

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Punu (Ipunu, Yipunu, Bapounou) (2)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): [puu] (2)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): -2.5, 11.00 (2)

1.4 Brief history: The Punu name originates from 19th century French administration of Gabon. First “discovered” by the western world in 1868 the Punu people were a collection of tribes, the foremost being Bapounous. Although western scholars of the time maintained that the Punu, like most people had “no history previous to European discovery,” there is a rich oral history that describes a great series of migrations. Originating in the Congo, they migrated west in an effort to avoid warfare and Portuguese influence for hundreds of years. (4)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The Punu are located in Gabon, which didn't gain independence from France until 1960, so there was about 90 years of French rule. The French have sent missionaries there, and currently about 6% of the population is Christian and about a quarter of that is evangelical. (3)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Primarily Rainforest. (5)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: There are about 130 thousand speakers of the language, but because of flight of peoples to Libreville and other large cities in Gabon, the population of the villages in the Southwest along the rivers is only about 40 thousand. (4)

2. Economy All information here is from (4)

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Roots, leaves, nuts.

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Roosters, drakes, sheep.

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Machete, firearms.

2.4 Food storage: Livestock, in ground roots.

2.5 Sexual division of production: Women are in charge of farming and crafts, such as jewelry, pottery. It has also been noted that they seem to serve as work-horses, to be bought and sold or inherited just like any other pot or pan or machete. Traditionally the men participated in the slave and salt trade

2.6 Land tenure: Communal

2.7 Ceramics: Earthenware pottery, jugs, plates.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: “Each Clan have specific taboo, specific wild animals that cannot be hunted or eaten...only a few apply to the whole population, the consumption of dogs, cats and snails. It is not customary for Punu women to eat animals that are familiar to them...they cannot eat snakes either for it is believed that a woman who eats the flesh of a snake can become wicked.”

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): 4.26 births per Woman

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:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Traditionally salt, now mostly alliances. (4)

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Matrilineal (4)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No mention.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Women are traded for supplies at times, but mostly to form alliances. (4)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? Paternity is not partible.

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)? No

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Not found.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Another clan, to form alliances.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? If the mother dies, the children are taken care of by the mother's family. Even if they have to go to her former village, they're shipped off.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females .99 males to 1 female.

4.22 Evidence for couvades: None

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

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Elder reverence.

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations “Mainly matrilineal, but cases of bilinearity are not unusual, particularly in terms of the authority of local dignitaries.”

4.26 Incest avoidance rules People are put to death if they perform incest.

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?) Women are married out of the community

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: No real warfare in the last couple of century.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Territorial infringement by outside groups, mostly resulting in the Punu migrating away from the violence.

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

4.18 Cannibalism? No.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Partly nomadic traditionally, in the last century they’ve settled down around rivers. (4)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Chiefdom (4)

5.4 Post marital residence: Patrilocal (4)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Not really, they’re mobile. (4)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): No real social distinction. Men hold economic power, women hold spiritual power, although the men are the ones who channel the female spirits. (4)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: No evidence found.

5.8 Village and house organization: “Huge kinship groups.” The villages of the Punu are not really important traditionally. They are merely “parts of a kinship group or groups that are for the meantime living together.” The scale of the chiefdoms and lineages is massive, tying together all of the villages and all of the clans across all of south Gabon. (4)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): The “Men’ Houses” are the places of worship. (4)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? In homes.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Ndjembe, a secret women society present in all the Punu groups, organizes agriculture and empowers the women. (4)

5.12 Trade: Traditionally slaves and salt, although recently they have a high amount of tourism due to the fascination over the ceremonial masks that they make. Once only crafted to channel spirits, they’re now almost mass produced for sale. (4)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Matrilineal/Chiefdom (4)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Old men become priests, which are more like “witch doctors,” masters of occult forces, called Nganga. (4)

6.2 Stimulants: They stimulate themselves spiritually with talismans crafted from human remains. (4)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Parts of relatives are preserved in death (bones mostly) and kept in wicker baskets covered in copper plating for respect, for use in relics. (4)

6.4 Other rituals: One of the most notable was the Mbumba, business and wealth fetish. It is said to be from the rainbow extending from the mouth of a great vomiting sea-fish after sacrificing a close relative or a white man. To protect the user from the additional bad effects of it, the copper bracelet, Olongo-Nkongga has to be worn at all times.

The Punu, worshipping spirits and ancestors as they do, channel the souls of the dead through great masks that they create and wear. Although the masks are not sacred, they’re more just the knob that opens the door to the ancients. The men channel ancient female spirits through these masks to keep slaves and women subservient. The Punu people live in fear of the ancients and spirits, and use this to control the population. (4)

6.5 Myths (Creation): Ancestors are the source of all life, and spirits control the world. The spirits are different from the ancestors; the spirits are like, forest spirits, animal spirits. The worlds in which they reside are separate. It is the ancestors who hold sway over fate. (4)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Masks. The artistry involved in the masks has made the group quite popular in recent decades. (4)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Places of worship are literally called “Men’s Houses.” Priests are always elderly men. (4)

6.8 Missionary effect: About 1 in 20 is Christian. (3)

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Ancestors are the source of all life and perpetuate human existence. Also, they like to make relics and talismans from human remains. One of the most notable was the Mbumba, business and wealth fetish. It is said to be from the rainbow extending from the mouth of a great vomiting sea-fish after sacrificing a close relative or a white man. To protect the user from the additional bad effects of it, the copper bracelet, Olongo-Nkonga has to be worn at all times. (4)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? The dead are called upon ceremonially to subordinate individuals. (4)

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Ancestor Worship. The dead are revered as the masters of the universe. The female ancestor in particular, being matrilineal, is summoned through ceremonial masks by dancers (always young male as they often perform acrobatically on stilts) There is some form of animism, they believe in spirits of animals, places, objects, but these are separate and inferior to those of the souls of the ancestors and separate in realm. They create relics and fetishes from the remains of people, relatives, who either were sacrificed or just happened to die. No information can be found on the sacrifices as they are regulated by secret (male) societies. The calling of the spirits by the men really seems to be a trump card played by the men who are living in denial that they are being controlled by the female societies, who operate secretly. (4)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Not found.

7.2 Piercings: Earrings.

7.3 Haircut: Women have long, plated and oiled hair. There is also evidence of a “tower shape” haircut for women resembling Marge from *The Simpsons*. Men usually have short hair.

7.4 Scarification: Not found.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Necklaces, earrings, bracelets, anklets, hair beads. Animal skins are also often worn, higher ranking individuals can wear leopard or panther skins.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Great fancy masks the Muludj’, which were created and used traditionally in a somewhat mundane experience, in the vacuum of colonial limiting on their slaves and salt trade the masks have become a symbol of their identity and a source of income for tourism. (4)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect: Little to none on adornment, those that have been converted move to the big city, Libreville. (5)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Masks everywhere.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Incest is punishable by death. (4)

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. CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gb.html>
2. Ethnologue: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=puu
3. Missionary Database: <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=15421&rog3=GB>
4. Perrois, Louis, and Charlotte Grand-Dufay. *Punu*. 1st. Milan, Italy: 5 Continents Editions, 2008. Print.
5. Barnes, James F. *Gabon: Beyond the Colonial Legacy*. 10th. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc, 1992. Print.