

## **Guanano/Wanano of Northwestern Amazonas (Tukano)**

### **1. Description**

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

The Wanano tribes are located in Northwestern Amazonas; specifically spread across Brazil and Colombia. They have many different names; calling themselves “Kotitia or Kotiria” while the neighboring Tukano tribe calls them “Ockotikana”. Wanano is their name in most literature, varying by the language of the text (“Guanano” in Spanish and “Uanano” in Portuguese). The comprehensive Wanano language family is made up of fifteen to twenty distinct language groups that are interconnected by marriage unions. The Wanano belong to the Eastern Tukanoan language family, with certain groups varying in language depending on their location, rather upriver or downriver.

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

*1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):* They occupy the stretch of land along the middle course of the Río Uaupés (Vaupés in Spanish), running from Jandhu Cachoeira in Brazil to Uarucapú in Colombia.

*1.4 Brief history:* The Wanano were first discovered by the Portuguese in the 1730s, marking their first encounter with “whites” since the dawn of their civilization. Their history then on is intertwined with slave export, military interference and ultimately rubber exploitation during the ‘rubber booms’ of the late 1800s and for a brief stint in WWII. The Wanano’s history is one that is overshadowed by Portuguese power and exploitation of their homeland, by which many indigenous Wanano choose to emigrate to the lower Río Negro and Colombia. To this day, the opportunities of wage labor elsewhere draw out the indigenous population from their homeland.

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

*1.5a: Influence of missionaries/Europeans:* Their contact with missionaries was directly tied to the establishment of forts by the Portuguese during the late 1700s. These missionary settlements, which were representations of the Portuguese, were resented by the indigenous Wanano, and they often refused their policies and left the settlements to live elsewhere.

*1.5b: Influence of schooling:* In modern times, many Wanano villages have bilingual schools and also high schools where Wanano adolescents are permitted to leave home and go study.

*1.6 Ecology:* The Uaupés Basin in which the Wanano reside receives on average over 300cm of rainfall a year, and uniquely the region’s flood systems drain twice annually, rather than once a year in most environments, characterized by a wet and dry season. Because of its position near the equator, the region is subject to two rainy seasons, the northern and southern. The flood seasons are between October and April, with each year presenting relatively the same pattern.

*1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:* Population size estimated anywhere between 1,400 to 1,600 individuals, approximately 700 residing Brazil and an estimated 900 individuals in Colombia. There is a high population density per settlement due to the abundance of resources and access to the Uaupés tributaries, which are rich with fish, thus allowing the Wanano to build up a protein surplus and support larger populations.

## **2. Economy**

*2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):* Manioc is their main staple; they also eat wild fruits and insects.

*2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:* Fish accounts for 90% of their protein intake, which is done by the men.

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

*2.4 Food storage:*

*2.5 Sexual division of production:* As previously mentioned, men are responsible for providing the meat (fish) while women are in charge of the horticulture. Women tend to the manioc farming, food preparation, clearing and burning of land for farming, and the collection of other wild fruits and insects to contribute to their daily diet. However, there are instances when men, women and children fish using plant toxins as a group activity.

*2.6 Land tenure:* Historically, the Wanano distributed land based on descent lineages. However, current Brazilian regulations provide collective usufruct rights to Wanano individuals through the “colônia indígena”, Colombia has a similar policy for indigenous groups known as “resguardos” (policies that spell out rights and regulations for communal lands).

*2.7 Ceramics:* There is no historical evidence of ceramics, however, the Wanano use fibers and basketry known as *wahpanios*.

*2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:* There is a definite hierarchy for which food is shared and distributed, but the means of collecting and sharing occurs relatively informally within a settlement, only becoming more of a formal transaction among neighboring settlements.

*2.9 Food taboos:*

*2.10 Canoes/watercraft?* The Wanano use canoes.

## **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):*

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?:*

4.9 *Inheritance patterns:* Inheritance of names through generations to establish a social hierarchy, see 4.28 and 5.11.

4.10 *Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:* During the first year of life, mothers carry infants close to their bodies in slings. Children continue to stay close to their mothers until they get older and enter into a village peer group in which they become relatively independent and form bonds with other children. There is a minor exception with girls, who remain close to their mothers and help them with food preparation and horticultural activities.

4.11 *Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:*

4.12 *Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):* There is a serious focus on exogamic marriages in the Wanano, even intermarrying within their own language is considered incestual.

