

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Miraña, Witotoan, Proto-Bora-Muinane [1].

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

Boa

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

71°50' W and 0°55' S [3].

1.4 Brief history:

The Miraña are classified as belonging to the Bora linguistic family [1]. Pre-contact, they lived: “in the middle and upper catchment areas of the Cahuinarí River (a main tributary of the Caquetá River)”, but evacuated the area when contact was first made with non-indigenous traders [3,216]. In the 17th century, the Miraña experienced a devastating loss of population. Many were captured by Portuguese slave raiders in order to extract cacao, zarzaparrilla, and cotton [3]. The Miraña community was also part of the rubber extraction community in the 19th and 20th centuries.

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

The Miraña are just one group of many who have been classified as “People of the Center”, or “gente del centro”, who share many cultural practices. Many of these groups speak linguistically distant languages: “Two of these groups speak languages of the Boran branch of the Witotoan linguistic family (Muinane and Miraña, along with its dialectal variant Bora), three further languages belong to a different branch of Witotoan (Witoto proper, Ocaina, and the almost extinct Nonuya). The remaining two languages are the linguistic isolate Andoke and the Arawak language Resígaro.” [2,19]. Additionally, the Miraña have begun interacting with local merchants, trading products of the forest for various goods [2]. Additionally, “they live in officially recognized reserves, where they have community schools and basic medical facilities. They take part in projects with governmental and non-governmental organizations, to the extent that this is possible in a situation that is characterized by the occasional military activities of guerrillas and the army as well as the periodic presence of the cocaine mafia and illegal gold miners.” [2,20].

1.6 Ecology:

The Miraña occupy an area that is classified as a tropical forest and: “is still largely covered by so-called virgin forests that lack signs of recent human intervention.” [3,216]. Furthermore, the land consists of: “well drained floodplains, swampy areas (including permanently inundated backswamps and basins in floodplains or fluvial terraces), areas covered with white-sand soils (found on high terraces of the Caquetá River and in less dissected parts of the Tertiary sedimentary plain), and well drained uplands (which are never flooded by river water).” [3,216]. The area averages 3060mm of rainfall a year [3]. The mean average temperature is 27.5 degrees Celsius [3].

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

There are roughly 700 Miraña Indians at present [3][4]. They inhabit four known villages along the river basin of the Caquetá River: “between 120 and 200 km east of Araracuara, four Miraña settlements are found: San Francisco, Caño Solarte, Puerto Remanso del Tigre, and Mariamanteca. The territory claimed by the Miraña community as a whole includes substantial parts of two indigenous reserves in Colombian Amazonia (Predio Putumayo and Mirití-Parana).” [3,216].

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Manioc and banana are common carbohydrate sources [2].

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Tapir, fish and peccary are the major protein sources for the Miraña [2][6].

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?

Bow and arrow technologies as well as the use of the blowgun are known to these people [3].

2.4 Food storage:

The Miraña make extensive use of baskets, and ceramics to store food [3].

2.5 Sexual division of production:

The Miraña practice slash-and-burn horticulture [3]. Typically, hunting, fishing, cacao cultivation, tending to tobacco patches, and harvesting medicinal plants from the forest [3]. Women focus on “nursing children, preparation of food, and cultivation of herbs and crops in home-gardens and chagras (small fields).”[3,216]

2.6 Land tenure:

Modern Miraña claim portions of two reserves: “The territory claimed by the Miraña community as a whole includes substantial parts of two indigenous reserves in Colombian Amazonia (Predio Putumayo and Mirití-Parana).” [3,216].

2.7 Ceramics:

These people do utilize ceramics [3].

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Sharing patterns are not present in the ethnographic record.

2.9 Food taboos:

Food taboos are not present in the ethnographic record.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Modern Miraña use motorboats to access nearby towns [2].

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Anthropometrics are not present in the ethnographic record.

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Anthropometrics are not present in the ethnographic record.

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Exact age at menarche is not reported in the literature.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Age at first birth is not reported.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Family size is not reported.

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Inter-birth interval is not emphasized in the literature.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

This is not present in the ethnographic record.

