



## IGBO Cultural Orientation

Technology Integration Division

February 2012



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: PROFILE.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Geography.....	1
Area .....	1
Climate .....	2
Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features.....	2
Rivers and Lakes.....	3
Niger River .....	3
Benue River .....	3
Kaduna River.....	4
Gongola River .....	4
Sokoto River.....	4
Principal States/Cities.....	4
Abia State .....	5
Anambra State .....	5
Ebonyi State.....	6
Enugu State.....	7
Imo State.....	7
History .....	9
Early and Colonial History .....	9
Civil War and Recent History .....	9
Government .....	11
Media .....	11
Traditional Jobs and Economy .....	12
Ethnic Groups .....	12
Edo.....	13
Efik .....	13
Ekoi.....	14
Ibibio.....	14
Igala .....	14
Ijaw (Ijo).....	15
Chapter 1 Assessment.....	16
CHAPTER 2: RELIGION .....	17
Overview of Major Religions .....	17
Role of Religion in Government.....	17
Influence of Religion on Daily Life.....	18
Traditional Religion and Christianity .....	18
Traditional Religion.....	19
Ancestor Worship.....	20

Religious Conventions and Gender Roles .....	20
Religious Events .....	21
Religious Holidays.....	22
Buildings of Worship.....	23
Behavior in Places of Worship .....	24
Chapter 2 Assessment.....	25
<b>CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Honor and Values .....	26
Formulaic Codes of Politeness .....	26
Interactions between Men and Women .....	27
Hospitality and Gift-Giving.....	28
Eating Habits/Types of Food .....	29
Dress Codes .....	30
Non-Religious Celebrations.....	31
Dos and Don'ts .....	32
Chapter 3 Assessment.....	33
<b>CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE.....</b>	<b>34</b>
Introduction.....	34
Urbanization .....	34
Urban Employment.....	35
Urban Healthcare .....	36
Urban Education .....	37
Restaurants.....	38
Marketplace and Street Vendors.....	39
Urban Traffic and Transportation.....	41
Street Crime and Solicitations .....	43
Chapter 4 Assessment.....	44
<b>CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Introduction.....	45
Land Distribution and Ownership .....	45
Rural Economy .....	46
Rural Transportation.....	47
Rural Healthcare .....	48
Rural Education .....	48
Village Life.....	49
Checkpoints .....	50
Land Mines and Munitions.....	51
Chapter 5 Assessment.....	53
<b>CHAPTER 6: FAMILY LIFE .....</b>	<b>54</b>
Family Structure .....	54
Interactions between Men and Women .....	55

Status.....	55
Elders .....	55
Adolescents.....	56
Children .....	56
Married Life, Divorce, Birth.....	57
Married Life.....	57
Divorce .....	58
Birth.....	59
Family Social Events .....	59
Rites of Passage.....	59
Weddings .....	60
Funerals .....	60
Naming Conventions .....	61
Chapter 6 Assessment.....	62
FINAL ASSESSMENT .....	63
FURTHER READING .....	65

## CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

### Introduction

Igbo is the language spoken by the approximately 18 million people of southeastern Nigeria. Although English is Nigeria's official language, four indigenous languages serve as official regional or trade languages: Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Igbo is dominant and the trade language of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states in southeastern Nigeria. Igbo consists of 30 dialects, not all of which are mutually intelligible. The standard literary form of the language is a mixture of two dialects: Owerri (from Imo State) and Umuahia (from Abia State).<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup>

Previously under British rule, Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, forming a confederation of 36 states and 1 federal territory. Each state is divided into Local Government Areas (LGAs); Nigeria has 774 LGAs. The Igbo practice a traditional polytheistic African religion, though many are Christian.



© pjotter05 / flickr.com  
Igbo man and woman

### Geography

#### Area

Nigeria is a large West African nation of 923,800 sq km (356,700 sq mi), about the size of California, Nevada, and Arizona or a little larger than Venezuela. Its southern border faces the Atlantic Ocean along the Gulf of Guinea. To the southwest, Nigeria shares a 773 km (480 mi) border with Benin. Along its 1,690 km (1,050 mi) eastern and southeastern border lies Cameroon. In the north and northwest, Nigeria borders Niger for 1,497 km (930 mi). Nigeria also has an 87 km (54 mi) border with Chad in the Lake Chad area—the far northeastern tip of the country. The Igbo occupy 8 southeastern Nigeria states, covering an area approximately 41,000 sq km (15,800 sq mi).<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup>



© Church Mission Society / flickr.com  
Rainy Nigeria

<sup>1</sup> Omniglot, "Igbo," 2011, <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/igbo.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ethnologue, "Igbo: A Language of Nigeria," 2011, [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=ibo](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ibo)

<sup>3</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Nigeria," in *The World Factbook*, 28 April 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Nigeria," 3 February 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2836.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Nigeria," in *The World Factbook*, 28 April 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

### *Climate*

Nigeria has a mixed climate. Southern Nigeria's climate is equatorial and averages around 381 cm (150 in) of annual rainfall. Central Nigeria has a tropical climate with an average yearly rainfall of 100–200 cm (39–79 in). Northern Nigeria's arid climate receives an annual rainfall of 50 cm (20 in) a year.<sup>9, 10, 11</sup>

Although Nigeria is warm year round, the north and the south have variations in climate. The north is characterized by two seasons. The dry season lasts from October to April. Farmers plant their crops during the wet season, which lasts from May to September. Southern Nigeria has four seasons. Farmers plant during the long March–July wet season. A short dry season lasts from July to August, followed by a short wet season from September to October. The long dry season lasts from November to March.<sup>12</sup>

### **Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features**

Nigeria is divided into three geographic regions: south, central, and north. The landscape is characterized by high plateaus and lowlands. The lowlands dominate coastal and southern Nigeria, extending inland and lying within major river basins. As they stretch inland, the lowlands are funneled to Nigeria's northern central plateau by the western uplands and the eastern/northeastern highlands. A series of relatively flat platforms, the northern central plateau takes up about one-fifth of the country and rises between 700–1,800 m (2,297–5,906 ft). The eastern and northeastern highlands part of the Cameroon Mountains. They are made up of the 1,200–1,500 m (3,937–4,921 ft) Mandara Mountains and the approximately 600–900 m (1,969–2,953 ft) Biu Plateau. The western uplands are half as large as the northern central plateau. Reaching a maximum height of approximately 1,000 m (3,280 ft) in the Idanre Hills, they range from 300–600 m (984–1,969 ft).<sup>13</sup>



© Pietro Zoccola  
Nigerian landscape

---

<sup>6</sup> NIGECS "The Nigerian Local Government Area Geodemographic Classification System and Profiler," 2010, [http://www.nigerianlgaclassification.com/log\\_in.php?reqPage=/community\\_safety/community-safety.php](http://www.nigerianlgaclassification.com/log_in.php?reqPage=/community_safety/community-safety.php)

<sup>7</sup> Every Culture, "Igbo," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ethnologue, "Igbo: A Language of Nigeria," 2011, [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=ibo](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ibo)

<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Nigeria: Climate," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414840/Nigeria/55285/Climate>

<sup>10</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Nigeria," in *The World Factbook*, 28 April 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

<sup>11</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "Country Pasture/Forage Resources Profiles: Nigeria," 2009, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/nigeria/nigeria.htm#3.CLIMATE>

<sup>12</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "Country Pasture/Forage Resources Profiles: Nigeria," 2009, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/nigeria/nigeria.htm#3.CLIMATE>

<sup>13</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "Country Pasture/Forage Resources Profiles: Nigeria," 2009, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/nigeria/nigeria.htm#3.CLIMATE>



## Rivers and Lakes

Nigeria has 18 major rivers. The principal rivers are the Niger River (which gives Nigeria its name) and the Benue River. These two form a wishbone shape that skirts the southern edge of the northern central highlands and flow south to the Atlantic Ocean where they form the Niger Delta.<sup>14, 15</sup>



© Terry Whalebone  
Niger Delta

### *Niger River*

With a total length of 4,100 km (2,548 mi), the Niger River is Africa's third-longest river, and the longest river in West Africa. It originates in the mountains of Guinea and flows northeast into Mali where it bends southeastward, flows into Niger, and enters Nigeria at Nigeria's border with Niger and Benin. Numerous tributaries flow into the Niger River, including the Benue, Sokoto, and Kaduna Rivers. The Niger River has many rapids and waterfalls but is largely navigable. Large watercraft can travel the river inland to Onitsha throughout the year and beyond to Lakoja (at the confluence of the Benue) from June to March. All watercraft can ply north to Jebba from October to November, but only smaller vessels can sail the Niger above Jebba.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

### *Benue River*

The Benue is the second principal river in Nigeria and the Niger's most important tributary. The confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers is located in south-central Nigeria at the city of Lakoja.<sup>19</sup> The source of the Benue River is in northern Cameroon where it takes on water from numerous tributaries. The Benue is navigable, but only by boats with a shallow draw (less than 0.75 m/2.5 ft). Crops, such as cotton and peanuts are transported from Chad along the Benue. It is approximately 480 km (300 mi) from the confluence of the Benue and Gongola Rivers in eastern Nigeria to where the Benue and Niger Rivers meet.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Motherland Nigeria, "Geography: Rivers," 2002, <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/geography.html#Rivers>

<sup>15</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "Country Pasture/Forage Resources Profiles: Nigeria," 2009, <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/nigeria/nigeria.htm#3.CLIMATE>

<sup>16</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "Irrigation Potential in Africa: A Basin Approach," 1997, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w4347e/w4347e0i.htm>

<sup>17</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Nigeria: Land: Drainage," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414840/Nigeria/55283/Drainage>

<sup>18</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Niger River: Transportation," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414815/Niger-River/37071/Transportation>

<sup>19</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "Irrigation Potential in Africa: A Basin Approach," 1997, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w4347e/w4347e0i.htm>

<sup>20</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Benue River," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/61238/Benue-River>

### *Kaduna River*

In central Nigeria, the Kaduna River is the main tributary of the Niger River. Flowing northwest from its source in the Jos Plateau, the Kaduna shifts to a southerly flow northeast of the town of Kaduna. It reaches the Niger River at Mureji after flowing for 550 km (340 mi) from its source. Seasonally navigable south of the town of Zungeru, the Kaduna River is used for transporting produce and for fishing. The flood plains of the Kaduna support rice and sugarcane production.<sup>21</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Kaduna river

### *Gongola River*

The Gongola River is 531 km (330 mi) long and the chief tributary of the Benue River. Springing from the eastern Jos Plateau, the Gongola flows northeast to Nafada, then turns south until it meets the Benue River. The river flows through the Gongola Basin, and, with the help of the Dadin Kowa Dam at Numan, provides irrigation for livestock grazing and agricultural production.<sup>22</sup>

### *Sokoto River*

The Sokoto River provides a waterway for the Hausa Dakarki, and Zabarma peoples in northwestern Nigeria. It also provides irrigation for the extensive agricultural production in the area. The river runs northwest from the northern plateau and forms an arc that flows south until it reaches the Niger River. It is joined by the Rima River on its southern route.<sup>23</sup>

## **Principal States/Cities**

Nigeria is a federation of 36 states and one federal territory. The Igbo populate eight southeastern Nigerian states, known as Igboland. In five of these states—Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo—Igbo is the only or majority language spoken. In the remaining three states—Delta, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom—the Igbo are well-represented. Igboland is the most densely populated area in Nigeria.<sup>24, 25</sup>



© pjotter05 / flickr.com  
Aba, Abia state

<sup>21</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Kaduna River,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/309502/Kaduna-River>

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Gongola River,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/238475/Gongola-River>

<sup>23</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Sokoto River,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/552801/Sokoto-River>

<sup>24</sup> Ethnologue, “Igbo: A Language of Nigeria,” 2011, [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=ibo](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ibo)

<sup>25</sup> Igbozurume, “The Igbo People: Map of Igbo Speaking People in Nigeria,” n.d., [http://igbozurume.org/Map\\_of\\_Igbo\\_speaking\\_areas.html](http://igbozurume.org/Map_of_Igbo_speaking_areas.html)



