gathering for subsistence; a large part of their economy today includes tourism and the sale of art and jewelry. They obtain food from local market places in Guatuso, which is walking distance (by road) from each community. Others look for modern day work in the area.

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

Since the Guatuso Indian Reserve had been created in 1976 the government has provided housing to the Maleku. Missionaries have also built churches, schools, and houses within the communities. Due to this influence many of the younger generation only speak Spanish, as school is taught in Spanish. This has also led to a large decrease in traditional religious practices among the younger peoples of the tribe. Along with the building of houses, churches, and schools is the construction of paved and unpaved roads. Deforestation is also a threat to the Maleku. (1)

Non-indigenous neighbors own cattle-raising land and small farms, which require little labor (not a very productive economy for the Maleku). There are also a small number of land squatters in the territory who have been known to live, intermarry, and produce offspring with the Maleku peoples. Other indigenous groups such as the Bribri, Cabécar, and Huetar are also found within the reserve and also have relations with the Maleku. "Some Maleku see their intermarriage with other indigenous peoples as an excellent alternative to maintain their culture," (Vasquez 40).

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The Río Frío watershed has a tropical wet climate, which consists of a long rainy season extending from May to February with a short dry season lasting from mid-August to mid-September. Once the lowlands are flooded the Río Frío, a tributary of Río San Juan, drains the watershed. With the variation in elevation there are many different types of tropical forests and wetlands within the watershed.

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

Population: 380 (Field census of Vasquez 2000)/ 480 (Costa Rican National Population Census 2000)

3 *palenques* (villages):

El Sol: 45
w/ 4 houses

Margarita: 157
w/ 17 houses

Tonjibe: 178
w/ 13 houses (1)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Maize is grown from second-grown forest areas where the vegetation had been cut down then burned to produce fertile soil from the ash. Wild plants such as manioc were often left standing in the fields to also be used as a source of carbs. Pejibaye is another important staple food and was used for making *chicha*, an alcoholic beverage. (1)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fishing and hunting provide the Maleku's main source of protein. The Maleku have a home range in which they hunt spider monkeys, iguana, and many species of bird. They also hunt wild animals found within the boundaries of the plantain and cacao fields; in the past wild animals such as paca, armadillo, and peccary were found in the fields, while today the Maleku are reduced to hunting squirrels, armadillo, and various types of birds in their fields. The Maleku mainly fish for catfish, bobo mullet, mojarra, and sardines. They also hunt aquatic animals such as turtle, crab, and river shrimp. (1)

Animal husbandry is also practiced among the Maleku where baby animals are captured during hunting trips and then raised to the point where the animal is big enough to be eaten. They also had domesticated the stingless native honeybee and were kept in houses. (1)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Bows and arrows and lances are made from peach palm, a cultivated species found in the plantain and cacao fields. (1)

2.4 Food storage:

Before colonization food was less plentiful during the rainy season, and this is when storing and preservation became useful. Large holes were dug in the ground to store turtles for up to several weeks. Large quantities of meat and fish were "placed on a frame above a slow fire, so the flesh was simultaneously smoked, dried, and partially cooked. Smoked fish was preserved for at least three months," (Vásquez 166). Cacao, maize, and pejibaye were also stored for several weeks, until needed, after being dried. (1)

2.5 Sexual/Age division of production:

For agriculture men would do the clearing and burning for the new fields as well as plant and weed, while the women harvest then transport the crops.

Apart from agriculture men would build houses and rafts, hunt, and fish. Women and boys shared the tasks of fishing and gathering fruit and also participated in hunting near their houses and within the agricultural fields where mainly small game was found.

Women held many other tasks such as taking care of children, preparing food, and making hammocks, fishing nets, and pottery jars. Girls took care of siblings, carried water from streams, and collected firewood. Bows and arrows, spears, gourds, and drums were made by boys and older men. (1)

2.6 Land tenure:

Maleku control roughly 20% of the Guatuso Indian Reserve, powerful outsiders (squatters), and other indigenous groups control the remaining land. Another problem is that the 20% of land is unequally distributed among the indigenous families.

2.7 Ceramics: Jars are made for making *chichi* (a ceremonial, alcoholic beverage)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

The Maleku have developed a system in which food is shared at the inter-settlement level. "By focusing in different food-getting strategies in different places and at different times of the year, along with the development of different food preservation methods the reciprocal exchanges of labor and foodstuffs, Maleku families were able to have access to food throughout the year," (Vásquez 167).