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorce is not mentioned in the literature.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Polygyny is not mentioned in the literature.

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

Brides are sold, in some instances, to pay off debts: "Exchange of women is a means of paying "debts" (murders, etc.)" [5, 31].

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Inheritance is not mentioned in the literature.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

I was unable to find any information related to parent-offspring conflict.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Homosexuality is not mentioned.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

There is a pattern of endogamy: "Marriage alliances are also increasingly interethnic in groups which were, according to ethnological literature and people's own version, endogamic." [5,31]. However, : "Exogamic marriages have become mandatory for the smaller groups, in order to avoid incest" [5,76].

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

Partible paternity is not mentioned in the literature.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

Sexual practices in general are missing from the ethnographic record.

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

Sexual practices in general are missing from the ethnographic record.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Sexual practices in general are missing from the ethnographic record.

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

There is no preferential category for a spouse [7].

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Sexual practices in general are missing from the ethnographic record.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

This is not mentioned in the literature.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

There is no record of this in the ethnographic record.

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

This is not present in the ethnographic record.

4.22 Evidence for couvades

Couvades are not mentioned in the literature.

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

Partible paternity and the potential for multiple fathers is not present in the ethnographic record.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

Incest avoidance is very strict, and is detailed in question 4.26. Aside from these avoidance rules, children are taught to practice the utmost respect for their elders. This includes referring to elders by their patrilineal clan name, and not personal names [5].

4.24 Joking relationships?

Joking relationships are not mentioned in the literature.

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Descent is tracked bilaterally. "Likewise, husband and wife do not conceive of each other as affines; they do not use affinal terms, or kin terms of any sort, to address each other. The groups to which each one belongs do become affines after marriage, and their children are kin of each of those groups." [5,270].

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Incest avoidance rules are stressed at an early age, and are quite extensive: "The first rule of behavior is to be able to recognize the nonmarriageable relatives: for a man, his sister; for a woman, her brother." [5,123]. Additionally: "Sisters and brothers include all agnatic cousins: these are non-marriageable relatives. In the relations with agnatic relatives the main concern is the discrimination of nonmarriageable relatives. In the relations with parents and grandparents and with uterine relatives the concern is with recognition and respect." [5,123-124].

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

There is no mention of a formal marriage ceremony in the literature.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

Names are dependent on patrilineal clan affiliation: "Every patrilineage or clan carries a name which differentiates it from all others. What distinguishes one patrilineage from another constitutes a whole semantic field, which includes the name of the clan, the name of ancestors, a set of personal names, an emblem, and other elements which are referred to in songs, proverbs and riddles." [5,79].

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Marriage rules are relatively lax: "The only marriage prohibitions of the Miraña in the Amazonian region of Colombia concern the category of classificatory siblings." [7,612]. Additionally, "the future spouse must not belong to one of the four patrilineages of the grandparents." [7,612].

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

Arranged marriage is practiced, as often brides are "sold" to repay a family debt [5].

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

This is not present in the literature.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Exact percentages of deaths due to warfare are not present in the ethnographic record.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Outgroup warfare is predatory in nature [6]. However, the extent to which these people are still violent to their neighbors is debated [5]. Ingroup violence is not mentioned.

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

Outgroup killing can be caused by predatory warfare [6]. Ingroup violence is not mentioned.

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

The Miraña are just one group within a large group of tribes, which call themselves "people of the center" [3][4][5]. These people live in special proximity, and share a number of cultural traits [3][5]. However, Miraña myths tell of periods of strife between the groups in past times [5]. These tales emphasize violent death, and ritual cannibalism [5]. Warfare among the Miraña in particular is predatory in nature [6].

4.18 Cannibalism?

Ritual consumption of prisoners of war was practiced in former times [5].

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Numeration of group size is not present in the ethnographic record.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

These people are sedentary [5].

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

Clan distinctions based on patrilineality dominate the political system of these people: "These lineages have a coherent territoriality. The residential units belonging to the same lineage are politically autonomous and there is no chief lineage that presides over the ensemble of units." [5,79].