### *Abia State*

Abia State is located in the southeastern portion of Igboland. Created in 1991, it consists of a hilly northern area of woodland savanna. Southern Abia State is oilpalm bush and tropical rainforest. Mainly an agricultural area, Abia produces yams, taro, corn, rice, and cassava. Oil palm is the major cash crop of the area. Approximately 70% of its 3 million people live as subsistence farmers.<sup>26</sup> Umuahia is the state's capital. Its oilpalm processing plant and breweries make it an important city. Aba, however, is the state's main industrial city, which manufactures textiles, pharmaceuticals, plastics, cement, footwear, and cosmetics. Aba lies on the railway north of the harbor town of Port Harcourt.<sup>27</sup> The state consists of 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs).<sup>28</sup> Although Igbo is the area's traditional language, English is the language of business and government.<sup>29</sup>

### *Anambra State*

Located in the northwest corner of Igboland, Anambra State is a densely populated area of roughly 4.2 million people, primarily Igbo. First formed in 1976, ethnic strife over resources in the area prompted government officials to split the state in 1991 when it took on its present boundaries. Named after the Anambra River, the state consists of 21 LGAs and is home to 39 major towns and cities. A network of roads links Awka, the state capital, to the cities of Onitsha and Ihiala and to Enugu, the capital city of neighboring Enugu State.<sup>30, 31, 32</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia  
Anambra state

Anambra State possesses rich deposits of mostly untapped natural resources, such as natural gas, crude oil, and bauxite (an aluminum ore). Agriculture is important to the state economy, and almost 100% of the soil is arable.<sup>33</sup> The principal crops are yam, taro, oil palm, rice, corn,

---

<sup>26</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Abia," 10 October 2009, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Abia\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Abia_State.html)

<sup>27</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Abia," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1273/Abia>

<sup>28</sup> Online Nigeria, "Abia State: Background Information," 9 January 2003, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/abiaadv.asp>

<sup>29</sup> USAfricaonline, "Abia State of Nigeria," 2009, <http://www.usafricaonline.com/abia.html>

<sup>30</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Anambra," 10 October 2009, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Anambra\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Anambra_State.html)

<sup>31</sup> Online Nigeria, "Anambra State," 29 January 2003, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/anambraadv.asp?blurb=193>

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Anambra," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/22647/Anambra>

<sup>33</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Anambra," 10 October 2009, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Anambra\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Anambra_State.html)  
*Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Anambra," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/22647/Anambra>

cassava, and citrus fruits.<sup>34</sup> Manufacturing plays a large role in the economy as well. The industrial belt in the area of Nnewi houses the manufacturing and auto industries.<sup>35</sup> Strategically located along the navigable portion of the Niger River, Onitsha holds the distinction of being Anambra State's industrial and commercial hub. The city maintains direct links to Benin City and Lagos by a bridge that spans the Niger River.<sup>36</sup>

### *Ebonyi State*

Located in the northeast corner of Igboland, Ebonyi State is an agricultural center created in 1996. This predominantly Igbo state is home to approximately 2.2 million people. Igbo is the main language, but English is the official language. Among its 13 LGAs are Abakaliki—the state capital and largest city—and Afikpo, the second largest city in Ebonyi State.

Agriculture supports the economy of Ebonyi State. Rice, yams, oil palm products, corn, peanuts, plantain, banana, cassava, melon, sugar cane, beans, and fruits and vegetables make up the state's agricultural production.<sup>37</sup> Ebonyi state leads Nigeria's production of yams, potatoes, corn, cassava, and beans.<sup>38</sup> Trade forms a significant portion of the economy and fishing is concentrated in Afikpo. Mineral resources in the state include lead, zinc, limestone, and marble, but large-scale commercial mining is underdeveloped. In Ohaozara, the Uburu/Okposi salt lakes yield salt.<sup>39, 40</sup> Other industries in the state include cement (Nkalagu), rock quarrying (Ishiagu), and rice milling/food processing (Abakaliki). Ebonyi State hosts four major universities. The health care sector is well developed. Abakaliki has two major hospitals, and the cities of Onueke, Onich, and Enohia Itim each support a general hospital.<sup>41</sup>



© pjtter05 / flickr.com  
Road to Abakaliki, Ebonyi state

<sup>34</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Anambra," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/22647/Anambra>

<sup>35</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Anambra," 10 October 2009, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Anambra\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Anambra_State.html)

<sup>36</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Anambra," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/22647/Anambra>

<sup>37</sup> Ebonyi Online, "About Ebonyi: An Overview," 2009, <http://www.ebonyionline.com/overview.html>

<sup>38</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Ebonyi," 29 January 2010, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Ebonyi\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Ebonyi_State.html)

<sup>39</sup> Ebonyi Online, "About Ebonyi: An Overview," 2009, <http://www.ebonyionline.com/overview.html>

<sup>40</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Ebonyi," 29 January 2010, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Ebonyi\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Ebonyi_State.html)

<sup>41</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Ebonyi," 29 January 2010, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Ebonyi\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Ebonyi_State.html)

### *Enugu State*

Located in the north central region of Igboland, Enugu State spans tropical rain forest in the south, open woodland in its central region, and savannah in the north. The state is named for its capital city, Enugu, an Igbo word meaning “on top of the hill,” because of its position atop the string of low hills that occupy the state. The primary rivers of Enugu State are the Adada and the Oji. Enugu State is home to approximately 3.3 million mostly Igbo people spread throughout its 17 LGAs. The capital city, Enugu, is the oldest urban area in Igboland, and, along with the city of Nsukka, forms the state’s industrial center. Early development of Enugu focused on its commercial-level coal deposits, its main economy before the discovery and the exploitation of oil deposits. Many people in Enugu State work in agriculture. Yams, oil palm products, and rice are the main crops. The state extracts limestone, iron ore, bauxite, crude oil, and natural gas. Industry plays a major role in the economy of Enugu State, which ranges from food processing and textiles to steel and aluminum. Enugu is home to Ama Breweries PLC, the largest brewery in Africa. The state’s infrastructure is well developed. Roads connect important centers of trade and industry, and current road development programs aim to decrease urban congestion and increase accessibility to rural areas. A major railway connects Enugu to the important coastal city of Port Harcourt. The railroad also connects Enugu to important urban areas in the north, such as Makurdi, located on the Benue River.<sup>42, 43, 44, 45</sup>



© pjotter05 / flickr.com  
Palm wine tapping  
Enugu State

### *Imo State*

Located in the southwestern corner of Igboland, Imo State consists of coastal lowlands east of the Niger River. Much of the rest of the state consists of oil palm bushes that have replaced the tropical rain forest indigenous to the region.<sup>46</sup> Imo State has few rivers but its dry river valleys carry drainage during the rainy season, which often damages crops and homes.<sup>47</sup> Imo State was created in 1976 and reached its present form in 1991. Its capital and largest city is Owerri. Imo State has 16 other major



© Gilles Guerraz  
Man reading Bali Post

<sup>42</sup> Nigeria Galleria, “Enugu,” 10 October 2009, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Enugu\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Enugu_State.html)

<sup>43</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Enugu,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/189078/Enugu>

<sup>44</sup> Government of Enugu State of Nigeria, “About Enugu State: Brief History,” 2011, <http://www.enugustate.gov.ng/about.php>

<sup>45</sup> Government of Enugu State of Nigeria, “Physical Infrastructure,” 2011, <http://www.enugustate.gov.ng/projects.php>

<sup>46</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Imo,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283739/Imo>

<sup>47</sup> Online Nigeria, “Imo State: Physical Setting,” 30 January 2003, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/imoadv.asp?blurb=268>

cities and towns, as well as 27 LGAs.<sup>48</sup> The state's population is approximately 4 million predominantly Igbo people.<sup>49</sup> English is the official language, but people mainly speak Igbo.<sup>50, 51</sup> Although the state has a well-developed urban infrastructure, the majority of the state is rural. High population density—among the highest in Africa—contributes to heavy pressure on the main industry: agriculture. Staple crops are cassava, taro, yam, and corn. Oil palm is the main cash crop.<sup>52, 53</sup> Imo State possesses abundant natural resources in commercial quantities, such as crude oil, lead, zinc, natural gas, and limestone. It is the main onshore petroleum-producing area in Nigeria. Though many of these resources remain largely untapped, urban centers have grown up around manufacturing and industry.<sup>54, 55</sup> The capital city, Owerri, is the educational and industrial center of the state, producing beverages, sheet iron, leather products, and soap. Two other important cities in the state—Orlu and Okigwe—engage in manufacturing and trade.<sup>56, 57</sup> The well-developed urban infrastructure includes roads that connect the three main cities Owerri, Orlu, and Okigwe. They also connect the state to major cities in neighboring states, such as Port Harcourt, Onitsha, and Enugu, among others. Urban centers have an abundance of roads connecting them to rural areas, facilitating agriculture and trade. River transportation connects Oguta in Imo state with Onitsha in neighboring Anambra State. It also links these cities with important cities south along the coast and cities north as far as the Benue River.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Imo State Government, "Business: Investment Guide," 2011, <http://www.imostate.gov.ng/info/Investment>

<sup>49</sup> City Population, "Nigeria," 13 March 2009, <http://citypopulation.de/Nigeria.html>

<sup>50</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Imo," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283739/Imo>

<sup>51</sup> Nigeria Galleria, "Imo," 10 October 2009, [http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States\\_Nigeria/Imo\\_State.html](http://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Imo_State.html)

<sup>52</sup> Online Nigeria, "Imo State: Physical Setting," 30 January 2003, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/imoadv.asp?blurb=268>

<sup>53</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Imo," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283739/Imo>

<sup>54</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Imo," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283739/Imo>

<sup>55</sup> Imo State Government, "Business: Investment Guide," 2011, <http://www.imostate.gov.ng/info/Investment>

<sup>56</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Imo," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283739/Imo>

<sup>57</sup> Online Nigeria, "Imo State: Population and Settlement," 30 January 2003, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/imoadv.asp?blurb=270>

<sup>58</sup> Online Nigeria, "Imo State: Social Infrastructure," 30 January 2003, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/imoadv.asp?blurb=271>



## History

### *Early and Colonial History*

Current research suggests that the Igbo have inhabited their current location for as long as 5,000 years. Archeological evidence supports the theory that the Igbo were a sedentary agricultural people with highly advanced technologies and art forms. Surviving bronze statues from the 10th century found at Igbo-Okwu attest to their skill with metal and technology.<sup>59</sup>

Trade played a role in the development of Igboland. Igbo traders had contact with caravans on the trans-Saharan trade routes. Scholars hypothesize that skilled Igbo metalworkers learned their trade from Berber traders from the north.<sup>60</sup> The Igbo traded gold, slaves, salt, cowry shells, weapons, ivory, and leather goods. In the 16th century, Igboland flourished, trading slaves with the newly arrived Europeans until the abolition of slavery in 1807. The Igbo turned their trade efforts to palm products, timber, elephant tusks, and spices.<sup>61</sup>



© Brandy Shaul  
Igbo carvings

Around 1815, the British began trading in the country's interior. Following typical patterns of British colonialism, British officials preferred indirect rule rather than trying to assimilate local populations. They set up networks of treaties with local chieftains to oversee their trade and maintain peace. The British increased their involvement in Nigerian government and trade until, in 1914, Nigeria became an official British colony.<sup>62</sup> Nigeria's colonial status lasted for more than four decades until the country gained independence in 1960. Three years later Nigeria became a federal republic with the ratification of its new constitution.<sup>63</sup>

### *Civil War and Recent History*

Political disunity led to contested elections in 1964–1965. In January 1966, military officers—mostly Igbo—staged a coup. They assassinated leaders from the regional governments and took control of Nigeria. Muslims in the north, fearful that the coup was a ploy to promote Igbo political agendas across Nigeria, staged a counter coup, attacking and killing hundreds of Igbo

---

<sup>59</sup> Art and Life in Africa, "Igbo Information," 3 November 1998, <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Igbo.html>

<sup>60</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Early History," in *Nigeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0013\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0013))

<sup>61</sup> The Igbo Catholic Community, "The Igbo People Origin and History," 16 March 2007, [http://www.igbocatholic.org/Hayward/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE\\_user\\_op=view\\_page&PAGE\\_id=10&MMN\\_position=15:15](http://www.igbocatholic.org/Hayward/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=10&MMN_position=15:15)

<sup>62</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Colonial Nigeria," in *Nigeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0027\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0027))

