

1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Bekwil, Bakwele, Bakwil, Bekwel, Bekwie, Okpele, In the Congo, Bantu(1)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): BKW(1)
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Congo, Republic of
- 1.4 Brief history:
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Bakwele culture lived to the north and west of their current location, at the headwaters of the Ivindo. Until guns starting coming in from the trade posts along the Atlantic. The Bakwele were then reduced by raid groups of their neighbors. The Bakwele were forced to move. The Bakwele continued swidden cultivation Today there has been strong influence from Christian missionaries that list the Bekwils Religion as 90% Christian with the Sub-division Roman Catholic and 10% Ethnic Religions. Portions of the bible have been translated so that the Bantu can now read the scripture. The European influence greatly changed Bakwele way of life and culture. Rites were performed using masks but upon discovery of what many Europeans called art the Bakwele people stopped using their masks for ceremonies and instead used them for entertainment or as a means to trade.(2)(3)(5p.58)(6)
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment): "At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Bakwele culture lived to the north and west of their current location, at the headwaters of the Ivindo." Sangha region, along Cameroon border, near Gabon border, almost to Ouessou.(5p.58)
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density 12,060, 9,600 in the Congo(6) Swidden Cultivators so they move from land to land with the same general region(3)

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): The Bakwele were hunters and gathers. Their diet consist of both meat and plants. The Bakwele make use of fifty non-domesticated forest plants for nutritional and other value. A plantain economy.(4)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Hunters that eat meats. (3)
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: The 1920's introduced the BaKwele people to guns through the trade along the Atlantic although at first the BaKwele's neighbors exclusivity had guns it was not long before the BaKwele were able to trade goods and masks that Europeans found aesthetically pleasing in order to have firearms. Previously the Bakwele were hunters and gathers so some basic tools from hunting including spears and snares were used. (3)(5)
- 2.4 Food storage: No mentioned although trade of goods including crops is mentioned. (3)(5)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: The women were traditionally the gathers while men hunted.(56)
- 2.6 Land tenure: Lived in nonpermanet settlements and were swidden cultivators. Minimal concern for land tenure allowed the Bakwele to continue with their swidden cultivation. (3p.274)(4)
- 2.7 Ceramics: No evidence
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: The male head of the household is in charge or equal distribution of wealth. Although in reality the distribution is in accordance to the whim of the head male. (3)
- 2.9 Food taboos: No known dietary restrictions. (4)
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No the Bakwele are cultivators and hunters. (5)

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): No numbers
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): No numbers

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): No numbers
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): No numbers
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): The lineages could grow to be as large as the household male could provide for although there is mentioning of larger groups having to move away from the group. (6)
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): No numbers
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): No numbers
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: No numbers
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygamous: Ideally marriage was polygynous however women were scarce creating competition in the marriage system., "however the compulsion toward having a large family, and hence personal power in the village, drove many BaKwele family heads to spend the family wealth exclusively to acquire wives of their own." (6p.59)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: "In acquiring wives for themselves and their sons and younger brothers, family heads were expected to allocate family wealth equitably... many Bakwele family heads to spend the family wealth exclusively to acquire wives." (p.59)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Inheritance was to be split equally but in reality the head of the household who was the father determined the allocation. (6)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: The sons will often leave and join another lineage I the other lineage has more wealth or women to offer in exchange for allegiance. (3)
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Not found.
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): There is some exogamy although no examples the movement of groups and lineage indicate that the marriage or relationships with outsiders was an accepted reality. (3)(4)

- 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") To carry and be healthy for the child which indicates a level of responsibility. Then to care for the child which is considered to be hers. (5)(6)
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No evidence
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape Not found
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) No evidence
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Not found.
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring No evidence
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The other mothers or the sisters. The children belong to the lineage. (3)(5)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females "While the Bakwele have a slight female preponderance...and slightly >1 for Bakwele.(7)
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades No evidence
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) Distinction between size of lineage and wealth. (3)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? When a son left one house he essentially became adopted by the house that would take him in. (3)
- 4.24 Joking relationships? No evidence.
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations No evidence.
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules No evidence.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Ceremonies that included masks were used as rites. (3)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? No evidence
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Within community the polygamy encouraged large households in order for men to gain more power. (5)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Dowry had to be met and given to the lineage to which the woman belonged. (3)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: Yes, the limited amount of women made polygamy a problem amongst the males. Resulting in young men leaving their fathers home which resulted in a loss of power for the lineage. (5)

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Raids by outside tribes caused by European colonial expansion decimated the Bakwele population and forced the Bakwele's to relocate. Since then there is now a designated war leader called a gen that has a place in the political system in charge of ingroup fighting. (5p60)
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
- 4.18 Cannibalism? No (5)

