

## Jonathan Parker

### 1. Description

#### 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

The Warao are a language isolate group whose language is taught at the university level. (1)

#### 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): [wba] (1)

#### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Warao tribes are located in the Orinoco Delta in eastern Venezuela. Latitude: 8°20`-10° N, longitude 60°30`-62°30` W. (2)

#### 1.4 Brief history:

The Warao tribes have occupied the Orinoco Delta since prehistoric times and have enjoyed the protection of their inaccessible environment of mangrove swamps and river mazes. (2)

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

With a circumstance "owing to Criollo and Mission influences the headman has become known as kabitana whereas the office of a kobenahoro of a subtribe is held by a band headman of considerable native stature." (2) These roles have been superimposed by outsiders because in traditional Warao culture the society is sharply segregated with an elite of elders, patriarchs or chiefs, and a class of workers.

#### 1.6 Ecology:

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

### 2. Economy

#### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Manioc.

#### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

The Warao hunt fish, crab, reptilians, rodents and birds, but neglect larger game animals although the manatee is also eaten. The Warao are of few South American tribes to exploit the moriche (*Mauritia flexuosa*) in a large scale. They do this because the on top of "the abundance of starch, the moriche palm indirectly provides protein in the form of palm borer larvae." (2)

#### 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?

The Warao traditionally used bows and arrows for hunting, but with outside contact metal instruments have become available.

#### 2.4 Food storage:

In the present Warao culture "food and leftovers are stored in baskets hanging from the cross beams of houses." (2)

#### 2.5 Sexual division of production:

#### 2.6 Land tenure: No data.

#### 2.7 Ceramics:

The material culture of the Warao is relatively simple and thus they lack pottery. (2) The Warao rely on calabashes and imported metal pots for containers for liquids and on a variety of basketry for storage of solids.

#### 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

#### 2.9 Food taboos:

#### 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

The Warao "excel at canoe making and spend much of their lives in their multipurpose boats." (2) After the hammock the canoe is the single most important product in the Warao material culture. The name Warao designates, specifically, a single person and, generically, the entire tribe. The word is derived from "wa," which means canoe and "arao," which means owner. (2)

### 3. Anthropometry

#### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Age groups:

15-19: 156.6 +/- 4.1

20-24: 156.6 +/- 2.8

25-29: 158.0 +/- 5.2

30-34: 159.1 +/- 3.6

35-39: 157.2 +/- 4.4

40+: 155.2 +/- 3.3

#### 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Age groups: (kilograms)

15-19: 52.4 +/- 5.1

20-24: 55.2 +/- 2.9

25-29: 58.1 +/- 2.9

30-34: 58.8 +/- 3.6

35-39: 58.8 +/- 5.6

40+: 57.4 +/- 8.0

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

#### 4.1 Age at menarche (f): No data.

#### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): No data.

#### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): No data.

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): No data.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Warao girls become marriageable once they pass through an initiation ceremony following the onset of menstruation. (2)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: No data.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: No data. But some non-sororal polygyny.

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

Bride price comes in the form of service paid with the labor of the husband. "Generalmente, cuando el joven Warao se casa, queda obligado a cambiar de residencia y a trabajar en todas las tareas masculinas del poblado de los padres de su mujer." (3) "Generally, when a young Warao man marries, he is obliged to change his residence and to work in all the masculine tasks of the village of the parents of his wife.

4.9 Inheritance patterns: No data.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: No data.

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

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Within the band system, there is a tendency for exogamy, and an "incline toward the formation of matrilineal alliances among band members of the same subtribe." (2)

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

Warao do have somewhat of a connection with partible paternity, but the literature was unavailable. For more info see: Beckerman, Stephen, and Paul Valentine. *Cultures of Multiple Fathers: The Theory and Practice of Partible Paternity in Lowland South America*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2002. Print.

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)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape No data.

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

The Warao prefer to not marry cousins, but will marry within their subtribes, so occasionally this can occur.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No data.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring No data.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

The care of children is done so by the women of the Warao. "Cuando muere uno de los cónyuges . el otro conserva junto a los hijos las exiguas pertenencias de la familia nuclear. Si ambos esposos mueren, los niños huérfanos quedan bajo los cuidados bien de la abuela o de alguna de las tias uterinas." (3) When one of the married couples die, the other conserves the children along side meager possessions of the nuclear family. If both die, then the children go to the grandmother or related aunts.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: No data.

4.22 Evidence for couvades: No data.

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): No data.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? No data.

4.24 Joking relationships? No data.

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: No data.

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: No data.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? No data.

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

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

The Warao prefer to marry within their subtribe or within their band.

