

## 1. Description

**1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:** Yagua (They call themselves “Nihamwo”), Yagua (Alternately Llagua, Nijyamii Nikyejaada, Yahua, Yava, Yegua), Yaguan (13)

**1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):** yad (13)

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** “The Yagua live scattered in the tropical rain forest of the northwestern Amazon, between 2° and 5° S and 70° and 75° W, mainly in the northeast of the present-day department of Loreto, Peru, bordering Colombia and Brazil.” (1)

**1.4 Brief history:** “The earliest documented European contact with the Yagua was probably made by the Spanish explorer Francisco de Orellana in January 1542.” Then regular European contact beginning in 1686. (9) “The first documented contact with Whites was with the Jesuit Father Samuel Fritz in 1693...” Between 1880 and 1914, many Indians were forced to work for rubber gatherers during the peak of the rubber extraction. (2) “During the 1970s, there was a regrouping of the Yaguas, and the establishment of 'native communities', as the result of new government legislation.” (9)

**1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:** “Though this mission [at San Joaquin de los Omagua] was established to serve the Cambeba people, there was undoubtedly contact with the Yaguas as well. From the 17th century to the last half of the 19th century, contact with the Yaguas was mainly through Catholic missionaries (first the Jesuits and later the Franciscans).” (9) “Until 1768, the date of their expulsion, the Jesuits tried to "settle" the Yagua, mainly on the Amazon or on its main tributaries.” (They failed – “By the nineteenth century, most Yagua had abandoned the riverine settlements and settled again in their homeland.” (2)

## 1.6 Ecology:

**1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:** About 4000 native speakers— most live in the Loreto Province of Peru. (15) They live in a 200 by 350 mile long rectangle shaped area – most people are in the eastern half. “Communities of three or four hundred members have been reported. Most communities consist of three or four houses.” The distance between communities varies from half an hour to a few days, by trail or canoe. (10) “In 1982 the Yagua population was estimated at 3,300 living in about sixty villages of 10 to 180 inhabitants.” (1)

## 2. Economy

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):** Non-bitter manioc, and several types of plantain and banana. (4)

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:** “The primary game are tapir, peccaries, monkeys, large birds, and small rodents. Fishing—originally not very important in the interfluvial settlement period—has become an increasing source of protein for the riverine Yagua.” (4)

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:** “Formerly, blowguns and spears were used; nowadays most men hunt with shotguns, although blowguns have not been completely abandoned.” (4) “Even though shotguns are a much more efficient means of hunting, blowguns are still used for economic reasons. Shotgun cartridges are just too expensive.” (15)

## 2.4 Food storage:

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** “Women clean, eviscerate, and quarter smaller game, but men take care of larger game whose hides are saved for sale, barter, or for making drum heads.” Women make pottery, while men make cord for harpoons and rope for cattle. Both men and women fish. (10) “The fabrication of palm-fiber yarn, hammocks, and carrying and ammunition bags, as well as pottery are female activities, but men do most of the plaiting, carving, and house construction. The fabrication of musical instruments and the preparation of curare are also male specialties. Ritual and medicinal activities are mainly executed by men.” (4)

**2.6 Land tenure:** “There is no individual ownership of land or fields. Only the products of the latter are regarded as personal property. All land, whether cultivated or hunting ground, is the property of the community, although each hunter tends to choose his own hunting territory. Increasing pressure from the landless mestizo population, the government policy of peopling the border areas in order to guarantee national sovereignty, and the invasion of cattle ranchers and miners threaten Yagua territory. There is an urgent need for land demarcation and land titles. Unfortunately, only a few communities hold such titles and even then they are not granted so as to be respected by outsiders.” (4)

**2.7 Ceramics:** “Women make pottery by the coil method. Ashes of apacharama bark are mixed with the clay. Colored clays, which produce red and white finishes when baked, are smeared over the outside of pots destined for water or beer storage. Resin glaze is applied to the inside. Cooking pots are made without coloring. Drinking bowls are red on the outside and black on the inside. All pots are fired in the open by stacking kindling all around and over them.” (10)

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

**2.9 Food taboos:** “Only carnivores and carrion eaters are not considered edible game, but Yaguas observing food taboos avoid all but the blandest of meats.” There are many food taboos for a girl during her first menstruation. (10)