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 systems.

4.18 *Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?:* There is evidence of infidelity, however, there isn't any mention of whether these freedoms are gender exclusive.

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*

4.22 *Evidence for couvades*

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

4.24 *Kin avoidance and respect?* There is a certain level of respect for those in positions that rank higher than you in each individual sib and then on a village level as well.

4.24 *Joking relationships?*

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

4.26 *Incest avoidance rules:* The avoidance of marriage within the Wanano language family, which makes marrying outside of your culture the only possible option.

4.27 *Is there a formal marriage ceremony?:*

4.28 *In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?*  
A Wanano individual receives its name based on their position of seniority within the hierarchy of their language group.

4.29 *Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?):* Exogamous marriages; each village is considered to be of one patrilineal descent line, therefore marriage within your own village is not allowed and considered incest. Most sibs maintain relationships with the other language groups that they exchange marital partners with.

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

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

### **Warfare/homicide**

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

4.15 *Outgroup vs ingroup 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):*

Very strong external relations, especially with other language groups that exchange marital partners and goods. There are also reports of raiding with neighboring tribes like the Cubeo, Desana and the Arawakan Baniwa.

4.18 *Cannibalism?*

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

5.1 *Mean local residential (village) group size:* There are ten villages situated along the Uaupés riverbank, each consisting of anywhere between 30 to 160 people. Each village consists of one patrilineal descent group or patri-clan, which is referred to as a “sib.” The fragmentation and creation of smaller subgroups elsewhere is not uncommon in the Wanano, in which case they may develop a new settlement or utilize bilateral kinship ties and live in another settlement with relatives.

- 5.2 *Mobility pattern: (seasonality)*: There was no mention of mobility among the Wanano in accordance to seasons, the information denotes that they have remained in the Uaupés river region since the time of their establishment as a society.
- 5.3 *Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes)*: The Wanano political system is viewed as a common brotherhood, where the individual sibs comprise a coherent hierarchical and functional system. There are no Wanano chiefs in modern times, but there are evidence of chiefs in Wanano history, as recent as the early 1900s.
- 5.4 *Post-marital residence*: Patrilocal, thus meaning the Wanano women are exchanged to neighboring tribes and language groups while the Wanano men remain in their respective societies and draw mates in from elsewhere.
- 5.5 *Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense)*: There is an existence of territory in the Wanano that they have fought to defend in their history.
- 5.6 *Social interaction divisions? (age and sex)*: Social interactions are dominated by the use of language as a means of establishing ones social rank. For example, if you address someone as an “elder”, then they are expected to reciprocate by addressing you as “younger” to demarcate each person’s position within the hierarchy.
- 5.7 *Special friendships/joking relationships*:
- 5.8 *Village and house organization*: Formerly, multiple Wanano sibs lived in communal long houses. In modern times, families inhabit smaller dwellings that consist of a single extended or nuclear family.
- 5.9 *Specialized village structures (mens’ houses)*: Historically the Wanano had longhouses in which certain sibs would live, but now most housing is nuclear and extended families.
- 5.10 *Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?*
- 5.11 *Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc*: There is a hierarchy of power within each individual language group/village, which revolves around seniority. This order of seniority is reproduced each generation through the inheritance of specific names for specific individuals. Subsequently, each person’s rank determines how he or she will interact with other people in their society.
- 5.12 *Trade*: Their trade networks consist of relationships with other in-law villages or sibs, like their Toucano in-laws of the lower Uaupés and Papurí rivers and their Baniwa in-laws of the Río Aiarí. They trade specialized crafts such as their “wahpanio” (palm-leaf strainers used for processing manioc) for other products produced by other indigenous groups. They also produce colorful bark-cloth mats, which they sell and trade to river merchants who pass through the area. They have been known in the past to trade their agricultural products for carrying baskets and game from the Makú tribe.

### *5.13 Indications of social hierarchies:*

Each person within the Wanano social hierarchy occupies their own rank, no two individuals are on the same level. It is best to look at the Wanano social ranking system as a commodity. The possession of a more valuable rank gives that individual/sib more benefits, like power within the society and access to better goods. A social rank is also something that can be stolen, extorted and abandoned. For example, upon the death of a senior-sib, a lower-ranking sib takes its higher rank and bestows it upon itself.

