

Xerente Questionnaire

1. Description

1.1 Xerente (Sherente, Acuen, Akwen, Awen, A'uwe). They refer to themselves as Akwe (2). The group language is Sherente (1) it belongs within the Je family language (2). Their dialect has been kept even though most indigenous members speak Portuguese (1).

1.2 Three letter language code: XER

1.3 Location: The plains of the Mato Grosso. This is east of the Tocantins River in Brazil, South of the Amazon Basin. It's described as a little north of Palmas (2). The region has also been described as "Northern Goias State" (2).

1.4 Brief History: The Xerente are known for being both horticulturalists and hunter/gatherers. Because of this, their range of territory was crucial, and over time, fishing has declined because of modern conveniences, like dams. Hunting has also declined because of the proximity of large cities (2). This tribe "integrated" more successfully than other indigenous tribes, learning Portuguese, converting to Christianity, and working to join the Brazilian economic system. However, the Portuguese "captaincy" in their territory was only initially accepted, than violently rejected, but later returned to (1). A second wave of settlers came with "squatters and ranchers" and eventually... the Baptists, actually trying to improve their living conditions (1). Today this is evident with their manufacture of baskets, war clubs, and other products for capital (2). In 1989 the State of Tocantins was made to protect native interests, but there are challenges to cultural preservation (1). They have successfully managed to maintain their cultural identity while working themselves into Brazilian culture. Bilingualism is evidence of this (1). Industrial pressures have created tension in this territory because of competing values as well.

1.5 Influences: Mission groups were successful in their efforts at conversion. But the Xerente have always had to cope with foreign encroachment given their location. Today, the Hydroelectric dam of Lageado, a new water way, and a project called PRODECER III have drawn attention because they've started paving roads across Indian territory (1). Jesuit missionaries were the first people to come to the area in the 1600's with "frontier expeditions and raids" (1). Later, the indigenous people were exploited as labor, put into infamous military prisons like "Teresa Cristina" (1). Basically, wave after wave of missions have come into Brazil into the Xerente territory, starting with the Capuchinos (late 1800's), Dominicans (1900s), then the Baptists. The Baptists are still there today (1).

1.6 Ecology: Right bank of the Tocantins River, near the savannah. The difficulty with this land is that it borders industrial Brazilian projects (1).

1.7 Population: In 2000 there were roughly 1,814 people in the Xerente tribe with 33 villages (2). There were only 500 individuals in the 20th century (2). It seems that the population has fluctuated since exploration though. There are conflicting reports from the 1920's and on. Way back in 1851 there were a reported 2,200, in 1924, roughly 1,360, then in 1982, it plunged to 700, and is only now once more on the rise (1).

2.Economy (Swidden Agriculture)

2.1 Carbohydrate Staples: “Honey, fruits, and various roots” were gathered to supplement game (2.) Agriculture has now come to ‘complete’ their diet (3). Evidence of corn (6).

2.2 Protein/Lipid Sources: peccaries and game from the savannah (7). Fishing also played a role (3).

2.3 Weapons: Clubs, sharpened sticks, now, iron tools and guns (7). First toy weapons, bows and arrows, are given to boys at three years (7).

2.4 Food Storage: straw basket production (5).

2.5 Sexual division of production: It seems that men typically worked with hunting and fishing. Hunting, walking, and running were assessments of male skill (2.)

2.6 Land tenure: N/A

2.7 Ceramics: Mostly baskets, these are sold today for supplemental income (1).

2.8 Specified sharing patterns? When gardens are planted (always in village vicinity) by the chief’s authority, multiple “residential segments” are involved and the produce is divided into 1. Residential segments and 2. The entire village (1). Otherwise, garden produce is typically not shared, or shared only in a residential segment.

2.9 Food Taboos: see under couvades, but also “wild-cats, jaguars, and steppe foxes” were avoided during ceremonial intervals, such as a pregnancy (7).

2.10 Canoes/water culture: Little mention given to fishing, and it’s possible that they migrated from the coastline (3).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (MF): N/A

3.2 Mean adult weight (MF): N/A

4. Life History, Mating, Marriage

4.1 Age at menarche: N/A

4.2 Age at first birth (mf): N/A

4.3 Completed family size: N/A

4.4 Inter-birth interval (f): The text said nursing lasts two years. With lactation amenorrhea, that would suggest another pregnancy would also be possible two years after the first birth (7).

4.5 Age of first marriage: 20 for males (7).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Adultery and divorce were not uncommon. No real punishment for men committing adultery, but women would lose their children and were abandoned (7). Divorce was acceptable for men with a “renounced wife,” and women could divorce and remarry, but only in extreme cases of neglect, then returning to their uncle or brother’s house, only then marrying an older man (7).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: only chiefs usually limited to two wives (6).