**2.10 Canoes/watercraft?:** Dugout canoes are used. (10)

## **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):** Females often have their first child at 14 or 15. (14)

**4.3 Completed family size (m and f):**

**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?:** “The bride’s father minimally requires that the groom make a garden for him, and the groom’s mother requires the bride to dig and plant cassava in a garden for her.” “After a period of bride service, in which the groom helps his father-in-law clear a field and perhaps build a house, there is a period of service by the bride with her mother-in-law in which she helps her plant a field and make hammocks.” (10)

**4.9 Inheritance patterns:** “Personal belongings—even those of great value like axes, machetes, or shotguns—were traditionally dumped in a deep area of the river or destroyed after their owner’s death; houses and fields were abandoned. Now these valuable items, as well as dogs and pets, are inherited by the children.” (6)

**4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:** “The relationship between mother and son is strong, as is that between a woman’s brother and her son; but no comparable relationships with the daughter have been observed. A mother feels personally responsible to see that her son obtains a wife, and her brother is personally responsible to see that the boy receives a proper education in jungle lore and manly arts. The mother’s brother takes this personal interest in the boy because he is a potential son-in-law who might provide bride service and establish permanent residence in his home.” (10)

**4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:**

**4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):** Marriage is clan-exogamous. (6)

**4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?:**

**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:**

**4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin):** “Cross-cousin marriage was once the rule and is still preferred by members of certain clans.” (6)

**4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?:**

**4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring:**

**4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?:**

**4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females:** 120.1 men for every 100 women. (12)

**4.22 Evidence for couvades:** “A mild form of couvade is observed by the husband in which he abstains from heavy work until the baby’s cord is healed lest the baby be endangered. The mother rests under a mosquito net for from five to seven days.” (10)

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

**4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?:**

**4.24 Joking relationships?:** “There is a joking relationship between actual and potential brothers-in-law and between actual and potential sisters-in-law, which becomes much more free and less inhibited when the relationship is formalized by marriage. When drunk,

brothers-in-law may start calling each other names, such as anteater's tail, and then march around with arms around each other's neck and singing a crazy song, ending up in front of the beer pot for a mutual drink." (10)

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

**4.26 Incest avoidance rules:**

**4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?:** "There is no special marriage ceremony other than a drinking party." (6) "If the union is approved, a drinking party is usually arranged at which the marriage is formalized. At this party the girl's father used to tie a large new hammock in place and make his daughter lie in it. Then the young man was brought and made to lie in it with her. The groom would have chosen a godfather and godmother for the occasion to counsel him and his bride on how they should live." (10)

**4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?:** "Yagua names are still used among many of the people, particularly those who have had less contact with the outside world. These names are associated in some way with their clan name. ... These names used to be given when the child was formally initiated into the clan at one of the Big Feasts. ... The children were given their Yagua names as two men pronounced a ritual formula over them, waving a sheaf of a special herb over their heads and attaching a sprig of it to each of the initiates." (10)

**4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?):** Marriage to members of other tribes or with non-Indians is rare. (6)

**4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?:** "Marriage used to be arranged by the parents for their children at any time from infancy on, but these arrangements were not binding if the children objected and strongly asserted themselves. If a marriage has not been prearranged, as most are not nowadays, a young man is supposed to let the girl of his choice know of his desire for her. She in turn tells her mother, So-and-so wants me. Her mother tells her father who then invites the young man for a discussion of the matter." (10)

**4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:**

**Warfare/homicide**

**4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:**

**4.15 Out-group vs in-group cause of violent death:**

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

**4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):** "Traditional enemies included the Omagua, the Ticuna, the Mayoruna, and the Witoto. There is evidence of past aggression between Yagua local groups and nonallied clans." "Today, although the Yagua are very peaceful, conflict within the group still occurs because of sorcery and jealousy. Conflicts with the outside world increasingly stem from problems of land tenure, since the Yagua—like other Amazonian natives—are under increasing pressure from the national society." (7)

**4.18 Cannibalism?:**

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

**5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:** 116 people. (12)

**5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):**

**5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):** "Formerly, Yagua society was divided into different groups according to sex and age. Today, the age groups are devoid of particular duties and only their names survive." Women and men are considered equal. In a group, a man (usually the oldest) is their "chief" of sorts – he's referred to as "master of the communal house," or sometimes "the one having two wives." (Prestige attached to polygyny?) (7)