5.4 Post marital residence:

Post marital residence is patrilocal: "The composition of such groups is established by a simple rule of residence: men reside with their parents, women reside with their husbands, that is, a rule of patrilocality for men and virilocality for women." [5,78].

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Territory is based on patrilineal clan distinction: "There are named lineages which are represented by just one maloca or residential unit, and there are others which extend over several malocas. These lineages have a coherent territoriality." [5,79].

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Evidence for social divisions is not discussed in the literature.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Joking relationships are not mentioned in the ethnographic record.

5.8 Village and house organization:

Residential units are organized around communal houses. “The residential unit is formed by two hierarchical groups of people: (a) the “masters of the house” (*jofo naani*), and (b) the “orphans” (*jaiéniki*). Ideally, a residential group lived under the same roof, a *maloca*, or communal house. Today, although *malocas* do exist, the members of a single residential unit might live in several clustered individual houses. A ‘settlement’ may be formed by one or more residential units as defined here.” [5,78]

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

At the center of each “residential unit”, is the *maloca*, or communal house [5]. These large structures hold a number of dance rituals, which occur throughout the “ceremonial career” [5]. Typically, each residential unit will have a ceremonial leader, who will invite other groups to the *maloca* to ritually exchange gifts, sing, and dance [5].

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Fibers from palm leaves are used to create hammocks for sleeping [3].

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

They are organized into patrilineal clans [2][3][5].

5.12 Trade:

The Miraña have begun taking part in the local market economy [1]. They go into the local towns of Araracuara and La Pedrera to sell “products of the rainforest”, and to buy sugar, clothes, and fishhooks [2,18].

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Social hierarchy is present, and is based on patrilineal clan association [5]. Those who lack a patrilineal clan affiliation are considered “orphans”, and are considered inferior: “The “orphans” are people who, without being in a relation of alliance with the group of masters, have come to live with it. They come from other residential units they had to leave due to the loss of their ceremonial chief or to the disintegration of the group caused by epidemics or war. They are servants and occupy a position of hierarchical inferiority in relation to the masters of the house. This group may also include eventual prisoners of war who, in former times, were ceremonially consumed.” [5,78].

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

Exact numbers on the time allocated to RCR are not present in the literature.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Each patrilineal clan has a leader of the communal house, known as the “master” of the *maloca* [5]. These individuals are in charge of performing dances and songs in the ritual cycle, or “ceremonial career” [5]. Additionally, “some communities nominate a ‘cacique’, or ‘traditional’ authority, usually a master of dance rituals, or the eldest person in the *cabildo* jurisdiction.” [5,82]. The Miraña also have shamans, who are imbued with healing capabilities, and the power to enter the spirit realm (facilitated through the use of tobacco, and coca) [5].

6.2 Stimulants:

Tobacco and pounded coca leaves are ingested in ritual contexts [5].

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

Passage rituals are not mentioned in the literature.

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

The “people of the center” share a creation myth: “The three gods Thunder-Jaguar, Eagle-Snake-of-White-Feathers (Ñé’ñéfi), and Big-StripedCayman became the three “Hérons”: Heron-of-the-Mouth-of-the-River, Heron-of-the-Center, and Heron-of-the-Source-of-the-River. Source, Center and Mouth are the main positions of a strongly uni-dimensional cosmic topology. The groups of upriver (Uitoto or, on another level, Colombians), the center (Andoque or, on another level, Indians), and downriver (Miraña or, on another level, Brazilians) are manifestations of these gods.” [5,108].

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The Miraña use wooden flutes and drums in their rituals dances and songs within the *maloca* [5]. They also have access to local town markets, and make use of steel tools, particularly axes [5].

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Only men may be the head, or master of the *maloca* rituals [5]. This position is of great prestige with reference to individual standing within the patrilineal clan.

6.8 Missionary effect:

A number of nearby mission towns were established in the Caquetá-Putumayo river basins in the 17th and 18th centuries [5]. While the Miraña have lost much of their cultural heritage to acculturation, ritual practices have remained largely unscathed, particularly their traditional song and dance ceremonies that take place in the *maloca* [5].