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: "BaKwele villages tended to consist of large chains of different lineages often more than a dozen." (6 p.59)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): The BaKwele were swidden cultivators who moved their settlements about often and erratically. (3)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): A strong if informal, system of patronage and clientage existed, in which opportunists in search of wealth and wives became the followers of wealthy men who could fulfill their expectations. Such opportunists would usually settle in a patron's village without assimilating to his lineages. The patron could thus attain nominal control over a number of lineages, a more strategic arrangement in village politics than merely the support of his own sons and younger brothers. Patrilineal villages formed large villages. The religious ceremonies would then decide or validate the social status of the patrilineal. "Political power over the village was diffuse and transitory" (6 p.59-60)(3p.274)
- 5.4 Post marital residence:
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): The large villages formed by each patrilineal was partly fortified. (3p.274)
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: No evidence
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Houses organized by the lineage family groups. (3)
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (men's houses): "A number of guardhouses were spaced out along the inner court of the village; each guardhouse represented a lineage and served as the focal point of its affairs." (6 p.59)
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: "BaKwele villages tended to consist of large chains of different lineages often more than a dozen." (6 p.59)
- 5.12 Trade: Was introduced with European colonization around 1920 and the introduction of trade changed the previous practice of swidden cultivation. The use of gold coins began to be used as another means of wealth. (3)
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? The different lineages and the importance of the ceremonies indicate a social hierarchy. (5)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: No specified amount the ceremonies before European involvement averaged once a year but personal RCR is unknown. (3)

- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Begaa or gaa were the religious specialists of the village who maintained a level of political power. (6p.60)
- 6.2 Stimulants: Magical stew- "The climax of beete consisted in the consumption of the magical stew, and the efficacy of this medicine was believed to depend upon the receptive condition of its consumers. At the proper time it was necessary that the village be animated by singing, dancing, and feasting, in other words, by intense and harmonious interaction."(5p62)
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Rituals observed as irregular but averaging once a year. (3 p.274)
- 6.4 Other rituals: Elaborate ritual ceremonies that were irregular but averaged once per year. Rituals included masks that distinguished the roles of various individuals in a group. The majority of those with masks were entertainers while some were described as beauty, and others had a role of terror. (3p274 &p.283.)
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): There is a myth regarding a witchcraft, "the Bakwele believe that the umbilicus is the main point of entry for witches and that it can be protected by something white or shiny, moreover, cowry shells are thought of by the BaKwele as eyes."(10)
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Seen in ceremonies and presently today used as entertainment since the involvement of European colonization. Masks, dancing and music is greatly used and admired in this culture. (3)(6)(9)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Originally the medicine man is listed as a man but that was before the influence of missionaries.(2)
- 6.8 Missionary effect: Large conversion to Christianity.
- 6.9 RCR revival: Due to the influence of mission trips the area is reported to be mainly converted to Christianity with a specialization of Roman Catholic. (2)
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: There is a thought of the afterlife because one rite is known that at the time of mourning the rite is ended with a special heart shaped mask. (9)
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? Not found
- 6.12 Is there tekonymy? Not present.
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) "BaKwele religion was expressed primarily in witchcraft beliefs and in several more or less rites of intensification which, incidentally decided or validated the social statuses of the patrilines.." (3p.274)

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: Masks were used in lieu of body paint in fact the terror mask was to be worn without any other kind of adornment, so nude. (3)
- 7.2 Piercings: Piercings were sometimes added onto the masks so the wearer wouldn't have to receive a piercing themselves. (3)
- 7.3 Haircut: No evidence
- 7.4 Scarification: No evidence
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): The masks worn by the Bakwele during special ceremonies have horns from animals such as antelopes that are killed as part of the rite. (8)
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Various masks were used in a ritual performed irregularly. Average was once a year. A few masks were used in other unknown ways. European contact in the 1920's led to the end of wearing using masks during the rituals. The difference between the masks represented the role of whoever wore the mask. There were entertainer masks and terror masks for those who would as part of the ritual terrorize the village. (3p.274&p283)
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: There were masks designated for competitions in determining leadership, these masks were reserved for men.
- 7.8 Missionary effect: N/A European influence already seen
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: After the European contact the use of masks in rituals was discontinued. However the masks are still produced for local use or public occasions. The use of adornment has switched towards entertainment use from ritual use. (3p.274-276)

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system: There is evidence that inheritance was to be split equally among the males yet the division of wealth was up to the father. The bigger the lineage the more power a man had so often men lived with their family until they sought their own household through marriage. The daughters would have been bought through the dowry system. (3)(4)(5)
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate: Due to the competition for polygamy which was the ideal Sororate was allowed but as far as levirate there is no mention. However one source notes how extremely competitive it was to marry other women so the widows should have been able to find another husband without the brother-in-laws obligation. (3)(4)
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): No.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them): "little is known about their traditional culture and religious beliefs. They are known for a forilla mask they make called gon and for their abstract often heartshaped masks."(9)

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