

## **1. Description**

1.1 Name of society: Macaguán language: Macaguán, and language family: Guajboan (1)

1.2 ISO code 639-3 (1).

1.3 Location: The Macaguán live in many scattered locations along Northern Colombia. Specific locations include "Arauca, Agualinda, and San José de Lipa between the Lipa Ele and Cuiloto rivers" (1)

1.4 Influence of missionaries and neighbors: "These communities are traditionally hunter-gathers, whom the Jesuits never succeeded in congregating in settlements" (2). The surrounding settlers have contact with the Macaguán providing means of trade as well as horizontal transmission of goods. Many of their weapons, tools and crafts are influenced by their neighbors. Neighboring tribes possess more complex weapons which leads them to restrict and forbid the Macaguán to hunt in certain areas. "Some settlers forbid them to hunt near their domains; in addition, the settlers have better weapons for hunting" (3) The Westerners of urban societies within Colombia also influence the Macaguán. The younger generation have aspirations to obtain an education, particularly in reading and writing. Young boys are also determined to learn the ways of hunting and fishing within their native culture. Although the older generations are weary of the westerners, they still aspire to possess items such as radios, good clothing, rings, watches, and other luxuries that are not normally obtainable. The adults also wish for their children to become educated and travel to meet new people and learn from different cultures. However, the adults do tread cautiously among the Westerners due to lack of trust caused by cattle farmers and other economic threats that have limited their possession of native land. "You can see their dissatisfaction with the current state and their feeling of inferiority compared to non-indigenous groups" (3). They do, however, trade with the westerners. The traded goods include corn, wild berries, hammocks, and wild parrots for clothing, tools, rice and salt. They rarely hunt for animal skins to trade but instead catch wild parrots and gather wild berries (3).

1.5 Ecology: The Macaguán use migratory agriculture. The soil is not suitable for many crops. "Only forty per cent of the land is available to the Macaguáns and is suitable for agriculture" (3). A majority of land is covered by marshes and lagoons. They also have problems with flooding during the winter. They must move and seed in different locations every two or three harvest seasons. They also hunt and fish for a more predictable food source (3).

1.6 Population size and home/family size: The population of native Macaguán speakers is 300 (2008) (1). A nuclear family for the Macaguán consists of a father, mother, and children. The average size for a family consists of six people and all live within the same house. Large homes can sometimes include three families and can consist of blood relatives or families that have no kinship relation (3).

## **2. Economy**

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staples: The foods grown and obtained by the Macaguán are mainly bananas, maize, and corn. Depending on the time of year they will also grow sweet cassava and sweet potatoes (3).
- 2.2 Main protein sources: The Macaguán does a majority of their hunting in the winter, during the high flood season that prevents crop growth. The common game is armadillos, pig, deer, wild birds, and turtles. Fish is another main food source consumed by the Macaguán. Fishing is more valuable during the summer months and the rivers supply a good variety of different types of fish.
- 2.3 Weapons: The Macaguán are skilled with the bow and flechas (arrows). They have different types of flechas for each animal they hunt. The flechas are made of a durable wood called 'Sarare' and is whittled down to a 25 centimeter stick adorned with paint and polish. The tip of the flechas is a metal or iron arrow woven securely to the wooden stick with rope, wire, or nylon. Depending on what materials they obtain through trading depends on what materials are used for making the flechas. They also use machetes, spears, and knives for hunting, food preparation, crafts, and building huts. They use harpoons for fishing and are assembled fairly similarly to the flechas (3).
- 2.4 Sexual division of production: Men do the majority of the hunting and fishing within their community. They are involved in building their huts, making weapons and any other labor intensive work. Men also deal with the trading among neighbors and westerners. Woman care for the younger children that are unable to start working. Young children are expected to help with the chores at an early age. Woman also tend to the crops, weave baskets and fans, prepare food, and also are expected to gather and transport goods when moving (3).
- 2.5 Land tenure: The Macaguán live a government granted area of land within the Northern portion of Colombia (3).
- 2.6 Handmade products: The Macaguán do very little artisan work. However they do produce clay bowls with handles used for grinding corn and yopo, a drug inhaled during singing and dancing rituals. The Macaguán woman weave baskets and fans out of royal palm birch and other fibrous plant material. They also make mosquito nets. The Macaguán own a limited amount of dishware that includes a bowl, spoons, and cups. When they are not able to use dishes they will improvise with hollowed out gourds (3).
- 2.7 Means of transportation: The Macaguán do most of their traveling on foot. Owning donkeys to help with transportation is rare but does occur occasionally. When traveling by water they use canoes built out of sturdy wood such as "Sarare." A tree is cut down and the canoes are hollowed out into a long narrow square shape. The tools used for building the canoes are machetes, axes, and knives (3).

## **3. Anthropometry**

- 3.1 Height: "The Macaguán are of medium height" (3).

