

**Paul Stockdell**

## **1. Description**

**1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:** Pilagá (Pilaca), Guaykuruan (Guaicuruan) (1)

**1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):** plg (1)

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** Central and western Formosa Province, Bermejo and Pilcomayo river valleys; Chaco and Salta Provinces, Argentina and Chile (1)

**1.4 Brief history:**

**1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:** Influence from the outside world can be seen in several instances. Henry describes that, "In 1933 the Pilagá had been attacked by the Argentine army. A number were killed, and many were driven from their homes to a point about 50 miles west of the sites of their original homes" (2, pg. 6). The Pilagá have also been slightly influenced by the outside economy. Henry describes how "roughly half the population went to work on the sugar clan plantations for about six months. This temporary migration took many of the most economically productive Pilagá away from the village, thus producing a disproportion between producers and the nonproducers" (2, pg. 6-7).

**1.6 Ecology:**

**1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:** Population 4,000 (1). Village sizes range from 50 to 200 persons (2).

## **2. Economy**

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):** Wild Fruits. "Although they have a few small gardens, they depend for most of their food on wild fruits and fish" (3, pg. 8).

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:** Fish. Refer to answer 2.1.

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:** No mention of preferred weapons made.

**2.4 Food storage:** No data found

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** Men are seen as much more important when it comes to economic standing. "The women provide only the wild fruits, while the men supply the much more highly valued fish, game and cultivated vegetables" (3, pg. 10).

**2.6 Land tenure:** Mostly gather only wild fruits and fish. "a few little patches of land are held only by the few older men who care to trouble themselves with gardening" (3, pg. 11).

**2.7 Ceramics:** Ceramics are briefly mentioned as the work of women but no detail about the ceramics found. "His wife is a little old woman who made the first pots and introduced the art of ceramics to women" (4, pg. 5). The "his" that it is referred to is a mythical hero of the Pilagá and further, "the most desirable wealth is not pots and ponchos – objects of female manufacture" (3, pg. 10).

**2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:** The Pilagá share food with members of their household unit. It can get very complicated on who gives who food and how much this person gave to everyone versus how much they received and so on. It can cause a lot of stress and tension in the group. Henry goes into extreme detail in his article *The Economics of Pilagá Food Distribution*. (2)

**2.9 Food taboos:** Food taboos are mentioned, but no specifics given.

**2.10 Canoes/watercraft?** No data found

### **3. Anthropometry**

**3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):** No data found

**3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):** No data found

### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

**4.1 Age at menarche (f):** No data found

**4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):** No data found

**4.3 Completed family size (m and f):** No data found

**4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):** No exact information is given but there is an intercourse-taboo for women from the time they are six months pregnant until her baby can run about. "For the Pilagá believe that were a woman to have intercourse when she was 'big' the child in her womb would die; and if she were to give birth to a second child before the first could run about then the first child would die" (3, pg. 13).

**4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):** No data found

**4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:** No data found

**4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:** Polygamy in general is not something that happens very often in Pilagá society, partly due to lower levels of women to men and partly due to women not being excepting of a co-wife. "An important factor in female opposition to a co-wife may be seen in the matrilineal residence rule. Since the small population of Pilagá villages makes it very unlikely that a man could find two wives in one village," (3, pg. 13).

**4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:** No data found

**4.9 Inheritance patterns:** No data found

**4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:** A new baby is initially met with great warmth, but as time passes it is gradually rejected (3, pg. 15). By the time a third sibling is born the first gets practically no attention at all beyond receiving the necessities of life (3, pg. 15). Warmth does not develop between fathers and children (3, pg. 17).

**4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:** No data found

**4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):** Exogamy. "Because of incest taboos a woman usually chooses her husband from a different village" (3, pg. 11)

**4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?** No direct information on this but the evidence suggests that there was no partible paternity as there are a lot of insecurities between married young people and insecurities would lead to jealousy if there was another man involved with one’s wife. They also practice matrilineal residency and there is incest taboos.

**4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”):** “Pilagá women are even deprived of whatever consideration they might receive as child-bearers, for it is believed that the man’s ejaculation projects a complete homunculus into the woman, and that it merely grows in her until it is big enough to come out.” (3, pg. 10)

**4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?** Possible, as it is believed that the man’s ejaculation projects a complete homunculus into the woman (see 4.14), but not likely as there is an intercourse taboo after the female reaches 6 months pregnant (see 4.4) so there would be no more build-up of semen after 6 months.

**4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape:** No data found

**4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin):** Not family

**4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?:** Females and males enjoy sexual freedom when they are young before they are married. “Although there is premarital sexual freedom...” (3, pg. 12)

**4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring:** No evidence given but not likely as it says a woman “may be willing to let her husband have affairs, she will fight both her husband and the other woman if an affair becomes serious” (3, pg. 14). This suggests against giving gifts to extramarital partners.

**4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?:** No data found.

**4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females:** An exact ratio is not given but there are more adult males than adult females. “The young men are eager to marry because, since they outnumber the young women, they find it difficult to obtain sexual partners.” (3, pg. 12)

**4.22 Evidence for couvades:** No data found

**4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older):** Nothing directly said on subject but it is mentioned that young men and young women get married.

**4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?:** Incest taboos

**4.24 Joking relationships? :** No data found

**4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations:** No direct information found but it is mentioned that, “the wife has no property rights of any importance and no great personal backing in her own village,” (3, pg. 11) so most likely not matrilineal.