<sup>63</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Independent Nigeria: Independent Nigeria," in *Nigeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0033\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0033))

living in the northern region.<sup>64, 65</sup> By September 1966, ethnic tensions had reached a fevered pitch, and Igbos living in the north were massacred. It is estimated that approximately 10,000–30,000 Igbos were massacred in 1966. About 1 million Igbo fled to Igboland from the north. They slaughtered northern Nigerians they found in the south and began expelling non-Igbo from Igboland. Attempts to reconcile political and ethnic differences failed. On 30 May 1967, the leaders of the secessionist Igbo declared their eastern region of Nigeria as the independent Republic of Biafra. Beginning on 2 July 1967, Nigerian government forces surrounded and blockaded rebel-held territory. Pushing inward from the north, south, and west, the numerically superior federal army committed atrocities against the Igbo, including using starvation as a “legitimate weapon of war.”<sup>66</sup> The rebels surrendered to the Nigerian federal army on 15 January 1970. During the two-and-a-half year war, known alternately as the Biafran War and the Nigerian Civil War, the rebels suffered around 100,000 military casualties. Between 500,000 and 3 million civilians, predominantly Igbo, died during the war, most from the systematic starvation as the result of federal blockades.<sup>67, 68, 69</sup>

After the civil war, the territory and rebels were absorbed back into greater Nigeria. The focus on economic development and rising oil prices allowed ethnic tensions in oil-rich Igboland to cool.<sup>70, 71</sup> Power, however, remained in the hands of the Federal Military Government, which minimized the power and influence of some ethnic groups.<sup>72</sup> Plans to resume civilian rule failed to materialize. Nigerians continued to live under numerous military regimes until they achieved civilian rule in 1999.<sup>73</sup> Since the institution of civilian rule in Nigeria, reforms have



© SSgt Paul R. Caron  
Nigerian soldier

<sup>64</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Independent Nigeria: Civil War,” in *Nigeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0039\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0039))

<sup>65</sup> ICE Case Studies, “The Biafran War,” 1997, <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/biafra.htm>

<sup>66</sup> About the Igbo Language, “Who Are the Igbo?,” 2003, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/igbo/whoare.html>

<sup>67</sup> ICE Case Studies, “The Biafran War,” 1997, <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/biafra.htm>

<sup>68</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Independent Nigeria: Civil War,” in *Nigeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0039\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0039))

<sup>69</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Biafra,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/64289/Biafra>

<sup>70</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Biafra,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/64289/Biafra>

<sup>71</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Nigeria,” 3 February 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2836.htm>

<sup>72</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Independent Nigeria: The Federal Military Government in the Postwar Era,” in *Nigeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0040\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0040))

<sup>73</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Nigeria: Independent Nigeria,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414840/Nigeria/214176/History?anchor=ref517331>



taken root but the nation is still plagued by ethnic tensions, a floundering economy, and questionable government practices.<sup>74</sup>

## Government

For centuries, the Igbo practiced a democratic form of government. Villages were the largest political unit and remained small, usually no larger than 8,000 people. These village groups shared communal market and meeting places. Leadership was vested in a council of elders who were elected to their positions based on merit.<sup>75, 76, 77</sup> Some exceptions to democratic rule by councils existed. In western Igboland, kings ruled in the area of present-day Onitsha. Priest kings ruled in the areas of Nri and Arochukwu.<sup>78</sup>

After the Biafran War, the Igbo were no longer allowed to serve in government positions. This changed as the country and Igboland were rebuilt. Contemporary Igbo carry on their political life within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They serve in government positions—from governorships to LGA council memberships—within the states they occupy.<sup>79</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Enugu Chief

## Media

Approximately 1.4 million users have telephone service, but quality is low. Approximately 73 million people use cellular phones. Broadcast media is also well developed. Nigeria hosts around 70 government-controlled national and regional television stations. Each of the 36 Nigerian states operates television stations. Cable and satellite television are available but television use is concentrated in urban areas. High operating costs and low advertising revenues make it difficult to expand television services to rural areas. Restrictive legislation of television licensing stunts growth as well.<sup>80, 81</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Nigeria: Independent Nigeria,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414840/Nigeria/214176/History?anchor=ref517331>

<sup>75</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Igbo,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282215/Igbo>

<sup>76</sup> Encyclopedia.com, “Igbo,” 2011, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Igbo.aspx>

<sup>77</sup> Art and Life in Africa, “Igbo Information,” 3 November 1998, <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Igbo.html>

<sup>78</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Igbo People,” 2 April 2008, [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Igbo\\_People](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Igbo_People)

<sup>79</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Igbo People,” 2 April 2008, [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Igbo\\_People](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Igbo_People)

<sup>80</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Nigeria,” in *The World Factbook*, 17 May 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

<sup>81</sup> BBC News, “Nigeria Country Profile,” 19 April 2011, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country\\_profiles/1064557.stm#media](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1064557.stm#media)

Radio is the primary source of information for Nigerians. Nigerians have access to international broadcasts, and 40 state government stations have their own programming. The federal government also controls a network of national, regional, and state radio stations. The press has a strong presence in Nigeria with over 100 national and local outlets. Though some of these are state-owned, private news organizations abound. Private news organizations routinely criticize the government. Press freedom is low in Nigeria, and journalists are routinely attacked and arrested. In 2010, Reporters without Borders rated Nigeria 145th out of 178 countries, one of the poorest ratings for media freedom in Africa.<sup>82, 83, 84</sup>



© Internews Network / flickr.com  
Nigerian reporter

### Traditional Jobs and Economy

The Igbo's traditional economy has always been subsistence farming. The principal subsistence crops are yams, cassava, and taro; oil palm is the principal cash crop. Trading, craft work, and wage labor make up a portion of the Igbo economy. However, the Igbo value education. Their high literacy rate allows many to obtain civil service and business-related occupations. The Igbo are renowned throughout Nigeria for the industrial arts as well. The blacksmiths from Akwa are famous for their metalwork. Igbo men produce hand-carved masks that are in high demand; Igbo women produce pottery and patterned cloth work that has earned them distinction. Igbo carpenters are also highly sought after, and can be found throughout the country. The Igbo trade surplus yams from the Abakaliki area. Women dominate the rural retail market. Oil palm products, cooked foods, and salt make up hefty portions of the Igbo trade market.<sup>85</sup>



© Owen Jones  
Igbo mask

### Ethnic Groups

Nigeria is home to more than 200 ethnic groups, speaking more than 500 languages.<sup>86</sup> Dispersed throughout 8 of Nigeria's 36 states, the Igbo are one of the three dominant ethnic groups in the country. They firmly control five states in southeastern Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu,

<sup>82</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Nigeria," in *The World Factbook*, 17 May 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

<sup>83</sup> BBC News, "Nigeria Country Profile," 19 April 2011, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country\\_profiles/1064557.stm#media](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1064557.stm#media)

<sup>84</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Presidential Election Being Held as Attacks on Media Increase," 16 April 2011, [http://en.rsf.org/nigeria-presidential-election-being-held-16-04-2011\\_40039.html](http://en.rsf.org/nigeria-presidential-election-being-held-16-04-2011_40039.html)

<sup>85</sup> Ifi Amadiume, "Igbo: Economy," Every Culture, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Igbo-Economy.html>

<sup>86</sup> The World Bank, "Nigeria: Country Brief," 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/NIGERIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20215820~menuPK:368906~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:368896,00.html>

and Imo. Known collectively as Igboland, these five states are surrounded by a number of ethnic groups that share cultural traits with the Igbo and have a cultural exchange with them.

### *Edo*

The Edo ethnic group occupies Edo State. Abutting the Igbo communities of northeastern Delta State and northwestern Anambra State, the Edo—called Idu by the Igbo—strongly influenced the Igbo’s pre-colonial political structure in western Igboland. The Edo favored kingships over democratic rule, a practice the western Igbo adopted. Known as *Oba*, Edo kings were sacred and served as political, economic and ritual heads of state. At the village level—the foundation of political life—councils of men governed, with the guidance of a headman. Numbering approximately 3.8 million inhabitants, the Edo live in compact village settlements. Like the Igbo, they are subsistence farmers. They are also skilled craftsmen who engage in brass casting, wood carving, leatherwork, and weaving.<sup>87, 88, 89</sup>



© catface3 / flickr.com  
Edo mask

### *Efik*

The Efik ethnic group occupies Cross River State in southwestern Nigeria. The Efik share borders with the Igbo along the eastern border of Ebonyi State and the northeast corner of Abia State. The Efik practice subsistence agriculture and are known as fishermen. During colonialism, the Efik transitioned from fishermen to influential members of the slave trade, acting as middlemen between slave traders from the interior and British slave traders. Efik society is made up of Houses. Houses are not physical structures. Rather, they are conglomerations of households. Polygyny (marriage of a man to multiple wives) used to be common among the Efik, but the practice is rare in contemporary society. Efik political structure makes use of a chief who is elected from the leaders of the many Houses that make up their society. Chiefs head the male secret society, known as *Ekpe* (the leopard society), which was responsible for creating and enforcing laws. Although *Ekpe* still exists, the Nigerian government has appropriated its powers.<sup>90, 91, 92, 93</sup>



© dalbera / flickr.com  
Efik sculpture

<sup>87</sup> Ademola Iyi-Eweka, “The Edo Tribe,” Edo Nation, 20 December 2008, <http://www.edo-nation.net/edotribe.htm>

<sup>88</sup> Ifi Amadiume, “Igbo,” Encyclopedia of World Cultures, 1996, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Igbo.aspx>

<sup>89</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Edo,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/179361/Edo>

<sup>90</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Efik,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/180068/Efik>

<sup>91</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Refworld, “Nigeria: Tribalism: Position and Treatment of Efik Tribe,” 1 June 1989, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher/IRBC/NGA/3ae6ad3214.0.html>

<sup>92</sup> Esop Efik, “About the Efik People,” 2006, <http://esopefik.tripod.com/efikpeople.html>

<sup>93</sup> Onoyom Ukpog, “A Brief History of The Efik,” Efik National Association, 19 May 2011, <http://www.efiknationalusa.org/efikhstory.html>

### *Ekoi*

The Ekoi ethnic group (also known as the Ejagham) lives in close proximity to the Efik, occupying Cross River state along the eastern border of Igboland. The Ekoi believe they were the first ethnic group to occupy their territory and claim right of ownership to their land. Their belief system awards ownership to the original occupants of a land, though they can sell land-use rights to other ethnic groups. Similar to the Igbo, the Ekoi practiced subsistence agriculture. However, Ekoi men are renowned for the hunting abilities. Ekoi women fish and cultivate crops. Both sexes weave. The Ekoi are ruled by a council of elders, though community members attend council meetings. Like the Efik, the Ekoi had a secret society. Called *Egbo*, in the past this group regulated society and held great sway in religious matters. The Ekoi are skilled in the arts of traditional medicines.<sup>94, 95, 96, 97</sup>

### *Ibibio*

The Ibibio occupy Akwa Ibom State along the southeastern corner of Igboland. They came to occupy their current location sometime in the 14th century after clashes with the Igbo in the Ibibio War ended in their defeat. The Ibibio are closely related to the Igbo culture, and the Igbo exert great influence on Ibibio culture. Traditionally, the Ibibio economy was based on subsistence farming. Their society was centered in the village. Villages consist of approximately 500 people who live in compounds built around common courtyards and divided into wards. Like many of the ethnic groups of southeastern Nigeria, Ibibio culture hosts secret societies, although the Ibibio have both male and female secret societies.<sup>98, 99</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
From Akwa Ibon state

### *Igala*

Abutting the northern border of Igboland is Kogi State, home to the Igala people. This largely Muslim ethnic group speaks Igala, a tribal language with many dialects, including the Anambra dialect, which is directly influenced by Igbo. The people live in villages that are collections of houses. The river-rich region they occupy is well suited to fishing and agriculture, the basis of their traditional economy. Contemporary Igala economy is agriculture. Traditionally, the Igala were organized into a kingship. They were ruled by a priest-king known as the *atta*. Father to all his people, the *atta* ruled with the help of regional chiefs. Together, they played key roles in their traditional religion. Today, the Igala believe the *atta* is

<sup>94</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Ekoi," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/181666/Ekoi>

<sup>95</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), "Nigeria: Institutional Mechanisms Fail to Address Recurrent Violence and Displacement," 29 October 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=4725d29e2&skip=0&query=Ejagham>

<sup>96</sup> Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and Leaders: Constitutional Politics among a Cross River People* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–13.

