

**Brittany Long**  
**Walker – Questionnaire**  
**Mundurucú**

**1. Description**

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

The Mundurucú, Mundurucú language family, a branch of the Tupi-Guarani language family (1)

**1.2 Location:**

Different regions and territories in the states of Pará (southwest channel and tributaries of the Tapajós River, in the municipalities of Santarém, Iraituba, Jacareacanga), Amazon River (east, Canuma River, municipality of Nova Olinda; and near the Trans-Amazon municipality of Borba) Mato Grosso (North, region of the river of the Fish, municipality of Juara). (1).

Basically just south of the equator in the Brazilian states of Pará and Amazonas (2).

**1.3 Brief history:**

Evidence for the first contact with the Mundurucú dates back to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (1). The territorial expansion of the Mundurucú produced different histories of contact. However they have always been historically portrayed as an “audaciously warrior nation” who took part in “obtaining trophies of enemy heads which were mummified and attributed to magical powers” (1.) In the early 1770's the Mundurucú raided Portuguese settlements along the Amazon (2). The Mundurucú fought continuously with the Portuguese, for their regions were consistently being berated by outsiders, which then alludes to the fact that their dispersal was large in scale (1). Due to the Mundurucú's fierce reputation, the Portuguese recruited Mundurucú to serve as mercenaries against other Indian groups in the Pará region, which continued into the rubber boom (2). The name Mundurucú was coined by the Parintintins, who were “an enemy people located in the region between the right bank of the Tapajós and the Madeira Rivers” (2). This name...meant ‘red ants’, alluding to the way the Mundurucú attacked rival territories en masse” (1). Along with the Mura, the Mundurucú were a very large (and still are, compared to many others today) indigenous group that continually raided Portuguese slavers and missionaries between 1749 and 1810 (3, 109). In 1832 the Mundurucú and the Mawé led a larger-scaled attack on a Portuguese settlement town and in 1835 (when oppressed Indian groups rebelled, AKA the Cabanagem), they were among the major tribes recognized as a leading warrior group in these quarrels, subsequently earning their name (3, 119). “During the...century (1800's), ties between the Mundurucú and the whites grew closer...they maintained friendly relations...and even undertook raids against hostile Indians to make the area safer for commerce with Christian missions” (3, 30). The Mundurucú remained their own people while trading goods (often at a four-fold markup) with rubber tappers in exchange for manioc flower (2). They eventually also learned to tap rubber and cure rubber latex, therefore profiting to a certain extent during the rubber trade. “During the mid 1950's, prospectors discovered gold...and hired Mundurucú men to dig alluvium from creeks” (2). Now, there are 2 separate major groups of Mundurucú who live on tributaries along the Tapajós and Madeira rivers (2).

**1.4 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:**

Although some Mundurucú became Roman Catholic and Protestant converts, the Mundurucú have still strong ties with their traditional religion. Mundurucú conceptions of afterlife are greatly influenced by Christian conceptions of heaven (2); also, in 1979-1981, there was a marked increase in baptisms (2). Past 1941 the Mundurucú no longer waged war with neighboring Indians and ceased the practice of beheading due to Catholic influence (3).

**1.5 Ecology:**

The Mundurucú are subsistence horticulturalists; they use slash and burn techniques. They raise manioc, bananas, and rice (2). The Mundurucú settle mainly on the banks of rivers during the dry season (1). The more traditional villages are usually located on savannas between the tributaries of the Tapajós and the Madeira.

**2. Economy**

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):**

Manioc (bitter and sweet), which is often made into farihna flour (3), bananas, rice, yams. Wild fruits and nuts are much more plentiful during the rainy season, which includes pineapple (3). Murphy stresses the strenuousness of the processing, which alludes to the assumption that they eat more bitter than sweet manioc.

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:**

Fish (which is often roasted), peccaries, agoutis, tapir, pacas, various New World monkeys (2). Some periods during the rainy season cause heavy downpours, making animals less available and days may pass where the tribe survives with no meat (3). The Mundurucú “commonly scattered afield during the dry season for warfare and fishing, returning to village life for planting” (3, 32).

**2.3 Weapons:**

They currently often use shotguns and rifles. They still hunt with bows and arrows as well (2). They also employ “timbo fishing” with which they extract poison from Timba roots that in turn paralyze the gills of fish while they still remain edible (3, 91).