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

Warao marriages are arranged by the parents who do so for work that the future husband will perform for the family.

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

## **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: No data.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: No data.

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

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

4.18 Cannibalism: No data.

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

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

The Warao are organized into subtribes, which consist of several bands that can range from 25 to 60 members. (2)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): No data.

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

The political pattern of the Warao is of bands and subtribes that have headman. (2)

5.4 Post marital residence:

Once married, the man will move in with his wife's family. "Hay una tendencia tradicional a la matrilocalidad de la residencia postmatrimonial." (3) There exists a matrilocality tendency for the post-marital residence.

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

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): No data.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: No data.

5.8 Village and house organization:

Nuclear families and marry in son-in-laws will share the same physical household. "Dwelling houses often accommodate several nuclear families of one extended family." (2)

5.9 Specialized village structures (men's houses):

A house type that is not found in many other cultures is the women's menstruation house. "The menstruation house, where women isolate themselves for the duration of their menstrual periods, is a special structure found in traditional Warao settlements." (2) There also exists a temple where the shamans keep their religious paraphernalia.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

The Warao sleep in hammocks. (2)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Band and subtribes.

5.12 Trade:

The Warao have contact with outsiders whom they can trade food for goods such as metal pots, glass beads and metal tools.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? No data.

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

6 Time allocation to RCR: No data.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

The religious leaders of the Warao are broken up into "three different kinds of religious practitioners, the priest-shaman, the white shaman and the black shaman." (2)

6.2 Stimulants: No data.

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

There is reference to female initiation rituals, but no data was found to explain what these rituals are.

6.4 Other rituals: No data.

6.5 Myths (Creation):

The creation myth says that the Warao came from the sky. One day an Indian named Good-(shooting) arm went hunting on earth for game animals. He shot his arrow and missed, but when he went to retrieve his arrow he found lots of vegetables and other foods. He returned to the sky and told the other Warao. They decided to go to this place and from there they discovered how life worked. (4)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The music of the Warao has been heavily studied. For more information see: Olsen, Dale A. Music of the Warao of Venezuela: Song People of the Rain Forest. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1996. Print

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: No data.

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival: No data.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

The Warao believes that even after a person dies they will always be a Warao. The Warao religion states that the Warao, their culture, and their society "are all expressions of a continuous and intensive relationship between the Warao on this earth and his ancestral spirits and gods in heaven." (2)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

Once a Warao has died and is deified into the spiritual pantheon, their personal name is never mentioned "and his individuality is absorbed in the amorphous choir of ancestral spirits." (2)

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No data.

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

The religion of the Warao is deism and ancestor worship. Approximately a year after the deceased has been buried; their bones are dug up and then deified into the tribal pantheon. "The Warao have an extremely complex cosmology and much of the individual's life is spent fulfilling mankind's role in a partnership with a pantheon of Supernaturals." (2) The Warao take care of these spirits by feeding them tobacco and offers of sago. Their belief is that "mankind obtains from the Supernaturals blessings of health, longevity, and all the other benefits mortals need and crave." (2)

## **7. Adornment**

7.1 Body paint:

Male adolescents and young men drew their eyebrows with straight red lines and painted their cheeks with red dashes and dots," but this is not very common anymore. (2) Although, women still paint their faces with onoto dye.

7.2 Piercings: No data.

7.3 Haircut:

"Men cut their hair as short as Criollos do. Women let their hair hang long in the back with bangs in front." (2)

7.4 Scarification: No data.

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

“Depending on the occasion, they wore bast ribbons with tassels around the head, torso, biceps, wrists, upper legs, and ankles, and donned necklaces of jaguar bones and teeth, seeds, glass beads and large silver coins.” (2)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: No data.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

“Traditional Warao dress was scant, consisting of a waist string and fiber loincloth for both sexes. Today, men wear a shirt and trousers held with a belt. Women wear handmade, ankle-length sleeveless dresses.” (2)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: No data.

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system: No data.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Most marriages are monogamous, but sororal and nonsororal polygyny is also practiced. (2)

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):  
Hawaiian (2)

## **9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

### **Numbered references**

1. Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2013. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Seventeenth edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.
2. Wilbert, Johannes, and Miguel Layrisse. Demographic and Biological Studies of the Warao Indians. [Los Angeles]: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1980. Print.
3. Suárez, María Matilde. Los Warao: Indígenas Del Delta Del Orinoco. Caracas: Instituto Venezolano De Investigaciones Cientificas, 1968. Print.
4. Wilbert, Johannes, and Antonio Vaquero. Textos Folklóricos De Los Indios Waraos. Los Angeles: Latin American Center, University of California, 1969. Print.