<sup>97</sup> Ute Rosenthaler, *Ejagham* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1996), 9–11.

<sup>98</sup> Nigerian Arts and Cultural Directory, "The Ibibio People," 17 September 2008, <http://www.nacd.gov.ng/Akwa%20Ibom%20state%20people.htm>

<sup>99</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Ibibio," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/280629/Ibibio>



divine, so he is in charge of sacred objects, shrines, and religious festivals. Like the Igbo, though, the Igala subject their *atta* to checks on his power. Called a taboo system, these checks allow certain members of the community to chastise the king to ensure that he does not overstep his divine authority.<sup>100, 101, 102</sup>

### *Ijaw (Ijo)*

Occupying Rivers State along the southwestern border of Igboland, the Ijaw (Ijo) are a traditional fishing culture. They claim to have occupied the coastal region of Nigeria for more than 7,000 years. Called Oru by the Igbo, the Ijaw also grow crops farther inland, sharing the same staples as the Igbo. Like many ethnic groups in southeastern Nigeria, the Ijaw incorporated slave trading with the Europeans into their colonial economy. The Ijaw practice village- and group-level politics. Councils of elders rule within villages, but priests preside over the councils.<sup>103, 104, 105, 106</sup>



© Rhys Thom  
Fishing

---

<sup>100</sup> Igala Association USA, "Igala History," 2007, <http://igalaassociationusa.org/ViewContent.aspx?id=13>

<sup>101</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Igala," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282201/Igala>

<sup>102</sup> Jean M. Borgatti, "The Otsa Festival of the Ekperi: Igbo Age-Grade Masquerades on the West Bank of the Niger?" *African Arts* (Winter 2003), [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0438/is\\_4\\_36/ai\\_n6158015/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0438/is_4_36/ai_n6158015/)

<sup>103</sup> Ijaw Foundation, "Ijaw History," 30 April 2009, <http://www.ijawfoundation.org/people.htm>

<sup>104</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Ijo," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282528/Ijo>

<sup>105</sup> E. J. Alagoa, "Izon: The Historical Perspective," Niger Delta Congress, 5 May 2004, [http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/iarticles/izon\\_the\\_historical\\_perspective.htm](http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/iarticles/izon_the_historical_perspective.htm)

<sup>106</sup> Benaebi Benatari, "The Ijo Genesis: The Original Ancestors and the Genesis of the Ijos," Bayelsa State Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 2006, <http://www.bayelsa.org.uk/main/ijaw-genesis/>

## Chapter 1 Assessment

1. The Igbo predominantly speak English.

**FALSE**

Although the national language of Nigeria is English, the Igbo language dominates and is the trade language of Igboland.

2. Igboland lies in the lowlands of southern Nigeria.

**TRUE**

The lowlands dominate coastal and southern Nigeria, extending inland and lying within the basins of the major rivers.

3. Igboland is sparsely populated.

**FALSE**

Igboland is the most densely populated area in Nigeria—the most densely populated country in Africa.

4. The Igbo are a fiercely independent people.

**TRUE**

The Igbo have a history of fighting for their rights, even seceding from Nigeria in 1967 and establishing themselves as the independent Republic of Biafra.

5. The Igbo are traditionally subsistence farmers.

**TRUE**

The Igbo's traditional economy has always been subsistence farming, though trading, craft work, and wage labor make up a portion of their economy.



## CHAPTER 2: RELIGION

### Overview of Major Religions

Christianity first entered Igboland through England's Anglican Church in the mid-19th century. Missionary work by Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians helped to solidify Christianity in Igboland. By 1939, Igbo Christians outnumbered practitioners of Odinani, the traditional religion of the Igbo people. Today, many Igbo practice a blend of Christianity and Odinani.<sup>107</sup>



© chiolachic / flickr.com  
Nigerian National Cathedral

A complex religion, Odinani holds a supreme being, along with a host of lesser deities that pervade every aspect of daily life. Ancestor worship and a belief in reincarnation are fundamental features of Odinani that provide a sense of life continuity.<sup>108</sup>

To a very small degree, Islam has emerged in Igboland. Brought to the region by Muslim proselytizers from abroad and from Igbo converts migrating from the north, Islam gained its first converts in the 1930s. It was not until after the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War that more than a handful of Igbos converted to Islam and began building a stable Muslim community. Igbo Muslims struggle to maintain their Igbo culture while still adhering to the principles of Islam in a region that considers Islam to be antithetical to Igbo culture.<sup>109</sup>

### Role of Religion in Government

The Nigerian constitution provides for religious freedom. The federal government forbids the 36 Nigerian states from adopting state religions. However, in the Muslim-dominated northern region, 12 states practice shari'a law. In the Christian-dominated southern region, states provide for legal protection of indigenes over settlers. Often defined along religious lines, indigenes enjoy legal privileges denied to settlers.<sup>110</sup> Muslims in Igboland report that Christian-dominated state governments and Local Government Areas deny them posts in local



© Kipp Jones  
Mosque in Abuja

<sup>107</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1974).

<sup>108</sup> M. O. Ené, "The Fundamentals of Odinani," 14 February 2003, <http://www.kwenu.com/odinani/frame.htm>

<sup>109</sup> Egodi Uchendu, "Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria and Conversions to Islam, 1930s to Recent Times *Journal of African History* 51(2010):63-87, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=7780668&jid=AFH&volumeId=51&issueId=01&aid=7780660&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=>

<sup>110</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2010," 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148713.htm>

politics and Igbo unions because they are Muslims. Igbo Muslims lodge similar complaints against traditional Igbo. They claim they are denied *eze* status and chieftaincy titles simply because they are Muslim.<sup>111</sup>

Generally, the Nigerian government respects religious freedom. However, individual states give preferential treatment to some ethnic groups and manipulate sectarian tensions. In the past, Nigerian states funded pilgrimages to Mecca, Rome, and Jerusalem for their citizens. Both Christians and Muslims must register with the Corporate Affairs Commission before building churches or mosques. Christians living in the northern region accuse state-level authorities of denying them building permits. In the southern region, some states mandated compulsory Christian instruction in public schools. The nation is plagued by sectarian violence. Most violence is concentrated in the northern and central regions and pits Muslims against Christians.<sup>112</sup>

## Influence of Religion on Daily Life

### *Traditional Religion and Christianity*

Pure practice of *Odinani* is rarely encountered in Igboland today. The Igbo have adopted Christianity. The Catholic Church and numerous Protestant denominations are recognized as the formal religious institutions of the Igbo. However, since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, the Igbo have begun to modify their Christian practices, mixing them with traditional behaviors and practices. Some Igbo still practice polygyny, marrying their first wife in the church and marrying successive wives in traditional Igbo ceremonies.<sup>113</sup> Catholic churches often allow local artisans to create effigies and wooden structures, such as doors, that depict traditional Igbo symbols, figures, and deities. Often, priests allow modified Igbo rituals into their churches for major life events, such as funerals and burials, naming rituals, widowhood practices, and new yam rituals, to name a few. Traditional Igbo age-grade systems, women and men's associations, lineage *ofu* rites are being practiced in many Igbo



© Mike Blyth  
Services in burned out church

<sup>111</sup> Egodi Uchendu, "Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria and Conversions to Islam, 1930s to Recent Times," *Journal of African History* 51(2010):63-87, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=7780668&jid=AFH&volumeId=51&issueId=01&aid=7780660&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=>

<sup>112</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2010," 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148713.htm>

<sup>113</sup> Daniel Balint-Kurti, "Catholics Steer a Delicate Course in Africa, Divided between, Islam and Christianity," Associated Press, 18 April 2005, [http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p\\_product=APAB&p\\_theme=apab&p\\_action=search&p\\_maxdocs=200&p\\_text\\_search-0=Catholics%20Steer%20Delicate%20Course%20in%20Africa&p\\_field\\_label-0=Topics&s\\_dispstring=Catholics%20Steer%20Delicate%20Course%20in%20Africa%20AND%20date%282005%29&p\\_field\\_date-0=YMD\\_date&p\\_params\\_date-0=date:B,E&p\\_text\\_date-0=2005&xcal\\_numdocs=20&p\\_perpage=10&p\\_sort=YMD\\_date:D&xcal\\_useweights=no](http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_product=APAB&p_theme=apab&p_action=search&p_maxdocs=200&p_text_search-0=Catholics%20Steer%20Delicate%20Course%20in%20Africa&p_field_label-0=Topics&s_dispstring=Catholics%20Steer%20Delicate%20Course%20in%20Africa%20AND%20date%282005%29&p_field_date-0=YMD_date&p_params_date-0=date:B,E&p_text_date-0=2005&xcal_numdocs=20&p_perpage=10&p_sort=YMD_date:D&xcal_useweights=no)

churches. Traditional Igbo religious practices have penetrated deeply enough into some churches so as to allow for rituals to deliver people from possession from evil spirits.<sup>114</sup>

### *Traditional Religion*

Religion exerts a strong influence over the daily lives of the Igbo. The Igbo believe in a supreme god, called *Chukwu*. This supreme god is the creator of all things, but the Igbo do not worship him directly. Instead, the Igbo worship *Chukwu* through prayers, rituals, feasts, and behaviors that honor a pantheon of lesser gods and deities, all of whom are creations of *Chukwu*. For the Igbo, all natural phenomena represent *Chukwu*'s influence.<sup>115, 116</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia  
Igbo medicine man

On the other hand, the Igbo vehemently worship the earth goddess, *Ala*. For the Igbo, *Ala* represents the physical world. Visualized as a nursing mother, she is the progenitor of the Igbo people. The Igbo base their moral customs and legal code on *Ala*'s attributes. Theft, murder, and incest are taboo. Other taboos include abnormalities of birth, which the Igbo define as twin births or children who cut their upper teeth first. Sanctions against individuals who violate these taboos are fierce; the Igbo consider taboo behavior an abomination against *Ala*, affecting individuals and their families for many generations.<sup>117, 118</sup>

Also important in the daily lives of the Igbo is the religious concept of *chi*. Difficult to define, *chi* approximates to an individualized divine force, a guardian angel, and destiny. *Chi* issues from *Ala* and is the personal side of Igbo religion. Traditional families honor *chi* with shrines. Women carry their shrines to their husbands' homes when they marry. The head of the household also makes daily prayers and sacrifices to his *chi* to protect his family members. And *chi* is the root of many names for both men and women. In short, *chi* is the controlling force in every Igbo's life. The Igbo believe that *chi* directs all of lifetime's fortune or misfortune.<sup>119, 120, 121</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Christopher I. Ejizu, "The Influence of African Indigenous Religions on Roman Catholicism, the Igbo Example," 06 November 2006, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/ejizu-atrcath.htm>

<sup>115</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 49.

<sup>116</sup> Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), 95–95.

<sup>117</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 51–53.

<sup>118</sup> Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 36–37.

<sup>119</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 54–55.

<sup>120</sup> M.C. Onukawa, "The Chi Concept in Igbo Gender Naming," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 1 (2000): 108–109, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1161403.pdf?acceptTC=true>

<sup>121</sup> Theophilus Okere, "The Structure of the Self in Igbo Thought," in *Identity and Change: Nigerian Philosophical Studies, I*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series II, Africa, vol. 3, ed. Theophilus Okere, (Washington D.C.: Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, 2000), [http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-3/chapter\\_ix.htm](http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-3/chapter_ix.htm)

### *Ancestor Worship*

Ancestor worship plays a major role in the daily lives of the Igbo. In Igbo culture, the dead become spirits that maintain their membership in family lineages and the community. Igbo custom requires families to make regular sacrifices to their ancestors at the shrines of their deities. Ancestor spirits interact directly in the daily lives of their living families. When they are pleased with the offerings made to them, they will influence the deities to bring good fortune on their family members. When families fail to care for them properly, they refuse to influence the deities, often bringing misfortune to a family to show their anger. Ancestors also return to their families through reincarnation. Often, Igbo names suggest the relationship of a newborn to a reincarnated ancestor. The name *Nnenna* means “Father’s Mother,” suggesting that the child is the reincarnation of her paternal grandmother.<sup>122, 123, 124</sup>



© Mike Blyth  
Family naming ceremony

### **Religious Conventions and Gender Roles**

In traditional Odinani, gender dictates people’s roles. Women cannot become priests who preside over public shrines, and they cannot control family, lineage, or village *ofò* (the symbol of Igbo spirituality and authority). However, women perform crucial tasks in public ceremonies. They provide the majority of items used in public ceremonies. They are the custodians of female deity effigies and are responsible for carrying them to the shrines for ceremonies. Women also maintain and clean public shrines. They stage dances that are held at ritual celebrations. In Odinani, most sacrificial rites deal with fertility, the realm of women. Women also worship daily at the shrine of their personal *chi*.<sup>125, 126</sup>



© Church Mission Society / flickr.com  
Christian Archbishop Akinilo

Male practitioners of Odinani control its hierarchy. With very few exceptions, only men become priests. These priests reside over most ceremonies and rituals. Igbo men also control *ofò*, which must be present to perform ceremonial rites. Igbo moral and legal codes issue from the earth

<sup>122</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 55–57.