**5.4 Post marital residence:** "... residence is matrilocal for the oldest daughter if the parents are living, and the remaining children reside at the location of greatest convenience and compatibility or of greatest influence and control between the families involved." (10) Also said to be patrilocal. (12)

**5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):**

**5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):**

**5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:** "There is a joking relationship between both actual and potential brothers-in-law and between actual and potential sisters-in-law." (5)

**5.8 Village and house organization:** Settlements were scattered and "traditionally consisted of one large, oval, beehive-shaped communal house inhabited by several related families. ... The roof of a characteristic house extended to the ground, which served as

the floor. Houses were often separated by considerable distances but were linked by a network of jungle trails.” These houses were built on high ground, but later influence to live near main rivers forced them to build individual huts on stilts to avoid flooding. (3) “In some of the houses a small section is walled in with palm staves for a bedroom and storage space for the owners. Otherwise, houses have no walls. A few of the people still use a communal house style kitchen, but most build a separate, smaller house, which is joined to the main house by a catwalk. The kitchen is often closed in, especially where the houses are easily accessible from public trails or waterways and strangers may drop in and want to take or buy any wild game or jungle produce that they see.” (10)

### **5.9 Specialized village structures (men's houses):**

**5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?:** They hang hammocks inside their houses – “Hammocks are the preferred spot for relaxing.” (10)

**5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:** Divided into patrilineal clans, which are associated with birds, plants, or land animals. “These three natural categories in which the clans are grouped, in turn, are organized in a pattern of exogamous halves.” Then each is divided into two sub-species clans. “... the families of the plant can exchange wives with the families of terrestrial animals.” (12) “Yagua society is divided into sixteen patrilineal, exogamous clans bearing animal or plant names. There is much evidence that formerly the lineages formed local groups, and probably a moiety division also existed. Between two local groups there was a strong relationship cemented by intermarriage. ... Today, because of the changing settlement patterns, the clans no longer form local units. The communities are instead formed by several lineage segments, although the preference for certain allied clans is still apparent.” (5)

**5.12 Trade:** Trade between Yagua groups and neighboring tribes was common. “Yagua traded mainly curare poison and hammocks. From the mestizos they obtained salt and iron goods. Today, other basic necessities (e.g., kerosene, gasoline, matches, firearms, soap, and cloth) are purchased by working for a patron or by selling animal hides and other products of the forest to the riverine population.” (4) Women trade for cloth to make wrap-around skirts, and some Yagua groups trade domesticated animals as well. (10)

### **5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?:**

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

### **6 Time allocation to RCR:**

**6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):** “Any individual can become a shaman through training by a master. This training lasts several months and includes the use of mind-altering drugs and the imparting of knowledge of the spiritual world and the techniques of diagnosis and healing of illness. Although shamans receive only limited material rewards, they exercise considerable influence as a result of their divinatory and healing roles and under special conditions can even become political leaders. A Yagua community without a shaman is still considered very vulnerable.” “Disease is thought to be caused by spiritual malevolence brought on by violating taboos and by sorcery. Curing techniques consist of extracting the foreign "element" by sucking it out and blowing tobacco smoke over the patient. Medicinal plants might be used later on and by anyone, but do not belong to the shaman's practice. Today, Western medicine is applied side by side with indigenous treatment.” (8)

### **6.2 Stimulants:**

**6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):** “A girl is isolated at her first menses, sometimes in a hut made for the occasion off in the jungle, sometimes in a specially constructed leaf bower in a part of the house. During her isolation of approximately ten days she is not supposed to see or be seen by any man. Her food and drink is taken to her by her mother or an elder female relative.” After this period, she is considered marriageable. “Boys used to be initiated into manhood on their first Big Feast Hunt. Now that these Big Feasts are rare, we do not know whether any functional substitute has been instituted or not.” (10)