4.8 Bride price, bride service, dowry? N/A

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Patrilineal for names (1).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Children are allowed only to speak their native tongue until they turn five (3). Sometimes, unmarried women would induce abortions by leaning heavily on tree trunks. Deformed children or children resulting from “wantons” (prostitute class) were commonly buried alive quickly after birth (7). Also, an interesting relationship between parent and child exists later in life. Adult, married individuals abstain from sex when their parents are ill because they believe it could harm them (7).

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

4.12 Pattern of exogamy: Uxorilocal (1)

4.13 Role of males in conception: Usually are involved in the delivery of the child. The woman holds onto his knees and pushes out the baby. Then the husband “sits on her to crush her pelvis back into shape (7).”

4.14 Mother’s role in procreation: Must follow dietary restrictions, cannot work before delivery, only allowed to bathe (7).

4.15 Is conception incremental over time? N/A

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion/rape: Violence against women is common, especially in divorce resulting from adultery (7). If a woman was raped, however, she told her husband. He would then rape the *wife* of the assailers with the woman’s kinsmen (7).

4.17 Preferential category for spouse: Cross cousins are preferred; parallel cousins are taboo (6).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms: So “interethnic love affairs and marriages are common,” (1) but typically favor seems to be given to males. This is a fairly prude society for the Je language family (7).

4.19 Gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring? N/A

4.20 If mother dies, who raises children? N/A

4.21 Adult sex ratio: Does not explicitly state, but in terms of group membership for each tribe, there are roughly four masculine “associations” to every one female “association” (7).

4.22 Evidence of couvades: Absolutely. Neither male nor female can eat certain food items including: Peixe Sabao, Piau fish, tatu de rabo molle. Surubin was thought to cause the child to have “spotted skin,” pirahanas weren’t eaten because it was feared “that their shadow would bite the child after its birth, and certain forest animals couldn’t even be looked at, such as the guariba and the sucuriju out of fear “that their bad traits would become the child’s” (7). After delivery, the parents and the husband still have to follow couvades. White manioc cakes and palm kernel milk is the only food offered to the parents and the husband is not allowed to “take up the ax” for several days. A lot seems dependent on when the naval cord drops off, otherwise, the mother and father aren’t really allowed to leave the “delivery partitioning” (7).

4.23 Distinctions for potential fathers? “Wantons” declare the father for their pregnancy and he must undergo the couvades (7).

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect: Yes, very clear. There is a council of elders known as Wawes, chiefs and shamans are also a reflection of kinship groups and social stratification. Age is a contributing factor to respect/avoidance (1).

4.25 Patterns of descent for certain rights? Again, patrilineal for class distinctions and naming (1).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules? Yes! Moiety system is followed again, explains why this society is uxori-local with the apparent contradiction of a patrilineal descent system. Incest is prevented by out-group mating (1).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Little was mentioned of the ceremony, but status on behalf of the male had to be earned first. Typically, log races elevated men to a new class, the sixth being the “marriageable class.”

4.28 In what way does one get a name, change their name, or obtain another name? Names are complex. Mostly patrilineal, names are passed from father to son, as is typical of our society as well. A generation, however, was typically skipped. Each Xerente clan “owns a set of proper names which are passed down from generation to generation.” More importantly, however, these names serve to show where individuals fall on the social hierarchy (1). *See moieties for information on specific classifications. In this society, gender divide was also significant.

Female name changes are based on societies while male name changes are based off moieties (7).

4.29 Is marriage preferred within a community or outside of a community? (MF difference?) Within community but out of moiety (1).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges? N/A

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who? So non-Indian women can be married into the group, but not non-India men. An interesting caveat for interethnic marriages. Non-Indian men cannot be married into the group, lots of social restrictions against this (1).

Warfare/homicide: Warrior Ethos is huge (1).

4.14 Percent adult male deaths due to warfare? N/A

4.15 Outgroup vs. ingroup cause of violent death? N/A

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killings? N/A

4.17 Number, diversity, and relationship with neighboring societies: The Xavante were close neighbors, as were the Acroa and Xacriaba, but this was mostly before cultural assimilation with the Brazilian people (1). Most of these neighboring tribes ran away after European settlement, the Xerente stayed.

4.18 Cannibalism? N/A (not mentioned)

5. Socio-Political Organization and Interaction:

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: 1800 people for 33 villages (1). Another source said about 10-50 people for village (2).

5.2 Mobility pattern (seasonality): They have summer, the dry season, and winter, the wet season. They adjust horticultural activities and hunting accordingly (1). Also, we see a mixture of permanent and temporary houses, the smaller satellites being used as hunting lodges (7).

5.3 Political System (Chiefs, clans, status classes): Definitely trending toward stratified with complex moiety system (1). There is a chief, and there is a division between moieties as well.

5.4 Post marital residence: Patrilineal system, uxori-local (1).

5.5 Territoriality? Yes. Each woman/wife was held responsible for clearing land and preparing a (temporary) hut for 1.) the husband's clan 2.) his moiety and 3.) his family (7). Men made permanent settlements (round huts) (7).