<sup>123</sup> Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), 102.

<sup>124</sup> C. N. Uba, “The Supreme Being, Divinities, and Ancestors in Igbo Traditional Religion: Evidence from Otachara and Otanzu,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 52, no. 2 (1982): 100–102, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1159143.pdf?acceptTC=true>

<sup>125</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 42–46.

<sup>126</sup> Daniel Jordon Smith, “Igbo,” in *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World’s Cultures* 1, eds. Carol R Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., 2003) 513–515.



goddess *Ala*. As a patriarchy, Igbo society requires men to interact with the spirit ancestors and divinities and to preside over the legal-spiritual caretaking of the community.<sup>127, 128, 129</sup>

Gender roles for Igbo Christians mirror those of Odinani practitioners. Men manage the hierarchy of the church and its business endeavors. Women are involved in daily church life and organize the congregation's activities.<sup>130</sup> Contemporary Igbo are primarily Christian, but no matter their denomination, they have blended the traditions of Odinani with Christianity. The rise of Pentecostalism in Igboland illustrates this religious blend.

Igbo Muslims conform to similar gender roles. Islamic organizations and mosques are headed and run by male members. Male converts to Islam engage in a public ceremony of conversion attended only by male Muslims. Female converts announce their conversion in private, female ceremonies. Boys and girls are also separated in Muslim schools. In the north, Igbo Muslims often conform to the Hausa practice of wife seclusion, a practice that converts in Igboland have begun to adopt.<sup>131, 132</sup>

## Religious Events

Odinani practitioners observe ritual holy days at different times throughout the year. Each deity has its own holy day. The large number of deities in Odinani make it impossible for people to honor each one. So practitioners honor the deities in a variety of ways. Regional deities are honored on their particular holy days by titled men. Called *ozo*, these men represent their communities and observe the holy days, which are usually on market days. Most *ozo* observe holy days on the largest of the market days. On holy days, *ozo* must abstain from farm work and food cooked in palm oil, and must avoid women. They must also meditate and offer prayer to ancestors in the spirit world for the well-being of their communities.<sup>133, 134</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Women singing and praying

<sup>127</sup>Ekwe Nche, "Ofo: Ofo Chukwu, Staff of God," n.d., <http://ekwenche.org/ofo.htm>

<sup>128</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 42–46.

<sup>129</sup> John N. Oriji, "Sacred Authority in Igbo society," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 34e (July–September 1989): 113–123, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/30128572.pdf?acceptTC=true>

<sup>130</sup> Daniel Jordon Smith, "Igbo," in *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures* vol. 1, eds. Carol R Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., 2003) 513–515.

<sup>131</sup> Egodi Uchendu, "Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria and Conversions to Islam, 1930s to Recent Times," *Journal of African History* 51(2010):63-87, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=7780668&jid=AFH&volumeId=51&issueId=01&aid=7780660&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=>

<sup>132</sup> Douglas Anthony, "'Islam Does Not Belong to them': Ethnic and Religious Identities among Male Igbo Converts in Hausaland," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 3 (2000): 422-423, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1161068.pdf>

<sup>133</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1974), 54.

<sup>134</sup> Victor C. Uchendo, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), 90–91.

Young, untitled men observe holy days. They seek the advice of diviners who tell them which deities are sacred to them and the holy days for those deities. Others, dedicated to specific deities by their families, must observe the holy days and rites reserved for those deities.<sup>135, 136</sup>

Igbo Christians observe a pilgrimage at Christmas. Igbo from across Nigeria take great pains to return to their homes or traditional villages to spend time with their families. The Igbo believe their traditional home is their only true home, and Christmas is the time they choose to return home to renew ties with their friends, families, and Igbo traditions.<sup>137</sup> However, Igbo Christians and Muslims observe the traditional religious events of the Igbo people. The events may hold little or no religious significance for them, but they are so thoroughly engrained in Igbo culture that seldom do individuals refuse to honor the traditions.

### Religious Holidays

Contemporary Igbo celebrate many religious holidays. Christian Igbo celebrate the standard Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas, which are Nigerian national holidays.<sup>138</sup> To celebrate Easter, the Igbo honor Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday. Good Friday finds Igbo Christians quietly attending church in remembrance of Christ's crucifixion; however, Easter Sunday and Monday are joyously celebrated with feasts, dancing, and drumming. Christian Igbo also celebrate Christmas by attending church. Feasts that feature dancing and drumming follow the church service. Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and gift exchanges are not part of the Christmas celebration, though the British tradition of Boxing Day is observed. Seen as an extension of Christmas, Boxing Day falls on either December 26 or 27 and features trips to the beach, picnics, and may involve dancing and masquerades.<sup>139</sup>

#### Exchange 1: Will you be celebrating Easter?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will you be celebrating Easter?	Ige-me-emume Ista?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Traditional Igbo celebrate numerous holidays and festivals. Although many holidays seem secular, their underlying principles celebrate and give thanks to the deities the Igbo believe are responsible for every aspect of their lives. The Okpe Nsi festival celebrates Igbo ancestors. Rooted in the Igbo belief in reincarnation and the practice of ancestor worship, Okpe Nsi allows the Igbo to give thanks for the many blessings bestowed upon them through the mediation of their ancestors. Igwansi celebrates the beginning of the new yam harvest, signaling the end of the "hunger period" between sowing and harvest. This festival doubles as a thanksgiving for the deity who protects the population during the hunger period. Okuka Udo is another religious

<sup>135</sup> Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1974), 54.

<sup>136</sup> Victor C. Uchendo, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), 90–91.

<sup>137</sup> Michael Widjaja, "Igbo Culture, Igbo Language and Enugu: Religion," 2011, <http://www.igboguide.org/index.php?l=chapter6>

<sup>138</sup> Everyculture, "Igbo," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>

<sup>139</sup> Motherland Nigeria, "Holidays," 17 December 2007, <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/holidays.html>



festival associated with giving thanks to the Udo deity for protecting the people. They also supplicate for future protection.<sup>140, 141, 142</sup>

## Buildings of Worship

Traditional *Odinani* does not call for buildings of worship for the supreme god *Chukwu*. The Igbo believe that *Chukwu* is too great to be represented visibly, nor can he be housed in a building of worship.<sup>143</sup> The Igbo construct shrines to honor the lesser deities, though. Popular are the *mbari* shrines dedicated to the earth goddess *Ala*. Open-sided shelters traditionally made of unfired mud, *mbari* have straw roofs and elaborately painted pillars around the perimeter. Under the thatched roof of the *mbari* reside life-size, painted figures and ancestor shrines.<sup>144, 145</sup> Traditionally, *mbari* were built from organic material so they would decay; each time a new *mbari* was built, it signified renewal of the earth. Today, *mbari* are built with cement. Although they remain nominally religious, they function more as examples of traditional art.<sup>146</sup>



© Jonathan Blundell  
Igbo village church

Christian Igbo belong to any number of denominations; Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians abound. Pentecostalism increased dramatically after Nigerian independence. Like Christians elsewhere, the Igbo build churches for their congregations.

Although Igboland is home to very small numbers of Muslims, mosques exist in cities with Muslim communities. Enugu State boasts the largest number of Muslims. The capital city Enugu is second only to Nsukka, which is considered to be the Islamic capital of Igboland. Imo State has seen an increase in its Muslim population as well.<sup>147, 148</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Nigeria Arts and Culture Directory, "Festivals in Anambra State," 17 September 2008, [http://www.nacd.gov.ng/Anambra\\_state\\_festivals.htm](http://www.nacd.gov.ng/Anambra_state_festivals.htm)

<sup>141</sup> Igbonet, "Yam Festival in Igboland: The Origin of Yam," n.d., <http://www.kaleidoscope.igbonet.com/culture/yamfestival/oikejiani.html>

<sup>142</sup> Emeagwali, "IN Honour of New Yam," n.d., <http://www.emeagwali.com/nigeria/cuisine/igbo-new-yam-festival.html>

<sup>143</sup> Emeka Emeakaroha, "Die Igbos im Osten von Nigeria," n.d., [http://www.emeka.at/v2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=224&Itemid=131](http://www.emeka.at/v2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=224&Itemid=131)

<sup>144</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "African Architecture: Palaces and Shrines," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/756980/African-architecture/57114/Palaces-and-shrines#ref519964>

<sup>145</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "African Art: Nigeria: Igbo," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/757032/African-art/57131/Nigeria#ref520057>

<sup>146</sup> Herbert M. Cole, "The Survival and Impact of Igbo Mbari," *African Arts* 21, no.2 (February 1998):54.

<sup>147</sup> Egodi Uchendu, "Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria and Conversions to Islam, 1930s to Recent Times," *Journal of African History* 51(2010):63-87, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=7780668&jid=AFH&volumeId=51&issueId=01&aid=7780660&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=>

## Behavior in Places of Worship

Practitioners of Odinani do not worship in traditional church buildings. They worship at shrines, which can be large pavilion-like structures or small enclosures that house the ritual objects dedicated to a particular deity. Still, during worship at the shrine, attendees should dress neatly.<sup>149</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Dressed for church

### Exchange 2: May I enter the church?

Soldier:	May I enter the church?	Enwere-m iki-bata nu-lu-ka?
Local:	Yes.	E.

Protestant and Catholic churchgoers dress up for church. Men wear suits and women wear dresses. In some churches, it is common for congregants to wear traditional West African clothing that is clean and neat.<sup>150</sup> Behavior in Igbo Christian churches resembles that of non-African churches. Rules of etiquette forbid eating, drinking, using cell phones, and disrupting services with talking or unnecessary movement. A common practice is for women to cover their heads at church, while men are required to take off their hats. Many Igbo appreciate when visitors wear traditional Nigerian dress when visiting churches, but the clothing should be regional, for the proper sex, and worn correctly.<sup>151</sup>

### Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do I need to cover my head?	Ekwesiri-m iPuchi-si-m?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	Mba.

<sup>148</sup> Michael O. Maduagwu, "Igbo Culture and the Prospects of Islam in Eastern Nigeria," Egodi Uchendu, 2010, [http://www.egodiuchendu.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=54:igbo-culture-and-the-prospects-of-islam-in-eastern-nigeria&catid=5:papers&Itemid=11](http://www.egodiuchendu.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54:igbo-culture-and-the-prospects-of-islam-in-eastern-nigeria&catid=5:papers&Itemid=11)

<sup>149</sup> Ekwe Nche, "Religious Life: Symbols and Forms of Religious Worship," n.d., <http://www.ekwenche.org/mbonu.htm>

<sup>150</sup> William Kirsh-Carr, "Church Etiquette and Dress Code," Associated Content, 17 August 2006, [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/51787/church\\_etiquette\\_and\\_dress\\_code.html?cat=34](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/51787/church_etiquette_and_dress_code.html?cat=34)

<sup>151</sup> Abuja City, "Dress and Social Etiquette," n.d., [http://www.abujacity.com/abuja\\_and\\_beyond/dress-and-social-etiquette.html](http://www.abujacity.com/abuja_and_beyond/dress-and-social-etiquette.html)

## Chapter 2 Assessment

1. The Igbo are free to practice religion in Igboland.

**TRUE**

The Nigerian Constitution provides for freedom of religion across Nigeria.