**2.4 Food storage:**

Collection of stunned fish (2). They also have domesticated chickens; the village dogs eat the eggs (3, 64).

## **2.5 Sexual division of production:**

Hunting/clearing plots for houses/ building houses are male responsibilities; processing manioc flour/washing clothes are female responsibilities (2). The planting of manioc is done mostly by women (1). Women take care of hearth responsibilities; women bring water up from the stream (3). Women process manioc. Women do most or all of the planting, and also clear land for garden use (1). Murphy stresses the strenuousness of the processing, which makes me assume that they eat more bitter than sweet manioc. Women also do the butchering (3, 158).

## **2.6 Land tenure:**

“Garden plots are considered owned by the household of the men who clear them of trees and brush. The gardens are planted, weeded and harvested by women (2). “The essential poverty of the soil, and the encroachment of weeds from the surrounding forests, make only two sequential plantings possible; by the third year, the garden is left to revert to forest” (3, 87). A trail will lead a village into a communal garden, which is occupied by all the women of the village (3, 10). The gardens are usually no more than 2 acres in extent, and provide the main sources of vegetables for the households; mainly producing manioc in its second planting (3, 10).

No evidence of land ownership other than the residential households, which are still open to visitors (3).

## **2.7 Ceramics:**

Basket weaving (which is a male activity) is a common practice among the Mundurucú, who use them as backpacks (2); Ceramics (a traditionally female activity) has nearly disappeared except in villages of Kaburuá and Kató (2). Metal pots and pans are usually used for cooking meat post-rubber boom (3, 33).

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

The women of the traditional villages cook, process manioc, and gather fruits and nuts seasonally; distribution of the manioc circulates throughout the village. The men do the hunting and fishing, subsequently sharing the biggest game with the village and the smaller game within their households (3).

## **2.9 Food taboos:**

Not consuming bitter manioc in its raw form is one important food taboo. Men must share all big game with other members of the village. The Mundurucú keep chickens, but the women would only kill birds if someone had caught a cold (because of chicken soup's curative properties, which they learned from the Germans) (3, 64). Only women of prepubescent age and women of post menopausal age are permitted to make the sweet manioc drink in order to avoid menstrual blood or semen contamination (3, 136).

## **2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Canoes**

## **3. Anthropometry**

**3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):** N/A

**3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):** N/A

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

**4.1 Age at menarche (f):** N/A

**4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):** N/A

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

Pretty large, families are composed of the father (husband) the mother, and any of the mother's related elders, children, and unmarried brothers and sisters. Currently, it is common for one household to have about 20-25 residents (including the attached males whom live in the men's house); previously that number would have been about 50 (3, 142). There may be anywhere from 2 to 5 households in a typical village today (3, 142).

## **4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):**

The time periods are usually very short between births. Murphy observes that multiple pregnant women are present in the village during one time (3).

**4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):** Not directly stated. However, boys are permitted to move into the men's house at 13 years of age, therefore possibly making them eligible husbands at that time (3). The only indication I found for girls is that they marry young (3).

## **4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:**

The divorce rate is High (3). Usually men or women have been married 2 or 3 times by the time they reach their 40's or 50's (3, 147).

#### **4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:**

Very little to zero; usually occurs among high status males, often the headman of the village historically if at all (2). Monogamy is the norm among the Mundurucú (3, 172.)

#### **4.8 Arranged marriage, bride purchase/service, dowry:**

Men or women select their spouses from opposite moiety systems; their marriage system is regulated (2). Their version of bride service involves a man bringing fish or game to the woman's household; he will then move into her family's household (2).

#### **4.9 Inheritance patterns:**

Most personal property of the dead is burned; larger items such as tables, canoes, stoves, rifles, and sewing machines stay within the households and are not destroyed (2).

#### **4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:**

Women are responsible for child rearing (3). Traditionally men live in the men's house, so interaction with children is sporadic (men will stop by for food, when they are sick, to provide food, or simply visit). Bonds between mothers and daughters are stronger than bonds between mothers and sons (3, 148).

#### **4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: N/A**

#### **4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):**

Due to the Mundurucú moiety system, they practice exogamy. Not too much evidence of Mundurucú marrying inside their own clan. The men (usually) go to a different clan in order to choose a spouse.