## **4. Marriage**

4.1 Relationship customs: Men and women are chosen to be together at a young age. They grow up together and are usually a couple for several years before they officially join in marriage. Husbands and wives live together with their children. It is preferred that a marriage should take place between cousins. "Boys can marry the daughter of his mother's brother" (3).

4.2 Completed family size: A nuclear family is an average of six people, women usually have four surviving children in a lifetime. The Macaguán keep a tight knit family and are close with their extended family. It is expected of everyone in the family to care and help one another. If food is scarce members of the tribe will share their game and other goods. Any food acquired from the westerners is also shared among the family and extended relations (3).

4.3 Marriage Practices: In recent years they have adopted similar marriage customs from the westerners (3).

## **5. Warfare**

Internal warfare: The Macaguán mostly participate in internal warfare and the acts usually happen when they are intoxicated. The tribe will indulge in hallucinogenic drugs and fermented alcohol during ritualistic singing and dancing and fights will break out among them. "The palm wine, spirits and strong chicha are causing fights and problems between them; deaths, injuries, burning of houses and disagreements occur" (3).

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

5.1 Housing: The Macaguán build square huts that consist of four posts placed in the ground forming a box shape with horizontal pieces of wood placed across to make the walls. The roof is made of many palm leaves and is usually built underneath a tree for added protection and shade. Some materials vary due to trading and what is available. During the hot months of summer the huts will only consist of the four posts and a roof. The huts have dirt floors and within the huts are hammocks surrounded by mosquito nets to sleep in. If there is not enough hammocks for everyone, the others will sleep on the ground together (3).

5.2 Social Interaction: The Macaguán are very sociable people. They are conversationalist but have trouble communicating with outsiders due to their lack of understanding other languages. They are cheerful with one another and joke in a harmless fashion. At first meeting new people, they are timid but warm up quickly if they are trusted. The Macaguán will bond and use drugs with other surrounding groups and also trade with close neighbors and westerners (3).

## **6. Ceremonies/Substances/Beliefs**

6.1 Drugs: Narcotics are frequently used during ceremonial practices. The main drug is the 'yopo' which is ground up and snorted through a long wooden stick. 'Yopo' are extracted pod like beans from a native tree and can either be crushed and snorted or made into a drink. The drug has hallucinogenic properties that are said to be peaceful and calming for the user. "It seems that one of the main functions of inhaled yopo collectively, is the peaceful

social interaction between people from the other groups that come to visit" (3). Another drug that is commonly used is the 'yaje' which is a vine that is either chewed or mashed into a drink. If the drink sits and ferments it becomes stronger and more intoxicating. The 'yaje' gives a numbing, drunk feeling to the user and helps suppress hunger, insect bites, and disease. The palm wine is another drug used by the Macaguán. It is extracted from the palm and is collected in a cup to ferment. The palm wine is very sweet and produces a desired drunkenness. "We include here the palm wine and is quite used by this community. It has two purposes; to suppress hunger and to become drunk" (3) "It seems that sometimes the settlers give brandy to the indigenous tribe" (3). The trade usually occurs during the harvesting of corn and is the main material used in trading for the brandy. "The use of snuff and cigarettes is very popular in this tribe" (3).

6.2 Ceremonies: Dancing is a big part of the Macaguán's rituals and entertainment. "These dances are performed only when there is chicha, wine or anything intoxicating involved" (3). Everyone forms a circle and interlocks arms while dancing sideways in a large circle sing and drinking. These dances always last well into the night. (3) The songs sung during the dances are inspired by animals. The songs have connections to their hunts, the habits of the animals, and their relationships with their god and nature (3).

Death: The Macaguán bury their dead and have a small ceremony for the deceased. They believe that if a healthy individual dies without a known cause it was the devil that killed so he could feed. They fear the souls of the dead because it is believed that the souls also kill the living to feed. It is believed that a strong wind is caused by the 'breeze of spirit' and happens when the soul is upset. This is deemed dangerous and one should take precautions from the 'breeze of spirit' (3).

## **7. Adornment/Dress**

Jewelry: Some items that are obtained through trade are clothing, rings, and watches. The Macaguán people enjoy the luxuries of western society. Women also make necklaces out of beads, pierced coins, animal teeth, and the scales and teeth of the payara fish. They also use feathers, squirrel tails, and tufts from other animals and sew them into their clothing. Men also use colorful beads and animal skins within their wardrobe as well.

Clothing: Much of their clothing comes from trading with the westerners and is now a common dress for the Macaguán. Many men and women have two changes of clothing and they save the nicest set for when they visit neighboring groups and westerners. Women always stay dressed in their 'western clothes' but men will still wear a loan cloth while hunting and working. Children are first put in loan clothes until an outfit can be acquired for them (3).

## 8. Other interesting cultural features:

- A problem within the Macaguán community is cleanliness. Food preparation is done in a very messy fashion and animals are not properly cleaned before cooking (3).
- "The Macaguán seem to pay much attention and give great importance to odors" (3). They will not hunt or consume certain species of birds and animals because they believe they smell bad (3).
- They use soaps and perfumes to prevent bad odor (3).

## Numbered references

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