2. Today, many Igbo practice a blend of Christianity and Odinani.

**TRUE**

Although some people retain their traditional religion, their numbers have dwindled in the face of Christianity and the rise of Islam.

3. Women enjoy equal status with men in Igbo Christianity.

**FALSE**

Although women play active roles in the daily activities of the church, Igbo men manage the hierarchy of the church.

4. Traditional Igbo religious events play an important role in Igbo cultural life.

**TRUE**

The Igbo honor the major Igbo holidays, such as the Okpe Nsi celebration of the ancestors or the Igwansi celebration of the new yam harvest.

5. Practitioners of Odinani worship in buildings similar to churches.

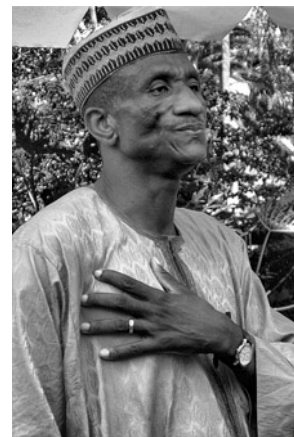
**FALSE**

The Igbo believe that *Chukwu* is too great to be represented visibly, nor can he be housed in a building of worship.

## CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS

### Honor and Values

The Igbo hold their egalitarianism in high regard. They also highly value individual achievement and personal initiative. Family forms the basis of Igbo society.<sup>152, 153</sup> The highest value in Igbo society is regard for human life. Punishments for wrong doing in Igbo society are dire and can have ramifications beyond the physical world. Violators could be denied burial rites, the most severe punishment to the Igbo. Denial of burial rites condemns the violator to remain on earth without the possibility of being reincarnated. Lengthy exile is another form of punishment. Separation from their communities equates to great suffering for the Igbo. An Igbo who dies away from home is destined to live out his spirit existence in eternal exile from his family and community.<sup>154</sup>



© e-du / flickr.com  
Devoted Man

### Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Greetings are important in Igboland, and Nigeria as a whole. The Igbo take their time greeting one another and inquire about family affairs, work, and health. Patience with lengthy greetings serves people well. Public displays of emotion are also common. The Igbo are comfortable with little personal space, and they stand less than an arm's length apart when conversing, often touching one another. Eye contact is common with people of the same gender and social status. However, direct eye contact with superiors is rude.<sup>155</sup>

### Exchange 4: Hello, Mr. Okara.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Hello, Mr. Okara.	Olia, Ma-zi Okara.
<b>Local:</b>	Hello!	Olia!
<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you doing well?	Ine-me nko-ma?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

<sup>152</sup> Uzoma Onyemaechi, "Igbo Political Systems," Umunna Cultural Association of Indianapolis, 7 July 2008, <http://www.umunna.org/politicalsystems.htm>

<sup>153</sup> Chinaka Okoro, "Ndigbo Bemoan Waning Values," Igbo Focus, 9 June 2011, <http://www.igbofocus.co.uk/html/special1.html>

<sup>154</sup> Vernantius Emeka Ndukaihe, "4.2 Respect for Human Life and Dignity," in *Achievement as Value in the Igbo/African Identity: The Ethics: Perspectives in the Light of Christian Normative/Value Systems*, (University of Passau, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 251.

<sup>155</sup> Culture Crossing, "Nigeria: Greetings," n.d., [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=7&CID=151](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=151)

Often, greetings derive from traditional Igbo religious beliefs. The word *chi* is common in a greeting. A religious concept, *chi* has been defined as a guardian spirit, personal angel, or force of fate that governs people's lives. Alternatively, *chi* distinguishes between light and darkness. Other common greetings (*I bola chi, ka chi fo*) express a wish for good fortune. The use of these greetings suggests that the speaker practices Odinani, the traditional religion of the Igbo.<sup>156</sup> Children and young people are required to greet senior members of their families and communities every time they see them.



© Lisa Goldman  
Hospitality

### Exchange 5: Good morning.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good morning.	Ututuo-ma.
<b>Local:</b>	Good morning.	Ututuo-mao.

Meetings and gatherings are rarely punctual. Times given for events usually mean the earliest time that the event will begin. People are used to waiting—sometimes for hours—for meetings and gatherings to begin.<sup>157</sup> Often, meetings and other gatherings of people are constantly interrupted by latecomers announcing their arrivals by greeting those already present. This is common, and people gladly halt their meetings to make the required greetings.<sup>158</sup>



© Mike Blyth  
Greetings

### Exchange 6: How is your family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How is your family?	Kedu ke-zinu-lo gi di?
<b>Local:</b>	They are doing fine, thank you.	Ha ne-menko-ma. Ime-la.

### Interactions between Men and Women

In general, interactions between Igbo men and women are open. Many of the same rules governing politeness between people of the same sex apply to male/female interactions, though

<sup>156</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000), 54.

<sup>157</sup> Culture Crossing, "Nigeria: Greetings," n.d., [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=7&CID=151](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=151)

<sup>158</sup> Onyema Nwazue, "Lesson VII (Ihe Omymy Nke Asaa)," Igbo Catholic, n.d., [http://www.igbocatholic.org/Hayward/files/uplink/Lesson\\_VII.pdf](http://www.igbocatholic.org/Hayward/files/uplink/Lesson_VII.pdf)



some interactions have slightly different rules. When conversing, it is common for men and women to give each other more space.<sup>159</sup>

Traditional Igbo continue to practice polygyny and arranged marriages, although the practices are losing favor, especially in urban areas. Traditional Igbo include the extended family in the courtship process. Referred to as a trial marriage period, young prospective brides must prove they are hardworking, honorable, and able to get along with other family members. Premarital sex is taboo in traditional communities.<sup>160</sup> Many contemporary Igbo adopt nontraditional courtship practices. Young Igbo, especially urban ones, tend to value love and companionship as the basis for marriage. They choose their spouses, only informing their families of their decision to marry afterward. Premarital sex and public displays of courtship are common for these modern Igbo.<sup>161</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Searching for the husband

### Hospitality and Gift-Giving

The Igbo are famed for their hospitality. The Igbo share food openly with guests. Women often share their dishes with neighbors, and people take turns entertaining guests of their neighbors, going to great pains to find out the visitors' favorite dishes.<sup>162</sup>



© crashdburnd / flickr.com  
Igbo Kola nut proverb

### Exchange 7: This food is very good.

<b>Soldier:</b>	This food is very good.	Nria di eziBo mma.
<b>Local:</b>	This is foo foo with egusi soup.	Nka- bu utara no-fe-gusi.

<sup>159</sup> Culture Crossing, "Nigeria: Greetings," n.d.,

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=7&CID=151](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=151)

<sup>160</sup> Marcellina U. Okehie-Offoha, "The Igbo," in *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria*, eds. Marcellina U. Okehie-Offoha and Mathew No. O. Sadiku (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1996), 64–67.

<sup>161</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, "Love and the Risk of HIV: Courtship, Marriage, and Infidelity in Southeastern Nigeria," in *Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage*, eds. Jennifer S. Hirsch and Holly Wardlow (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 137–144.

<sup>162</sup> Oraifite, "Igbo Culture and Traditions of Oraifite Ibo Land African Nigeria," 2011, <http://www.oraifite.com/culture-and-traditions/>



The kola nut figures prominently in Igbo life. The kola nut comes from the kola trees native to the region. The tree and the nut are sacred, and the nuts symbolize hospitality.<sup>163</sup> Kola nut ceremonies are conducted for numerous occasions, especially to welcome visitors. When Igbo villages and families welcome visitors, they bless the kola nuts, break them, and distribute them. The kola nut ceremonies are highly ritualistic. Only men can pick kola nuts, and the nuts should always be presented with two hands. The kola nut symbolizes reconciliation and accord between people.<sup>164, 165</sup>

### Exchange 8: I really appreciate your hospitality

<b>Soldier:</b>	I really appreciate your hospitality.	Omasirim no- nanletao-ma gi.
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you for coming.	Imela ni-bia.

Gift-giving is customary in Igboland, and certain rules apply. Guests in a home should bring the hosts fruit, nuts, or chocolates. Visitors should wrap gifts but should not be offended if the host does not open the gift. Gifts should be presented with either the right hand or both hands, never with the left hand, which is considered unclean. Men cannot give gifts directly to women. Gifts given to women must be given in the name of a mother, wife, sister, or other female relative.<sup>166</sup>



© International Institute of Tropical Agriculture  
Receiving gifts

### Exchange 9: This gift is for you.

<b>Soldier:</b>	This gift is for you.	Onyinya- bu nkegi.
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you very much!	Ime-lakaricha-!

### Eating Habits/Types of Food

Contemporary Igbo, especially in urban areas, frequently rely on prepackaged foods. They blend the modern and the traditional to create meals that are affordable. Traditionally, the Igbo eat with their hands, but Western utensils are becoming common. Food is vital at ceremonies and festivals.<sup>167</sup> In general, few Igbo eat at restaurants because of the prohibitive costs. However, in

<sup>163</sup> Uzoma Onyemaechi, "Igbo Culture and Socialization," 22 July 2011, [http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/igbowebpages/Igbo.dir/Culture/culture\\_and\\_socialization.html](http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/igbowebpages/Igbo.dir/Culture/culture_and_socialization.html)

<sup>164</sup> Michael Widjaja, "Kola Nut," 2011, Igbo Guide, 2001–2011, <http://www.igboguide.org/index.php?l=chapter8>

<sup>165</sup> Fada Jon Ofoegbu Ukaegbu, "The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and Social Symbol," IgboNet, 2003, <http://kaleidoscope.igbonet.com/culture/kolanutseries/jukaegbu/>

<sup>166</sup> Kwintessential, "Nigeria: Etiquette and Customs in Nigeria," 2010, <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/nigeria.html>

<sup>167</sup> Tim Curry, "Nigeria: Food and Economy: Food in Daily Life," Every Culture, 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Nigeria.html>

urban and semi-urban areas, inexpensive restaurants called “chop houses” serve food that is affordable for the average Nigerian.<sup>168</sup>

### Exchange 10: The food tastes so good.

<b>Soldier:</b>	The food tastes so good.	Nria- toro eziBu-to.
<b>Local:</b>	Thank you.	Ime-la.

Yams are used in a wide variety of dishes. Frequently, meals include cooked vegetables and palm-oil based stews or soups. Desserts are uncommon. Instead, Igbo snack on fruits, which are inexpensive and widely available from city street vendors.<sup>169</sup>



© IITA

Roasted bananas and yams

### Exchange 11: What ingredients are used to make foo foo with egusi soup?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What ingredients are used to make foo foo with egusi soup?	Kedu mGua-nri ejiri sie utara no-fa, no-fe-gusia-?
<b>Local:</b>	Yams, ground melon seeds, meat, dried fish, stockfish, snail, crayfish, onions, pepper, salt, bitter leaves, thickener and palm oil.	Ji, egusi, anu,azuikpo, okporoko, eju, ayiya, yaba-s, ose, nnu, olu-Bu, achina mmanu-nkwu.

### Dress Codes

Traditionally, Igbo clothing was akin to the loincloth. Both men and women would wrap a piece of cloth around the waist and between the legs, fastening the ends both front and back to cover the genitalia. Women were not required to cover their upper bodies unless they chose to. In modern Nigeria, such a dress code is impractical and violates norms of decency. Today, the Igbo opt to dress in what has been termed Nigerian clothing. Clothing is generally ornate, colorful,

<sup>168</sup> Lizzie Williams, “Eating and Drinking: Street Food,” in *Nigeria: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2nd ed. (Guilford, CT: 2008), 81.