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

~~Paternity is NOT partible (3, 128).~~ Husband USUALLY has continuous access to his mate but extramarital affairs are common

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

The mother is viewed as a receptacle in which the fetus grows (3).

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

Yes. It is assumed that a woman must have several sexual contacts in order to accumulate enough material for a fetus to grow (3, 128).

#### **4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape:**

Women are more likely to be submissive to the sexual will of their husbands or other males (3). A woman may also be gang raped if she initiates too much sex, which may include about 20 or so of the village males dragging her out to the middle of the village plaza and violating her (3, 133). Also, if a woman is to view or play a *karokó* (sacred flutes historically made of fish bones), it is punishable by gang rape (3, 133).

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

The spouse must not be from the same moiety (3). “In past times...the preferred marital choice was between first degree cross-cousins...” although this was rarely confirmed by Murphy's team (3, 173). It is preferred that a woman marry a man who belongs to the same patrilineal moiety as her mother's brother or father's sister, consequently making marriage with a sororate and levirate permissible (3, 173).

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

Occasionally. However climax is “usually only experienced by the male” (3, 179). Women are not supposed to be the aggressors of sexual acts; those that do initiate sex are viewed as promiscuous or delinquent (3, 133).

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

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

The other women in the household, as well as the father at times.

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

There is a “fairly equal distribution of available marriage partners in the society as a whole” (3, 173). However, more imbalance is noted among the villages on the savannah than on the Cururú River due to the migration of marriageable men (3, 173).

#### **4.22 Evidence for couvades: N/A**

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

Generally only the husband has access to his wife; therefore he is the one and only social father in most cases (3, 128).

#### **4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?**

The Mundurucú consider themselves all related by kinship, either through the “white” or the “red” moiety (4).

#### **4.24 Joking relationships?**

“Talk among the women continues whenever they are together. They gossip about the men and one another. The women exchange notes about the sexual escapades of others, or their laziness. A woman who has loose sexual morals becomes a butt of gossip, partly because she breaches the moral solidarity of the females as a group and invites the intervention of the men who may stage a gang rape which is an assault on the women as a whole, however a woman who engages only in occasional dalliance and protests seduction suffers only female gossip” (7).

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

Patrilineal descent, virilocal residence patterns.

Children in fact, belong officially to the clan or moiety of the father (3, 127). If a child is fatherless, he is socially alienated and does not belong to the group; illegitimate children are often destroyed at birth, as well as twins (3, 127).

#### **4.26 Incest avoidance rules:**

Incest is prohibited; even members of the same clan are discouraged to have sexual relations (3).

#### **4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes.**

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

Father’s family makes the decisions.

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

Men journey to opposite moiety and choose a wife.

### **Warfare/homicide**

#### **4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:** very few. Their interests lie more in capitalism now (3).

#### **4.15 Outgroup vs. ingroup cause of violent death:**

Very little (besides the occasional infanticide) in the present day (3). However, the Mundurucú eventually would view all outsiders (including other Indian groups) as their enemies and would capture children, take trophy heads, etc. in order to remain autonomous and keep peaceful relations with whites during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. (3, 30).

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

Other than the occasional infanticide, the Mundurucú live fairly peacefully today (3).

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

Other than keeping in contact with an opposite moiety, the Mundurucú exist as a separate “nation” if you will; autonomous (3).

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

#### **5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:**

Villages are autonomous units. Larger traditional villages are usually no more than 200 (3). Most villages average around 50 to 100 residents today (3).

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

They often move to banks of rivers during the dry season and live on savannas during the wet seasons (1).

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

Each village has a headman; the most influential of the men who integrated into the village by marriage (2). The headman's sons and sons in laws often carry power and prestige in the community as well (2). However, the headman does not have authority over others in the village (2).

#### **5.4 Post marital residence:**

Males live in the man's hut. Boys under 13 live with mother's family, along with the rest of the family (infants, at times unmarried brothers, mothers, grandparents, etc). (3, 1, 2). The Mundurucú of the Cururú River do not have men's houses; they instead live within nuclear family residences (3, 164). “Matrilocality is the ideal...at least during the early years of marriage. But it is a rather strange residence, for the groom does not actually move into bride’s house. Rather, he stays in the men’s house, which, after all, is where he may have been living for some time.” (3, 177).