6.9 RCR revival:

The Miraña have been steadfast in retaining their ritual and ceremonial practices. As such, a question dealing with the “revival” of these practices is not applicable.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

Afterlife beliefs are not mentioned in the literature.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

This taboo is not mentioned in the literature.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Teknonymy is not mentioned.

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

The Miraña believe in a form of animism, they: “claim that humanity is exposed to aggression from animal spirits” [6]. Death caused by disease, accident, or other means may be attributed to malevolent animal spirits. In these cases, the Miraña may seek vengeance, killing living animals of the type of animal responsible for the death [6]. Additionally, “The Miraña distinguish animals classed as plants from those classed as persons. The first are the products of the gardens of the gods and not vectors of disease, while the second may well be harmful to humans. The problem lies in determining which animals are which. Small birds and rodents are plants by definition, whereas large predators are always persons. Located between these two categories are the most commonly hunted prey, which may be either plants or persons.” [6].

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

A number of plant species are harvested for use in body paint, these include: “Goupia glabra Aubl., Alibertia hispida Ducke, Chimarrhis gentryana Delprete, Genipa americana L.” [3,229].

7.2 Piercings:

The Miraña pierce their noses in an attempt to resemble vampire bats: “In the Amazon, in southeastern Colombia, during the 18th century, the Carijonas called themselves Huaque, or Bat-men, and projected an image of terror among their enemies and neighbours. On their shields they painted images of jaguars or possibly bats, which terrified their adversaries. Their neighbours – and enemies – the Mirañas from south of the River Caquetá, deformed their nostrils for the same reason– to resemble real vampire bats” [8].

7.3 Haircut:

Descriptions of haircuts are not provided in the ethnographic record.

7.4 Scarification:

Scarification is not mentioned in the literature.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

Descriptions of adornment, aside from piercings and body paint are not present in the ethnographic record.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

This is not highlighted in the literature.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Sex differences are not highlighted in the literature.

7.8 Missionary effect:

A number of nearby mission towns were established in the Caquetá-Putumayo river basins in the 17th and 18th centuries [5]. While the Miraña have lost much of their cultural heritage to acculturation, ritual practices have remained largely unscathed, particularly their traditional song and dance ceremonies that take place in the maloca [5].

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

The Miraña have been steadfast in retaining their ritual and ceremonial practices. As such, a question dealing with the “revival” of these practices is not applicable.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Kinship is bilateral: “Belonging to a named lineage is determined by patrilineal filiation. Kinship, on the other hand, is bilateral; it is transmitted through the paternal and maternal sides. Thus, when a man and an unrelated woman marry, all the relatives of each will be relatives of their descendants. This is a system that continually produces relatives: unrelated kin groups are continually made kin by alliance through the generations.” [5, 80].

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

This is absent in the literature.

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

Kinship terminology follows the Eskimo-Hawaiian pattern [7].

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. M.Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles Fennig (eds.)

2013 Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Seventeenth edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

2. Seifart, Frank

2005 The Structure and Use of Shape-Based Noun Classes in Miraña. Ph.D. dissertation, Universiteit Nijmegen.

3. Sánchez, M., et al.

2005 A stem-based ethnobotanical quantification of potential rain forest use by Mirañas in NW Amazonia. *Ethnobotany Research & Applications* 3 (2008): 215-230.

4. Karadimas, Dimitri
2005 La Raison du Corps: Idéologie du Corps et Représentation de l'Environnement Chez les Miraña d'Amazonie
Colombienne. Éditions Peeters, Paris.
5. Echeverri, Juan Alvaro.
1997 "The people of the center of the world." A study in culture, history and orality in the Colombian Amazon. New York:
New School for Social Research, Faculty of Political and Social Science.
6. Fausto, Carlos
2007 Feasting on People: Eating Animals and Humans in Amazonia. *Current Anthropology*, Vol.48, No.4.
7. Karadimas, Dimitri
2000 Parenté et Alliance Miraña. *L'Homme*, No.154/155, pp. 599-612.
8. Pineda, Roberto C.
2005 "The Labyrinth of Identity". *ORO DE COLOMBIA*:95.