<sup>169</sup> Abuja City, “Dress and Social Etiquette: The Food,” n.d., [http://www.abujacity.com/abuja\\_and\\_beyond/dress-and-social-etiquette.html](http://www.abujacity.com/abuja_and_beyond/dress-and-social-etiquette.html)

and well-suited to the humid climate of Nigeria. Nigerian styles are also influenced by those in West Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom.<sup>170</sup>

### Exchange 12: Is this acceptable to wear?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this acceptable to wear?	Nka- odimma oyiya?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Dress codes for the Igbo have been described as conservative. While many continue to wear traditional Nigerian clothing, Western styles have become quite common, especially in urban centers. For men, business-casual clothing is common. For important business or social meetings, men wear suits or traditional Nigerian dress—a long, fancifully embroidered shirt called an *isiagu*. They can wear either trousers or a long wrap under their *isiagu*.<sup>171, 172</sup>

Women also dress conservatively, and styles range from ornate, to practical, to Western. Wraps are most common, and they come in innumerable varieties to suit each social and domestic occasion. Traditional styles for women include a loose-fitting robe or long shirt accompanied by a wrap that is wound around the waist and tied to form a kind of skirt. The cut, quality, and adornment of the cloth indicates the woman's social class, status, and wealth.<sup>173, 174</sup>



© pjotter05 / flickr.com  
Colorful clothes

### Non-Religious Celebrations

Igbo life centers on festivals and celebrations. However, festivals are not celebrated on a specific day across Igboland. Festivals and celebrations are community affairs. They are held on days sacred to the deities significant to the particular community holding the festival.<sup>175</sup>

One of the most important of the Igbo festivals is *Ifẹjoku*, the New Yam Festival. Although most communities celebrate the festival after the yearly yam



© Global Crop Diversity Trust  
Yam festival celebration

<sup>170</sup> Samuel C. Obi, *Readings for Amerigerian Igbo: Culture, History, Language, and Legacy* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010), 133–136.

<sup>171</sup> Abuja City, “Dress and Social Etiquette: Clothing,” n.d., [http://www.abujacity.com/abuja\\_and\\_beyond/dress-and-social-etiquette.html](http://www.abujacity.com/abuja_and_beyond/dress-and-social-etiquette.html)

<sup>172</sup> Everyculture.com, “Igbo: Clothing,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>

<sup>173</sup> Everyculture.com, “Igbo: Clothing,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>

<sup>174</sup> Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 106–116.

<sup>175</sup> Udobatoa R. Onunwa, *A Handbook of African Religion and Culture* (Pittsburgh, PA: Red Lead Press, 2010), 41.

harvest, some hold the festival before sowing the yam crop. The festival honors and gives thanks to the yam deities for the harvest.<sup>176</sup> Lasting 2–4 days, the festival is open to the entire community. They celebrate by holding dances and celebratory rites. The community must throw away the old yams from the previous year. The leader of the community then consecrates the new yams and offers up a sampling as sacrifice to the deities.<sup>177, 178</sup>

### Exchange 13: Will you be celebrating the New Yam festival?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will you be celebrating the New Yam Festival?	Ige-me-emume iriji ohu-?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes!	E.

Another common Igbo celebration is *Igu Aro*, the New Year celebration. Usually lasting about two days, *Igu Aro* occurs in January or February, just before the new yam season. The celebration honors when *Chukwu* gave the yam to the Igbo in return for their devotion to him. Dancing, parties, and feasting characterize this celebration.<sup>179</sup>

### Dos and Don'ts

- **Do** smile sincerely when shaking a person's hand.
- **Do** take time to greet people at length, inquiring about their health, families, and life conditions.
- **Do** bring gifts of fruits, nuts, or chocolates when invited to someone's home.
- **Do** address people by academic, professional, or honorific titles plus their surnames, at least until invited to do otherwise.
- **Do** bow your head when greeting people much older than you.
- **Do** greet and serve the oldest person in a group first.
  
- **Do not** refuse food offered to you as a visitor; to do so is a sign of disrespect.
- **Do not** finish all your food when being served a meal; leave a small amount, otherwise you suggest you were not given enough to eat. Igbo pride themselves on always offering visitors enough food.
- **Do not** give or receive objects or gifts with your left hand; use your right hand or both hands.
- **Do not** rush through the process of greeting someone; take your time and show the proper respect.

---

<sup>176</sup> Udobatoa R. Onunwa, *A Handbook of African Religion and Culture* (Pittsburgh, PA: Red Lead Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>177</sup> Chris Manus Ukachukwu, "New Yam Festival," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 12, no. 2 (2007): 244–260, <http://ndigbo.net/NewYamFestival.html>

<sup>178</sup> Anthony Claret, "Iwa Ji Ofu (New Yam Festival) in Igboland!" Codewit News, 27 June 2011, <http://www.codewit.com/africa/3125-iwa-ji-ofu-new-yam-festival-in-igboland>

<sup>179</sup> Codewit News, "Igu Aro Ndigo-Igbo Calendar System," n.d., <http://news.codewit.com/culture/igu-aro-ndigo-igbo-calendar-system-359.html>

## **Chapter 3 Assessment**

1. The highest value in Igbo society is regard for human life.

**TRUE**

To the Igbo, regard for human life supersedes all other values.

2. Greeting rituals are unimportant in Igbo society.

**FALSE**

Greetings are highly important; the Igbo take their time greeting one another.

3. Premarital sex is common in Igbo society.

**TRUE**

Although traditionalists do not engage in premarital sex, the practice is common among young, modern Igbos.

4. The Igbo are hospitable.

**TRUE**

The Igbo are famed for their hospitality.

5. The Igbo frequently dine out.

**FALSE**

Restaurants are prohibitively expensive in Igboland, but in urban areas “chop houses” serve food that is affordable for the average Igbo.



## CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE

### Introduction

Igboland, like the rest of Nigeria, has been urbanizing at a steady, rapid pace. Cities sprang up and grew initially as a result of British colonization. After independence, they continued to develop, supporting growing industries such as mining, manufacturing, transport, and oil extraction and distribution. However, poverty in rural areas fueled migration to cities. Cities, in turn, grew too rapidly to accommodate the rising populations. Migrants often found themselves in slums, working in the informal economy. In Igbo cities, well-to-do families live side by side with the growing ranks of the urban poor, who live in dire circumstances. Mismanagement of resources resulted in the collapse of infrastructure. Despite the revenues generated by rich oil deposits, cities remain polluted, unemployment remains high, and sanitation is poor. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule, the collapse of infrastructure has increased the cost of education, making it a luxury few can afford.



© Amnesty International  
Failing infrastructure

### Urbanization

Across Igboland, urban areas suffer from congestion, poorly developed infrastructure, and housing shortages. Inadequate access to quality education and lack of incentives and policies for private-sector development constrains the development of urban areas. Poor water quality and sanitation services plague some areas, such as Enugu State.<sup>180</sup> Solid waste management is inadequate in many cities. People dispose of refuse along city streets and public areas. This has led to poor sanitation, a major cause of disease and ill health.<sup>181</sup> Some cities, such as Aba in Imo State, do not have the resources to contend with virtual mountains of garbage that have collected along the roadways and throughout the interiors of the cities.<sup>182</sup>



© SabrinaDan / flickr.com  
Slum

The lack of rural development has hampered rural people's access to markets, goods, and services, causing them to move to the cities.<sup>183</sup> In the cities, housing for these rural migrants is

<sup>180</sup> USAID, "Nigeria: Economic Growth and Environment," 24 November 2010, <http://nigeria.usaid.gov/program/1>

<sup>181</sup> Maxwell Umunna Nwachukwu, "Solid Waste Generation and Disposal in a Nigerian City: An Empirical Analysis in Onitsha Metropolis," *Journal of Environmental Management and Safety* 1, no.1 (2009):180–191.

<sup>182</sup> Lizzie Williams, "Aba," in *Nigeria: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2nd ed. (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2008), 199.

<sup>183</sup> John L.S. Alkali, "Planning Sustainable Urban Growth in Nigeria: Challenges and Strategies" (paper presented at the Conference on Planning Sustainable Urban Growth and Sustainable Architecture, ECOSOS Chambers, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 6 June 2005), <http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2005/docs/Alkali.pdf>

inadequate. In urban slums, families of 8–12 pack into one-room homes with limited to no electricity, running water, or toilet facilities.<sup>184</sup>

## Urban Employment

The foundations of the urban economy are trade (17.4%), services (9.8%), and informal economic activity (11.1%).

Despite rapid growth and attempts at modernization, working conditions in Igboland remain dismal. Workers in the informal economy suffer impoverished conditions in their homes or open air markets. Other problems are inadequate tools, a lack of protective equipment, heavy exposure to hazardous chemicals, and excessive physical strains. Informal sector employment entails trading, automotive repair, welding, carpentry, street vending, and cobbling. Women make up a large number of informal-sector workers, mostly involved in trading, washing, and street vending.<sup>185</sup>



© pjotter05 / flickr.com  
Business in Enugu

Other urban workers are employed in the manufacturing, mining, construction, and service industries. The Igbo work at all levels in these industries—from wage labor to management. Traditional crafts are in demand as well.<sup>186</sup> Igbo women are famous for their pottery, basket weaving, spinning, and cloth weaving. Igbo men are famous for their woodworking, carving wooden doors for homes and wooden masks for masquerades and the tourist industry.<sup>187</sup> Unemployment is high, and underemployment is even higher, which contributes to a large informal economy and a high crime rate.<sup>188, 189</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> Joseph Segun Ajanleko, “Sustainable Housing Development in Nigeria: The Financial and Infrastructural Implication,” (paper presented at the Spatial Information for Sustainable Development International Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, 2–5 October 2001), <http://www.fig.net/pub/proceedings/nairobi/ajanleko-CMWS1-1.pdf>

<sup>185</sup> United Nations Human Development Programme, *Niger Delta Human Development Report* (Garki, Abuja, Nigeria: United Nations Development Programme, 2006), [http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/africa/nigeria/nigeria\\_hdr\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/africa/nigeria/nigeria_hdr_report.pdf)

<sup>186</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Igbo,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282215/Igbo>

<sup>187</sup> *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* vol. 1, Africa, 2 ed., “Igbo,” eds. M. Njoroge, Timothy L. Gall, and Jeneen Hobby (New York: Gale, 2009), 287.

<sup>188</sup> United Nations Human Development Programme, *Niger Delta Human Development Report* (Garki, Abuja, Nigeria: United Nations Development Programme, 2006), [http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/africa/nigeria/nigeria\\_hdr\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/africa/nigeria/nigeria_hdr_report.pdf)

<sup>189</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations, “Nigeria: Overview of the Economy,” 2011, <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Africa/Nigeria-OVERVIEW-OF-ECONOMY.html>

## Urban Healthcare

Despite huge oil revenues in the area, government investment in Igboland's health industry remains low. Across Nigeria, women and children's health issues are a cause of great concern. Because of poor quality water, malaria, and inadequate access to healthcare, maternal, child, and infant mortality rates are extremely high.<sup>190</sup> Malaria is endemic in Nigeria, accounting for a large percentage of the reported diseases.<sup>191</sup>



© Mike Blyth  
mosquito nets

### Exchange 14: Is there a hospital nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a hospital nearby?	Onweru-lo-Gunonso eba--?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, in the center of town.	E, netiti-mo-bodo.

Contraceptive use is low in Nigeria.<sup>192</sup> As a result, the rate of HIV/AIDS infection is high, especially in the port city of Onitsha, which hosts one of the largest markets in Africa as well as an active sex trade. The capital of Anambra State, Awka, also has an active sex trade.<sup>193</sup>

### Exchange 15: Is Dr. Ukwu in?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is Dr. Ukwu in?	Doki-nta ukwu onoya?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, he is..	E onoya.

<sup>190</sup> GEANCO Foundation, *GEANCO* (Chicago, 2011), [http://www.geanco.org/GEANCO\\_brochure\\_2011.pdf](http://www.geanco.org/GEANCO_brochure_2011.pdf)

<sup>191</sup> Benjamin S.C. Uzochukwu et al., "Willingness to Pay for Rapid Diagnostic Tests for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Malaria in Southeast Nigeria: Ex Post and Ex Ante," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 9, no. 1 (January 2010), [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/1F9F45180F254C71492576AD00233380-Full\\_Report.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/1F9F45180F254C71492576AD00233380-Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>192</sup> USAID, "Nigeria: Health, Population, and Nutrition," 1 September 2010, <http://nigeria.usaid.gov/program/4>

<sup>193</sup> GEANCO Foundation, *GEANCO* (Chicago, 2011), [http://www.geanco.org/GEANCO\\_brochure\\_2011.pdf](http://www.geanco.org/GEANCO_brochure_2011.pdf)

Healthcare coverage remains sporadic in Igboland. Even though each Igbo state has hospitals and clinics, the healthcare industry suffers from a lack of professionals. Healthcare costs are prohibitive for poor families. Nationwide, more than 87% of poor women give birth at home.<sup>194</sup>



© BBC World Service / flickr.com  
Mother and newborn child

### Exchange 16: Do you know what is wrong?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know what is wrong?	Imaiho-bunana-diGi mma?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Less than 14% of poor people are immunized, compared to 60% of wealthy people. Hospitals and clinics are burdened by outdated and decrepit equipment, medicine shortages, and severe reductions in healthcare providers and workers. Private healthcare is on the rise, but costs are prohibitive for the majority of Igbo.<sup>195, 196</sup>

### Urban Education

The government of Nigeria provides free, government-supported education. Both federal and state governments administer and fund education from primary through postsecondary education. Students attend 6 years for primary school, 3 years of junior secondary school, and 3 years of senior secondary school.<sup>197</sup> School attendance is not government mandated at any level. In 2005, 58% of girls and 68% of boys were enrolled in primary school.