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

Mining companies (specifically the National Department of Mineral Production) have caused the Mundurucú to necessarily adopt measures to protect their area (1). A trail will lead a village into a communal garden, which is occupied by all the women of the village (3, 10).

Trading posts in 1941 – present (at least 1985) were at least 20km from any Mundurucú settlement (3).

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

When a new child is born, sibling rivalry can result. This is usually due to the fact that Mundurucú women often have multiple children consecutively. “When a younger sibling is born, the unweaned child is sharply and suddenly denied the breast milk in favor of the newcomer” (3, 194). Young children often try to hurt younger siblings. Young children have an immense amount of freedom, they basically wander around the village, and come and go as they please.

Women as well as men tend to socialize with one another, although women are seemingly more sociable with each other than the men (3). Both men and women find sex to be an important topic for humor (3).

#### **5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:**

Men joke with one another about sexual endeavors; women are more likely to be submissive to sexual advances of men, and do not usually bring it up in conversations with other women unless men are not around (3, 180).

#### **5.8 Village and house organization:**

Men, married and single, often live in a large male house. They often visit the families of their wives, where the children, elders, and unmarried brothers also dwell (3, 4). “Each of the traditional villages in the round consists of a number of dwelling houses-anywhere from three to five during the time of our visit-and a men’s house” (3, 81). Houses have two doors (at the front and the back) for access to the plaza as well as access to the edge of the village and trail networks (3, 81). There are no walls in the men’s house, unlike the residential households of the families at times (but not always) (3).

#### **5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):**

Yes. → *eksa* = the men’s house, houses all males above the age of 13 (3).

#### **5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?**

Hammocks (3).

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

2 main groups discussed have no evidence of continuous contact. Exogamy is practiced between Mundurucú moieties (clans). Patrilineal descent.

#### **5.12 Trade:**

The Mundurucú trade goods such as fish, agricultural goods, gold dust (their area is a prime area for gold mining) as well as a “small trade of wood, chestnut, and syringya” (5). They also trade manioc (or farihna, in its powder form) for cachaca (the regional cane rum), which the men only consume.

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

The Mundurucú lack class stratification. They do not have a central form of government. The headmen do not have power over the others in the village (4). They have no concept of individual or group wealth other than differences between men and women pertaining to the sexual divisions of labor (4).

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

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

For marriage ceremonies, a symbolic act of the union occurs when the days kill (made communally by one of the male hunters) is brought to the bride after the newlywed couple has isolated themselves from the rest of the tribe for a couple/few weeks at a time. “This is a period of transitional status, of ambiguity in social identity, as the couple moves into their new roles” (3, 177).

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

There is a belief that sorcerers cause illness by spreading caushi (infections illnesses). Shamans blow smoke, while patting and sucking on the caushi (2). Shamans may also use witchcraft, with which he converts to a supernatural jaguar that can travel to distant villages at a moment's notice in order to “consume the internal substance of his victim” (3, 109). The Mundurucú also seek western/ industrially manufactured cures as well (2). Also, Mundurucú women use ginger root and another unidentified root as a form of birth control with varying rates of success (5, 187). Roots may be grated into strong solutions, drank, or chewed (5).

#### **6.2 Stimulants:**

The men may trade to drink *cachaca*, the regional cane rum (3, 8). The Mundurucú also use tobacco (3).

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

In death, men from the opposite moiety of the deceased ritualistically burn the belongings, and bury in a coffin (2). Some conceptions of the afterlife are clearly influenced by Christian notions. Women cut their hair as a sign of respect (3).

As an initiation of the young into adulthood, the tattooing process would begin (3, 79). The tattooing process “conducted over a period of years, was extremely painful, often causing infection” (3, 79).

### **6.4 Other rituals:**

After a particularly long amount of time without meat (about a week, maybe more), men will make an offering of the meat to the spirits and pray for a good hunting season, which is then shared with the rest of the village (3). The men also are only allowed to play the *karokó*, ‘the long tubular instruments which contained the ancestral spirit...’ (3, 18).

