

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Name: Maxacali or Maxakalí  
Language: Maxakalí  
Language Family: Macro-Gê (1, p.6).

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

ISO 639-3: mbl

### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Maxakalí live in the municipality of Berópolis, which is in the Jequitinhonha Valley of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil (1, p.6). This area lies in the northeastern corner of Minas Gerais (2, p.1). They occupy two Indian reserves called Mariano de Oliveira and Pradiho (8, p.1).

### 1.4 Brief history:

The Maxakali were one of the very first indigenous groups to encounter colonizers, and therefore they have a long history of interaction with non-indigenous groups (4, p.1). When large gold deposits were found in areas of Minas Gerais, colonizers became determined to conquer and settle this area; they launched campaigns to eradicate the Maxakali populations living in this area. The Maxakali also experienced some instances of enslavement at the hands of the Portuguese conquerors (7, p.1). Later the Maxakali banded together with the Portuguese to fight an enemy indigenous tribe (8, p.1).

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

The Maxakali have a long history of contact with non-Indian civilization because of their close proximity to the colonial section of Brazil. However, despite this proximity, the Maxakali have retained many tribal customs and their language by attempting to isolate themselves from surrounding groups (2, p.1; 6, p.250). However, the Maxakali have in many ways been “fundamentally transformed by colonialism” (6, p. 249).

Perhaps as a result of their relationship with non-indigenous groups, many in the Maxakali population have developed problems with alcohol and other drugs (4, p.1). The first people to offer alcohol to the Maxakali were ranchers for whom they worked about fifty years ago. The Maxacali were paid in alcohol rather than money (4, p.1).

Although located in one of the richest Brazilian states, the Maxakali experience much malnutrition (5, p.1).

Many Maxakali presently live in non-Indigenous villages and towns, supporting themselves through working-class jobs (6, p.80). This emigration from the northeastern Minas Gerais region might be the result of historical colonists' methods of Indian exorcism, which involved anti-Indian terrorism, incapacitation of these terrorized victims, and pressures to abandon or at least hide tribal language, customs, and identity in order to assimilate. There were also pressures exerted over the Maxakali to intermarry (6, p.80-81). Many Maxakali have been forced by historical state practices of “massacre, relocation, incapacitation, and anti-Indian sentiments” to leave their communities, conceal their native identities, and marry white spouses (6, p.82-83). Even in more recent years, after the government stopped implicitly supporting anti-Indian practices, even Maxakali children are accustomed to daily violence from external forces (6, p.89).

In addition to violence, the Maxakali also face medical disadvantages because of their location. Most international efforts to fund proindigenous healthcare initiatives target groups residing deep within the Amazon. The Maxakali and other indigenous groups in the Minas Gerais region receive almost no such assistance (6, p. 111).

### 1.6 Ecology:

The Maxakali occupy about 10,000 acres of fertile land surrounded by waterfalls, and lush greenery and misty mountains (5, p.1).

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Manioc and potatoes are large staples in the Maxakali diet (4, p.1). They also raise and consume corn and sweet potatoes (5, p.1).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The Maxakali have historically been known to as “lethal archers” (7, p.1).

2.4 Food storage:

Traditionally, black clay is used to make small, globular pots. Cotton is also used to make net bags for storage (8, p.1).

2.5 Sexual division of production:

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

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):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Sororal polygyny has traditionally been the only kind of plural marriage allowed (8, p.1). Therefore a small number of marriages are probably polygynous.

4.8 Arranged marriage, bride purchase/service, dowry:

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Parents who grew up experiencing anti-Indian practices and prejudice often encourage their children to marry outside the indigenous community. They think that marriage with a white person will raise their child's status (6, p.82).

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)

Cross-cousin marriage may traditionally have been preferred (8, p.1). Marriage between parallel cousins, however, traditionally was viewed as incestuous.

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

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

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Parallel cousins are classed as sibling; therefore, relationships between parallel cousins are considered incestuous (8, p.1).

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?)

### **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

In-group deaths have been known to occur as a result of alcohol-induced fistfights (4, p.1).

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

Causes of out-group violence have historically been caused by disputes with colonizing populations over land (7, p.1). In the 1980s, there were instances of chiefs and leaders being killed for refusing to cooperate with relocation efforts aimed at making way for non-indigenous expansion (9, p.1). The Maxakali and those working to help their situation faced constant threats and violent attacks from the fazendeiros in the area (6, p.145). The Maxakali may have poor relationships with nearby whites because of their problems with alcohol. When they go into the cities to drink, conflicts between the two groups intensify (6, p.202).

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

The Maxakali were one of the very first indigenous groups to encounter colonizers, and therefore they have a long history of interaction with non-indigenous groups (4, p.1). The Maxakali are very suspicious of outsiders, who must earn their trust (6, p.144, 147). The Maxakali developed good relationships with missionaries who, starting in the 1980s, worked to help publicize the persecution the indigenous were facing, sold their goods, and provided them with resources and medical assistance (6, p.143-147).