5.6 Social interaction divisions? Age and Sex: “intense social factionalism based on kinship” (1). Men and women vote in the Tocantins territory (3).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: If a “non-Indian” woman is married into the group, she assumes the same roles, identity, and rights as an Indian (1).

5.8 Village and house organization: 10-50 people per village (1). In 1988, only about 9 villages, exploded to 33 with kinship disputes for power and negotiations with the whites (1).

5.9 Specialized village structures (men’s houses?) Men’s houses were mentioned for “bachelor status,” where “Wantons” and women were kept away to maintain the young men’s purity (7).

5.10: Sleep in hammocks, group or elsewhere? Hammocks (3).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Moiety system is essential!!!! Based off the cosmological division of the sun and moon, the Xerente system is divided into halves. Doi e Wahire is how this is described. The doi, or sun, moiety includes the following classes/names: kuzaptedkwa (owners of fire), kbazitdkwa (owners of cotton), and kritoitdkwa (hot potato people). The moon moiety, or Wahire, has the krozake, krepehi, and wahire (1).

5.12 Trade: Before the 1840’s, lived close to their neighbors Shavante. The Shavante went Northeast and resisted assimilation (2).

5.13 Indications of Social hierarchy? Yes. Chiefs can force division of goods in main gardens (1). Moiety system is also a huge indication of stratification because of what is described as “a network of reciprocal duties and obligations” (1). But while support for social hierarchy is substantial, residential units do work for their own subsistence separate from the group at times (1).

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR: Significant, highly developed socio-cultural system (1).

6.1 Specialization: There are shamans. These people are socially-elevated and are in charge of protecting the tribe from evil forest influences. For example, in log races, the Shaman stamps the logs “in request of forest protection” (1).

6.2 Stimulants: Talented gatherers of medicinal plants (2).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Men take three years apart from the community to become men (6).

6.4 Other rituals: When boys turn eight, they join one men’s association and one ‘athletic team’ (7).

6.5 Myths (Creation): The Jaguar (Huku) taught the people how to use fire. The sun and moon are representative of moieties in creation, and are seen as the founders of their society.

6.6 Cultural materials (art, music, games): athletic games like the Buriti log races, and now because of Brazilian cultural influence, soccer (1). Wrestling is also popular (7).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Only men made ritual/ceremonial items (7).

6.8 Missionary effect: Basically, the Xerente have worked to combine Catholic and Protestant ideas into their own faith. Now shamans are extremely active socially and politically (1).

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: ceremony for the dead, aikma, just the chiefs. Here, chiefs and their wives (usually two) celebrate/grieve (7). Birth of twins is seen as an omen of immediate death for parents, they are still raised however. (7).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? N/A

6.12 Is there teknonymy? N/A

6.13 Briefly describe religion: Cosmology is huge and most/nearly all rituals are heavily influenced on kinship relationships. The Jaguar was thought to have taught them how to use fire, and is known as Huku.

7 Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Children are painted daily but adults only on ritual occasions. The painting styles define how they fit into the moiety system. The Doi have a circle in their body painting while the Wahire have lines. Black, red, and white are the main colors. The preparation is complex, first babcu oil is used to prepare the body, and then individuals are “stamped” not exactly painted on (1).

7.2 Piercings: Nose piercings are most common, especially sticks with feathers woven into the end (4). Boys get piercings three years after initiation, each a thick stick in each whole (7).

7.3 Haircut: Men/boys get a haircut to symbolize their break from childhood and entrance into the men’s society they are assigned (7).

7.4 Scarification: Not mentioned

7.5 Adornment (beads, jewelry, etc.): From the photos of the Xerente, we see beads, necklaces, and nasal projections/sticks. Face paintings are an indication of status. Traditional colors are black and red. There are no pictures of tribal members today with lip plugs (4).

7.6 Ceremonial/ritual adornment: Feathers are common, especially headdresses for men. Potential sign of status (4)?

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary Effect: Xerente have had to deal with the Indigenist Missionary Council, Attorney General of the Republic, and Baptist Missions. Territoriality comes from factionalist disputes for access to these agents between kinship groups (1).

7.9 Cultural Revival in adornment: Yes. After white expansion, Tocantins region has seen renewal in indigenous adornment (4).

8 Kinship Systems:

8.1 Sibling classification system: N/A

8.2 Sororate, levirate: N/A

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology. N/A

Interesting side notes:

- Xerente have a 4% birth rate, higher today than any other indigenous population (1).
- Lip plugs are not mentioned (7).
- Violence against women is high, but it's an uxorilocal society (7).
- Naming patterns and inheritance and clearly distinguished (4 and 7).
- Lots of initiation rites
- Interethnic marriages are discussed for the first time (1 and 3).

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