### **6.5 Myths (Creation):**

The myth including the story of the man named Karusakaibö describes how women once disappeared into the form of fish because they became too “seductive” (3, 129). The conversion of women back to fish was executed by Karusakaibö, a male god (thus re-iterating female “inferiority” and male “superiority”; common beliefs among the Mundurucú) (3, 131).

If an individual experienced depression or malaise, they have lost their soul, which is called back to the shaman to “return to the proper place in the person from whom it wandered” (2).

### **6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):**

Basket weaving, sacred flutes, etc.

### **6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**

Only men are allowed to play sacred flutes, or *karokó* (2).

The women take place in a “sex reversal” ritual on evenings when large quantities of stunned fish are gathered. They gather large quantities of a sticky, milky tree sap and attempt to chase down the men and smear it on them (3, 66).

### **6.8 Missionary effect:**

Increased behaviors similar to Christian practices in death; previously they would bury the deceased under their houses (2).

### **6.9 RCR revival:**

The only notable rituals that remain today are rituals that are centered upon ancestral spirits and the men's house (3, 108).

### **6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:**

The Mundurucú adopted conceptions of heaven from Christian missionaries. The Mundurucú “underworld” (not necessarily hell, but similar) is a place where everything is “backwards” (3).

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

Yes. The taboo on speaking the names of the deceased by their living descendents prevents complete genealogies (3, 97).

### **6.12 Is there teknonymy? No**

## **7. Adornment**

### **7.1 Body paint:**

The Mundurucú are easy to identify without linguistic experience (3). “In the past the body of every adult was adorned from head to foot with elaborate tattoo work, applied by puncturing the skin with thorns dipped in genipa dye” (3, 78). Body tattoos were often characterized by geometric diamond and triangle symbols (3, 79).

### **7.2 Piercings:**

### **7.3 Haircut:**

Women usually do no more than trim their hair if it goes too far past the shoulder. The men “formerly shaved the front part of the head to the crown, allowing the hair in the back to grow to the neck” (3, 80).

### **7.4 Scarification:**

Tattoos are in themselves a form of ritual scarring.

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

### **7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:**

Marriage: no gift exchanges, bride prices, or even ceremonies; rather, a simple public recognition and consent of all important parties (I.e. The bride, groom, and both parents) (3, 176). Festive occasions called for red, blue and white vegetable dyes (3).

### **7.7 Sex differences in adornment:**

Men: head of men were often covered by solid blue coloring from the bottom of the nose to the mouth while the rest of the face was decorated with geometric designs (3). Traditionally men also wore nothing but a bark cloth and a penis sheath (3, 80).

Women: Women's faces were often overtaken by a large broad band of blue that streamed from ear to ear. The upper part of a woman's face was usually left un-tattooed, but geometric signs dominated the lower part of the neck (like the men). (3, 79). Traditionally, women wore no clothing.

### **7.8 Missionary effect:**

### **7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:**

The Mundurucú youth today are mostly unmarked, while men in their later twenties and thirties are only partly tattooed, which suggests that the elder grip on the culture is slipping, and that the young never did look forward to the painful and lengthy process of the Mundurucú tattoo (3, 79). Also, most of the Mundurucú currently wear cheap Brazilian-style clothing (3, 80).

## **8. Kinship systems**

### **8.1 Sibling classification system:**

The Mundurucú do know who their siblings are usually if they are birthed from the same mother. However, "the rest of the kinship network is differentiated into categories defined in the language of the kinship, but which are not the result of genealogical reckoning" (3, 98).

### **8.2 Sororate, levirate:**

In marriage, the sororate (marriage with a deceased sister's husband) and levirate (marriage with the deceased husband's brother) is permissible (3, 173).

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

The Mundurucú do not keep kinship genealogies (4).

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

1. Although the Mundurucú are exposed to high levels of mercury, there does not seem to be a negative effect in their central nervous systems (5).
2. The Mundurucú do not have vocabulary for numbers larger than 5, and they consistently misuse the words that they *do* have (6).
3. Robert and Yolanda Murphy discovered that "the nominal inferiority of females only applied to women of child-bearing years: older women become 'sociological males'" (3, 66).
4. The myth of the *karokó* is a parable of phallic dominance that represents the need for men to maintain their higher status by making the flutes unobtainable for all women at all times (3, 120).

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