4.18 Cannibalism?

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

There are said to be 250 Maxakali Indians (2, p.1). However, the total population Maxakali-speakers is about 800 (1, p.6). However, in a medical study two Maxakali village groups with populations of 720 and 500 were observed. The first village group, with a population of 720, was composed of seven neighboring small villages, while the second village group was made up of eight neighboring small villages with a total of 500 inhabitants (3, section 2.1).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

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

The Maxakali have chiefs who hold a lot of political power within the group (5, p.1).

5.4 Post marital residence:

Traditionally, couples lived virilocally after marriage (8, p.1).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Maxakali who still live in their traditional region in the northeastern Minas Gerais live on a defined reservation. However, this reservation has been reduced in size in the past, which resulted in violence and between the Maxakali and the non-indigenous groups infringing on that land (6, p.81).

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Houses have been observed to be the sleeping quarters for 18 Maxakali (4, p.1; 5, p.1). Huts consist of dirt floors and thatched roofs (5, p.1). These houses were made by sticking branches into the ground and bending them into the shape of a dome, using palm fronds as a roof (8, p.1).

The Maxakali historically lived a semi-nomadic life, resulting in only semi-permanent villages (7, p.1).

#### 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Traditional Maxakali villages had a men's hut in which men slept and women were forbidden from entering at all times. Younger, uninitiated men were also forbidden from entering the men's house after dark. Within the men's house, it was believed that spirits revealed themselves to the men through their dreams. (8, p.1).

#### 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Maxakali traditionally sleep in hammocks (6, p.81). The hammocks are made from cotton (8, p.1).

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

#### 5.12 Trade:

The Maxakali are known to have daily contact with urban communities, to which they travel in order to sell their products (3, section 2.1).

#### 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:

Many Maxakali suffer from alcohol problems. The use of this drug in rituals is unknown, but probably does not play a large role because alcohol carries so much shame with it. However, drinking is also a cultural norm with most of the Maxakali beginning as early as the age of 10 (4, p.1).

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

The initiation rituals for boys involve nightly singing lessons during which men dress up as spirits. After initiating a group of boys, a pole is placed in the ground in front of the men's house in order to channel the spirits to earth where the men danced (8, p.1).

#### 6.4 Other rituals:

#### 6.5 Myths (Creation):

Creation myth: Topar, the creator, gave an otter to the Maxakali to help them to fish and always have food. Topar told the Maxakali that the otter must always be given the three largest fish, and that the Maxakali could have the rest. One day the son-in-law of the otter's guardian asked if he could use the otter to go fishing. He was reminded of the agreement with Topar to give the otter the largest three fish. However, when the otter was retrieving fish from the river, this man took the largest three and all of the other fish that the otter had already retrieved and left to go back to the village. The otter saw that this happened and swam away, downstream. He later regretted this decision and tried to go back to the stream, but the otter had gone.

That night a flood came and wiped away the village and the people in it, except for the son-in-law, who had concealed himself inside a log, sealing the ends with deer skin. He stayed in the log many days and became very weak. When Topar came to check on the Maxakali, he found the log and pulled the son-in-law out, who had become very white, skinny, and covered in fecal matter. Topar helped warm up the man and gave the man bananas, manioc, honey, peanuts, melon, and watermelon. This is why the Maxakali today do not like beans and other foods of the white man.

After living alone for a while because all of the other Maxakali were killed in the flood, the man heard human voices speaking Maxakali. He found a small house in which a woman deer was cooking. Her husband, a buck, was working in a field near the house. The man shot the buck dead using his arrow. He then went back in the house and calmly told the deer that he could not find her husband. She proposed that they wait for him. When the buck never returned, the man and deer decided to marry. After the man had some trouble trying to conceive a child with the deer, Topar decided to help him by showing him how to have sex with his wife so that they could have children. This is how the Maxakali were born anew. (6, p.1-4).

There are also myths involving the moon and sun, who are brothers who once lived on the earth. The moon is constantly doing bad things, such as making snake fangs and hornet stingers, and the sun is constantly angry about the

things his brother has done. When burying their mother, the moon stamped hard on her grave, which infuriated the sun. Now, up in the sky, the moon stays a little back behind his brother so that they are never together (2, p.14-15).

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:

The Maxakali bury their dead in a squatting position (8, p.1). The Maxakali also traditionally believe that believe that the soul is capable of turning into a jaguar after death (8, p.1).

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 Maxakali address over 85 beings with ceremonial rights. These beings include animals, souls of the dead, semi-human beings, natural earthly phenomenon, and heavenly bodies—all of which are organized into eleven totem groups. Examples of these totem members include the moon, sun, water falls, planets, bat species, etc. (2, p.1).

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

When colonizers first arrived in Brazil, some Maxakali used botoque lip-discs; the Maxakali were therefore also known as Botocudo (7, p.1) However, this may not be accurate, as the Botocudo are other times cited as an entirely different indigenous group

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

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:

Parallel cousins are classed as sibling; therefore, relationships between parallel cousins are considered incestuous (8, p.1).

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Sororal polygyny has traditionally been the only kind of plural marriage allowed (8, p.1).

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

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