**4.26 Incest avoidance rules:** Incest taboos

**4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?:** No data found

**4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?:** No data found.

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

Outside of the community. See question 4.12.

**4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?** : No direct information given. It appears to be up to the people who are getting married to decide who and when they want to get married. “Young men are eager to marry...young women, on the other hand, never lack for lovers and are not so eager to marry as young men. Yet ultimately they must marry in order to avoid becoming beggars” (3, pg. 10).

**4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:** No data found

#### **4. Warfare/homicide**

**4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:** No data found on warfare. Warfare is briefly mentioned though, “the woman has no part in that which above all things is the way to prestige in Pilagá culture – warfare” (3).

**4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:** No data found

**4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:** No data found

**4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):** No data found

**4.18 Cannibalism?** No data found

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

**5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:** Village size ranges from 50 to 200 persons (2, pg. 2).

**5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):** No data found

**5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):** Each village traditionally has one chief, the heart of village organization (2, pg. 6).

**5.4 Post marital residence:** Matrilocal (3, pg. 11).

**5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):** No data found

**5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):** Women are seen pretty much as second class citizens to the men. Women don't provide the more valued food like men do (refer to 2.5), don't have any consideration given to them as child-bearers (refer to 4.14), and cannot gain prestige through warfare (refer to second 4.14). As children age they are seen as unimportant until they begin to take their place in adult economic activity (3, pg. 17).

**5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:** No data found

**5.8 Village and house organization:** “Villages are made up of families, whose members stand in varying degrees of kingship, some close, genealogically speaking, some so remote as to belong in the category of ‘created ‘tie’” (2, pg. 2). “Pilagá houses in the past have been very large. Sometimes an entire village, with its loosely united families, all lived under one roof” (2, pg. 2). Now the dwellings are smaller but placed so close together you can hardly squeeze between them (2, pg. 2).

**5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):** No data found

**5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?** No data found

**5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:** Villages and households organized into family groups.

**5.12 Trade:** No data found

**5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?** There is the rank of Chief but it does not appear as though there are any other distinctions. "The Pilagá have no device for giving status or prestige to anyone below the rank of chief" (3, pg. 16).

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

**6 Time allocation to RCR:** No data found

**6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):** Shamans

**6.2 Stimulants:** No data found

**6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):** "Girls at their first menses are secluded in their hut while dances and incantations are performed to protect them from evil influences" (4, pg. 15). There are no initiation rites for boys (4, pg. 15).

**6.4 Other rituals:** No data found

**6.5 Myths (Creation):** The Pilagá have many different origin myths ranging from the origin of women to the origin of fire. (4, pgs. 100-120)

**6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):** No data found

**6.7 Sex differences in RCR:** Girls have a coming of age rite but boys do not. Refer to 6.3

**6.8 Missionary effect:** No data found

**6.9 RCR revival:** No data found

**6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:** No data found

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?** No data found

**6.12 Is there teknonymy?** No data found

**6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):** The religion practiced by the Pilagá is an animism religion. Animism is basically the belief that natural objects, natural phenomena, and the universe itself possess souls. For instance, the Pilagá describe rain as, "a 'one-eyed man,' servant of the spirits, who lives toward the northwest" (4, pg. 26), while "Lightning is an old hairy woman" (4, pg. 27).

## **7. Adornment**

**7.1 Body paint:** The Pilagá women tattoo their faces. "That tattooing of the faces of the females starts at the aged of eight and continues at intervals of two years" (5).

**7.2 Piercings:** Men are characterized by their elongated earlobes. “The ear is pierced with a sword-like needle, a piece of grass is inserted into the wound, which, when it has become cicatrized, is distended by addition of more grasses, till it is able to hold small sticks, and finally, an ornament of one-inch radius” (5).

**7.3 Haircut:** No data found

**7.4 Scarification:** No data found

**7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):** No data found

**7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:** No data found

**7.7 Sex differences in adornment:** The females tattoo their faces and the males pierce and elongate their earlobes. See 7.1 and 7.2 respectfully

**7.8 Missionary effect:** No data found

**7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:** No data found

## **8. Kinship systems**

**8.1 Sibling classification system:** No data found

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:** No data found

**8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):** “Although Pilagá housemates call one another by relationship terms, detailed genealogical analysis of household populations shows that as many as half the members of any one household may not be relatives within the strict genealogical definition of the term” (3, pg. 8).

**9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):** There is a higher ratio of males to females as female infanticide used to take place. Females were seen as “weak things” and were undesirable for parents to have (3, pg. 10).

## **Numbered references: Order of Appearance**

1. Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Web. 4 April 2013
2. Henry, Jules. *The Economics of Pilagá Food Distribution*. *American Anthropologist*. 1951. Online.
3. Henry, Jules and Zunia Henry. *Doll Play of Pilagá Indian Children: an experimental and field analysis of the behavior of the Pilagá Indian children*. New York: American Orthopsychiatric Association, Inc. 1944. Online
4. Métraux, Alfred. *Myths of the Toba and Pilagá Indians of the Gran Choc*. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society. 1946. Online.
5. Cox, Alfred. “The Pilagá Indians of the Gran Chaco, N. Argentina.” *Man* Apr. 1940: 57. Online.