**6.4 Other rituals:** “Formerly, the 'Big Feast' was the centerpiece of Yagua ceremonial life.” (8) One man is in charge of it, and must plant cassava just for the feast, plan to build or repair a communal house for the affair, order the making of several storage pots, drinking bowls, etc. (and traditions govern who can be asked to make these), and he must organize professional singing for the event. Two weeks before, several men go out and hunt for six days, and bring back game and “hunting spirits,” which there are five of. The spirits and hunters arrive and circle the house (which women, children, and uninitiated males must be inside), and beat the roof with sticks, each spirit making its specific sounds. During the first night there is singing and games, mixed with ritual. (10) “[The feast] took place only every few years, when the young male members of a clan got their names and were initiated to the powerful hunting spirits.” (8)

**6.5 Myths (Creation):** “The Sun is the son of Moon by the latter's sister. When Moon's incest was exposed, he went to the sky in shame. Sun went to join his father and become like him, immortal, while also providing heat and light. A nephew of Moon is a star often seen near the moon.” (10) “The Yagua consider a small number of mythical beings or mythical ancestors to be Supreme Beings who created the world.” (8)

**6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):** “Singing was an important part of traditional ceremonial life, and there were professional singers.” Pantomimes were also performed at the Big Feasts. (8)

**6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**

**6.8 Missionary effect:** Some time after 1945, SIL missionaries showed up and translated the Bible into the Yagua language. (9) “A village leader ... was very excited to hear the Scriptures being read in his own language. They have been well received in all the villages that have had a chance to receive them.” (11) Today, even though Christian beliefs are present, “the traditional religion survives or prevails among more isolated groups.” (8)

**6.9 RCR revival:**

**6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:** “Death is ascribed to the same origins as disease. Death is feared and so are the evil spirits connected with it. ... Dying means that the different souls that resided in different parts of the body travel to their respective levels in the mythological universe.” (8)

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?:**

**6.12 Is there teknonymy:**

**6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):** Animism. “The Yagua believe in supernatural forces animating all manifestations of nature.” Also believe in supreme beings which are “surrounded by numerous spirits animating the visible and invisible worlds.” (8)

**7. Adornment**

**7.1 Body paint:** “Body painting is practiced in the few locations where traditional dress of shredded palm-leaf skirts and woven chambira palm fibers are still in vogue and each clan has its own design. The Bat clan in particular uses annatto mixed with palm fruit oil and sometimes scented with vanilla for festive occasions. All exposed body parts are painted solid red when Bat clan members go partying. When a Yagua Big Feast is given by a Bat clan member, all the guests are subjected to a thorough smearing with the red paint.” (10)

**7.2 Piercings:**

**7.3 Haircut:** For men: “Head hair is close-cropped and facial hair is plucked, sometimes including eyebrows. The men who have adopted pants and shirt have adopted the local hair styles of the mestizos.” For women: “The hair is worn long in back with bangs over the ears cut at earlobe length and shorter bangs cut neatly at mid-forehead.” (10)

**7.4 Scarification:**

**7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):** Today they mostly wear Western-style clothing. “Traditional wear for the men consists of Hawaiian hula-style shredded palm-leaf skirts. ... Women traditionally wore a narrow wrap-around miniskirt woven from chambira palm fibers...” There is much variation, however. (10)

**7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:** “For festive occasions in some areas, but everyday wear in others, there are added upper-arm decorations, wrist ruffles, knee ruffles, a necktie, and a turban ...” Knee rattles made from nuts are worn at feasts. “For the turban, the maximum adornment is a full feather crown with pendant, stuffed, brightly colored birds, and a rooster tail of downy hawk feathers.” (10)

**7.7 Sex differences in adornment:** Traditionally, men wear shredded skirts, and women have wrap-around miniskirts. “... a fiber bib of the same construction as the men's skirts is worn around the [woman's] neck. It hangs down fore and aft to about mid-breast level, but length and width are stylistic and variable. ... If feather adornments are available, these are worn as attachments to the [woman's] bib, or as necklaces, or in the hair.” (10)

**7.8 Missionary effect:**

**7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:**

**8. Kinship systems**

**8.1 Sibling classification system:**

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:** “Both levirate and sororal polygyny have been practiced, but we know of no new cases in the last twenty years.” (10)

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

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

1. "If either party is not satisfied with the performance of the respective son-in-law or daughter-in-law, the marriage may be terminated, even though there are children from the marriage." (10)

**Numbered References**

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