2.9 Food taboos:

For religious reasons the Maleku were prohibited from hunting a large number of species that were believed to be "filthy, dirty, unhealthy, and injurious to human life since they incited people to behave badly and to disobey god's established rules of good behavior," (Vásquez 149). Some of these species include rabbit, jaguar, howler and white-faced monkey, white-tailed deer, river otter, anteater, skunk, opossum, raccoon, two- and three-toed sloth, eagle, owl, heron, falcon, vulture, snake, crocodile, freshwater shark, snook, tarpon, and any species coming from the sea. (1)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

For fishing purposes, the Maleku traveled on low-water rivers (during dry season) using balsa rafts.

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Unknown

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): Unknown

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): Unknown

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Unknown

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

The families are nuclear and the average number of children a woman has is 3.6 (INEC 2002)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): Unknown

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Unknown

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Unknown

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Monogamy is practiced, there is no information on polygynous marriages.

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

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Leaders, mediums, and heads of households will often pass that power on to his son.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Unknown

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Unknown

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Mainly exogamic; married outside the village, since the village is one large extended family.

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

Usually the head of the household, the medium or shaman, and the leader of the village are the successors of their fathers.

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: Unknown

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

Maleku prefer to marry another from a neighboring village, since each village is made up of one large extended family. (1)

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?

The multifamily support each other in many ways and would most likely take over the raising of a child in the case of that child’s parent’s death.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females:

Male: 222

Female: 214

(Costa Rica: Indigenous Population, by Indigenous People of Identification, Area of Residence and Sex, 2000 Census)

4.22 Evidence for couvades: Unknown

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

Any sort of title or position of power is passed down from father to son.

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Present

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

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?):

Outside; females usually leave to live with the husband's family

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

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: No reported cases.

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

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
Neighboring villages kept in contact in traditional times.

4.18 Cannibalism?: No

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Past villages would consist of as little as 3 to as many as 10 multifamily houses. Each house would be occupied by 3 or more nuclear families (of 5 or 6). (1)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The three villages are sedentary. In the past, during the dry seasons (February to April and August to September) the Maleku set up distant hunting camps on the Tenorio Volcano and on the headwaters of the major rivers of the land since it was easier to move about the land with lower water levels.

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

Past villages operated as autonomous units and were almost completely egalitarian with the exception of leaders and *mediums* (spiritual communicators), who were commonly the same person. In times of war, past villages have been known to become an alliance under one chief warrior, or *Urojua* (1).

5.4 Post-marital residence:

Practice mainly matrilocality, though there is some degree of patrilocality (since it is not mandatory or obligated). In the past postmarital residence drew three or more generations of family together. (1)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

In the past the Maleku were not welcoming to Spanish explorers and colonizers as well as rubber tappers. Today, with the protection of the government, the Maleku do not need active defense.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Each village is made up of one large extended family. Each house consists of three or more nuclear families. Each family is assigned a space in which they sleep and prepare food. There is an empty space in the center of the house where deceased family members are buried. The head of the household is usually the eldest male. (1)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Traditionally, a village would only consist of large, multifamily houses.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Men and children slept on hammocks, while women slept on the ground. (2)

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

The Maleku are mainly equal amongst each other. There is a leader of each village who is often a medium (one who can communicate with the dead and supernatural) and the founder or a descendant of the founder.

5.12 Trade: See 2.8

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? None

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

The Maleku knew of many plants with medicinal properties and did have shamans.

6.2 Stimulants: Cacao

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

When an individual dies, the entire village mourns over his or her death and a funeral is held. The dead is often buried inside the house he or she lived (the space where the individual was buried is left empty and should not be walked on since it is sacred ground). (1)

6.4 Other rituals:

The Maleku engaged in many social celebrations involving singing and dancing and the drinking of *chicha*, a traditional alcoholic beverage.

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Presently the Maleku sell art, which often display symbolic animals. Drums are made cedar and iguana skin.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

Churches and schools (taught in Spanish) have been built. Missionaries have also provided housing to the Maleku. Many of the younger generation do not speak the native language. See 1.4 & 1.5

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.):

The Maleku are spiritual with animals. They also believe in spirits of the dead can communicate with mediums.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Make-up is made from seeds.

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut: Men and women grow their hair long, past the shoulders.

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Headdresses are made with feathers and bark cloth.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Headdresses

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

Presence of missionaries has caused younger generations to rarely be involved in traditional activities.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

There has been a revival in Maleku art and religious ceremonies. This is mainly for the business of tourism.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Nuclear families

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. Castillo Vasquez, R. (2005). *An ethnogeography of the Maleku indigenous peoples in northern Costa Rica* (Doctoral dissertation, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS).
2. Thiel, Bernardo A. 1886a. Entrada al territorio de los Guatusos, abril-mayo de 1882. In *Viajes a varias partes de la República de Costa Rica por el Dr. Bernardo A. Thiel (Obispo de Costa Rica), 1881-1896*. Instituto Físico-Geográfico Nacional, editor. Pp. 12-31. San José: Tipografía Nacional.