The most inclusive category of the Wanano social hierarchy is called the “mahsa”, which is the autonomous language group of the region they inhabit. Membership to a certain category is ancestor oriented, and thus divides into sibs (kurua or kuduri).

This social ranking system is tracked and followed by social interactions, how each person addresses another is indicative of their social position, and it changes with every different combination of individuals.

Issues in this system arise when tensions rise between sibs, most often due to accusations involving witchcraft or problems with labor. How the system is set up allows for higher-ranking sibs to use language to display their dominance in the social system over the lower ranking sibs, which can cause much humiliation and ridicule.

Social seniority is also measured in means of production, by which an individual’s rank is further defined through the exchange of goods.

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

### *6 Time allocation to RCR:*

*6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):* The Wanano do have shamans and also believe that diseases are directly a cause of sorcery. In order to cure these diseases, there is a belief that you must remove the object inside the sick individual that is causing them the ailment. Wanano shamans are men who learn their craft through an apprenticeship to senior shaman; each village might have several shamans of various ranks. Much like other religions, shamans are obligated to adhere to a life of abstinence and self-discipline.

The Wanano use medicinal plants to help cure diseases, and they keep this practice alive by passing down the information through oration (chants).

*6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):* The Wanano have several rituals to mark the transitions in ones life cycle. Ceremonies for female puberty and menstrual seclusion, as well as male initiation rituals are practiced, however not as often as in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are also exchange ceremonials in which sibs practice general reciprocity by giving crafts and foods to each other.

*6.5 Myths (Creation):* Most of these Uaupés groups believe in a general creation myth, in which the cosmos was dark and chaotic with no boundaries on time and space. It is believed that the first beings created the landscape and made it safe for human beings to dwell there. The arrival of humans is said to have happened in an Anaconda-ancestor

that entered from the East through the “water door” carrying all humankind inside its body.

*6.7 Sex differences in RCR:* Only men are directly involved in shamanistic practices.

Only men can use instrumental flutes, which, according to myth, were originally handled by the women in a time when men were responsible for the women’s tasks like horticulture and were also believed to menstruate. It was only when the flute was taken from the women by the men that the women started menstruating and the power segregation between the sexes was established.

*6.8 Missionary effect:* The Wanano that are in Brazil are now practicing Catholics. Each major village has a chapel and a trained Wanano catechist conducts ceremonies every week.

*6.9 RCR revival:*

*6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:* The dead members of each sib are buried near their surviving sib. There are also rumors that the dead used to be buried under the floors of the longhouses when they were functional parts of the society.

*6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?*

*6.12 Is there teknonymy?*

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

In general, the universe is comprised of three layers: the sky, the earth and the underworld. Each layer is a world within itself, containing beings and can be explained in both abstract and concrete terms. There is a belief that life moves in a cycle, being compared to the flow from upstream to downstream, and also West to East. The journey of life ends when the body is buried in a canoe and falls into the river of the underworld below. There is also a belief in reincarnation, in that the soul upon death returns to the “house of transformation”, the house of their origin.

The Wanano believe in an animal world that consists of brotherhoods that are synonymous with the human social world. Each entity is guarded by a spirit, or an “older brother”, that will protect its kin at any cost. These spirits are believed to live in houses and these establishments are avoided.

## **7. Adornment**

*7.1 Body paint:* They produce carajuru, or a red dye, that is used for body paint in rituals and is also traded to other groups for other goods.

*7.2 Piercings:*

*7.3 Haircut:*

*7.4 Scarification:*

*7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):* Feather headdresses in ritual ceremonies.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: see 7.1 and 7.5

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Dravidian kinship typology, which was in accord with their patrilineal descent and cross-cousin marriage systems.

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

1. The idea of linguistic exogamy, and that through the construction of exogamous marriages the Wanano have connected themselves to different language groups. This may, in part, be directly related to the threat of their languages' extinction in modern times, due to the pull of individuals away from their birth language in the Wanano.
2. There is a preference of sister exchange among marriage patterns as well as a patrilineal cross-cousin marriage system.
3. There are certain mechanisms for social control that are used to control individuals, like shame, ridicule and fear of exclusion or witchcraft, that generally keep certain factions of Wanano society in check.
4. Certain substances are used in ritualistic practices and considered sacred—like tobacco, coca (originative compound of cocaine) and ayahuasco (hallucinogenic).

## **Numbered references**

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