© One Laptop per child / flickr.com  
Laptops for children in schools

<sup>194</sup> The World Bank, "Nigeria: Second Health Systems Development Project," 14 June 2001, [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/07/07/000094946\\_00062905313932/Rendred/PDF/multi0page.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/07/07/000094946_00062905313932/Rendred/PDF/multi0page.pdf)

<sup>195</sup> The World Bank, "Nigeria: Second Health Systems Development Project," 14 June 2001, [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/07/07/000094946\\_00062905313932/Rendred/PDF/multi0page.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/07/07/000094946_00062905313932/Rendred/PDF/multi0page.pdf)

<sup>196</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Nigeria: Country Specific Information: Medical Facilities and Health Information," 13 September 2010, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_987.html#medical](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html#medical)

<sup>197</sup> Maps of the World, "Education in Nigeria," 31 May 2011, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/nigeria/education/>



These figures dropped to 23% of girls and 28% of boys for secondary school.<sup>198</sup>

The Igbo value education and have one of the highest literacy rates in all of Nigeria—68%.<sup>199</sup> One of the first American-modeled universities is in Nsukka, Igboland.<sup>200</sup> Yet schools are inadequately prepared to educate the students able to attend. They are short staffed, with teacher to student ratios around 1:37. Officially, Nigeria documents that almost 9 million children do not attend school, but the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education unofficially concedes that the number may be much higher. Poverty prevents parents from sending their children to school. Technically free of charge, schools demand hidden fees for books, uniforms, food, materials, and other resources, which are unaffordable for many impoverished Igbo.<sup>201</sup>

## Restaurants

Restaurants abound in urban Igboland. They serve both Nigerian and British dishes for reasonable prices. Also common are local restaurants, often called “chop houses,” which serve a wide variety of local cuisine.



© Eugene Kim  
Goat stew

## Exchange 17: Are you still serving breakfast?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you still serving breakfast?	Ikane-ke nri ututu?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Igbo food, even vegetarian, is notoriously spicy, and goat meat is common in dishes. Fresh vegetables and fruit are readily available.

<sup>198</sup> Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, “Country Profile: Nigeria,” July 2008, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nigeria.pdf>

<sup>199</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Nigeria,” in *The World Factbook*, 14 June 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

<sup>200</sup> *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* vol. 1, Africa, 2nd ed., “Igbo,” eds. M. Njoroge, Timothy L. Gall, and Jeneen Hobby (New York: Gale, 2009), 287.

<sup>201</sup> Alex Renton, “Millennium Development Goals: UNESCO Struggles to Meet Target to Educate 70m Children Out of Poverty,” *The Guardian*, 19 September 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2010/sep/19/millennium-development-goals-nigeria-education>



**Exchange 18: I'd like some hot soup.**

<b>Soldier:</b>	I'd like some hot soup.	Agama-chonwo-fedio-ku.
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	NGa-nu.

The Igbo regularly drink alcoholic beverages, favoring beer and especially locally produced palm wine, a staple at Igbo meals.<sup>202</sup> An oddity of the Igbo restaurants and chop houses is that they often do not have available what is printed on their menus or blackboards; diners must often request dishes until they come across something that is being served.<sup>203</sup>



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Palm wine

**Exchange 19: Do you have a dessert?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have a dessert?	Inwere- nri-mmeghario-nu?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, we have oilbeans.	E anyinwere-uBa.

**Exchange 20: Can I have my total bill, please?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I have my total bill, please?	Enweremi-ki-nwetebi-lum-ni-le biko?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, of course.	E, enu.

**Marketplace and Street Vendors**

Igbo cities are rife with markets. Vendors sell a variety of goods, including food, water, paintings, clothing, beverages, household goods, cloth, and traditional arts and crafts. Bargaining is the accepted method for purchasing goods in the markets.<sup>204</sup>



© go2net / flickr.com  
Bead vendor

<sup>202</sup> Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, "Eating and Drinking," in *The Rough Guide to West Africa*, 4th ed. (London: Rough Guide, Ltd., 2003), 1006.

<sup>203</sup> Lizzie Williams, "Eating and Drinking: Street Food," in *Nigeria: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2nd ed. (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2008), 81.

<sup>204</sup> Lizzie Williams, "Eating and Drinking: Street Food," in *Nigeria: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2nd ed. (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2008), 81–82.

### Exchange 21: Is the market nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is the market nearby?	Ahia-hu ono-nso?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, over there on the right.	E ofe-ba-hu na-kan-ri.

### Exchange 22: Do you accept U.S. currency?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you accept U.S. currency?	Ina-na dola ndiAmerika?
<b>Local:</b>	No we only accept nairas.	Mba anyina-nana-ni naira.

Many vendors and hawkers are unregulated and unlicensed in the urban markets. As a result, many markets have become serious health hazards. Drains become clogged, garbage and refuse collect in pathways, and sanitation is virtually nonexistent.<sup>205</sup>

### Exchange 23: Do you sell ekeigwe?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you sell <i>ekeigwe</i> ?	Ine-reki-gwe?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Food stalls abound in Igboland's urban centers. Omelets, chicken, and chips (French fries) are common, as are tea, coffee, and chocolate drinks.<sup>206</sup> In southeastern Nigeria, street food vendors are predominantly women.<sup>207</sup>



© Louis Kreusel  
Food Stall

### Exchange 24: May I examine this close up?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I examine this close up?	Mnweri-ke inyocha iha—Bagidere ihe?
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	Ehe-nu.

<sup>205</sup> Emmanuella C. Onyenechere, "The Informal Sector and the Environment in Nigerian Towns: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know," *Research Journal of Environmental and Earth Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2011): 61–69, <http://maxwellsci.com/print/rjees/v3-61-69.pdf>

<sup>206</sup> Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, "Eating and Drinking," in *The Rough Guide to West Africa*, 4th ed. (London: Rough Guide, Ltd., 2003), 1006.

<sup>207</sup> Irene Tinker, "Women Traders," in *Street Foods: Urban Food Employment in Developing Countries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 127.

**Exchange 25: Can I buy a basket with this much money?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I buy a basket with this much money?	Enweremi-kezuta eketa- na-nnukwuego ho-tua-?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

**Urban Traffic and Transportation**

Roads in Igboland, some of the worst in Nigeria, are in serious disrepair. Urban roadways have traffic signs, but they become scarcer farther from the major urban centers.<sup>208</sup> Traffic lights work infrequently, and power outages disable those that are in working condition. Understaffed police forces do not have the personnel to assign sufficient traffic control officers. Occasionally, traffic control officers may extort money from individuals being cited for a violation.<sup>209</sup>

**Exchange 26: Is there a gas station nearby?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a gas station nearby?	Onwere ebane-re petro-lu no-nso?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Congestion plagues the sprawling cities in Igboland. In the city centers and urban marketplaces, pedestrians, public transport, automobiles, and animals crowd the roadways. Visitors struggle to navigate the chaos and gridlock created by the traffic.



**Exchange 27: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	Onwere eziBo-nye mekani-ki no-nso?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

<sup>208</sup> Jim Hudgens and Richard Trillo, "Roads," in *The Rough Guide to West Africa*, 4th ed. (London: Rough Guide, Ltd., 2003), 1004.

<sup>209</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Nigeria: Country Specific Information," 13 September 2010, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_987.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html#traffic_safety)

Motorcycle taxis and buses are popular forms of public transportation. Their disrepair, coupled with high speeds, makes them unsafe. Motorcycle taxis frequently disregard traffic rules, weaving through traffic. Driving on the wrong side of the road and on sidewalks is common, posing serious danger to pedestrians and cyclists. Local taxi drivers have been known to attack and rob passengers.<sup>210</sup>



© Louis Kreusel  
Public transportation

### Exchange 28: Where can I get a cab?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where can I get a cab?	Ole-bem- nwerei-ki-nwete tagzi ?
<b>Local:</b>	Over there.	Ofe-ba-hu.

Air travel in Igboland complies with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) safety standards.<sup>211</sup> A railway system exists in Igboland, but its use has declined in favor of roadway transportation. Disuse and neglect makes travel by rail slow and unsafe.<sup>212, 213</sup>

### Exchange 29: Which road leads to the airport?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Which road leads to the airport?	Ole- uzogawara odu-Be-lu?
<b>Local:</b>	The road heading east.	Uza-hugawara owuwanyanwu

### Exchange 30: Is there a train station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a train station nearby?	Onwere ste-sho-nuBoPoru-zo no-nso?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	Mba.

<sup>210</sup> Lizzie Williams, *Nigeria: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2nd ed. (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2008), 196.

<sup>211</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Nigeria: Country Specific Information," 13 September 2010, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_987.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html#traffic_safety)

<sup>212</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Nigeria: Economy: Transportation and Telecommunications: Railroads," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414840/Nigeria/214169/Railroads>

<sup>213</sup> Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Nigeria," July 2008, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nigeria.pdf>

## Street Crime and Solicitations

The crime rate in Nigeria is high and poses a serious threat to Nigerian citizens, visitors, and tourists. Violent crimes are common countrywide, but southeastern Nigeria suffers added violence from a coalition of armed groups called the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which attacks oil facilities and their employees.<sup>214, 215</sup> Urban police do little to counter the armed robberies, kidnappings, and rapes that occur regularly. Gangs commit many crimes, but individuals frequently perpetrate violent crimes. Often, criminals wear police or military uniforms. Although crimes occur more frequently at night, daytime robberies and kidnappings are a problem.<sup>216</sup>



© Mike Blyth  
Installing razor wire

Nigeria is now infamous for its prevalence of confidence scams, known as 419 after the number of the Nigerian penal code dealing with fraud.<sup>217</sup> Launched from the numerous internet cafés in the cities, scams most often come in the form of unsolicited e-mails. The Nigerian scams target Westerners both in and out of Nigeria. Some scammers pose as needy Americans living in Nigeria. Still others pose as singles offering companionship on dating websites to solicit money. Other scams include fake work contracts and overcharging for purchases.<sup>218, 219</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> BBC, "Nigeria Profile," 28 June 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550>

<sup>215</sup> Jane's, "Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, 21 July 2011, <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Movement-for-the-Emancipation-of-the-Niger-Delta-MEND-Nigeria.html>

<sup>216</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Nigeria: Country Specific Information: Crime," 13 September 2010, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_987.html#safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html#safety)

<sup>217</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, "Corruption, Deception, and Social Morality, in *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>218</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Nigeria: Country Specific Information: Crime," 13 September 2010, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_987.html#safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html#safety)

<sup>219</sup> Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, "Reforming Nigeria's '419' Email Scammers," CNN, 12 October 2010, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-10-12/tech/nigeria.email.scams\\_1\\_scammers-cybercrime-felix-first?\\_s=PM:TECH](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-10-12/tech/nigeria.email.scams_1_scammers-cybercrime-felix-first?_s=PM:TECH)



## Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Urban areas in Igboland are well-developed and well-maintained.

**FALSE**

Urban areas suffer from congestion, poor infrastructure, housing shortages, poor water quality and sanitation, and inadequate sanitation and solid waste policies.

2. Igboland's informal economy is the direct result of poor employment opportunities.

**TRUE**

Unemployment is high, and underemployment is even higher, which contributes to a large informal economy.

3. Malaria seriously affects the health of many Igbo.

**TRUE**

Malaria is endemic in Nigeria, accounting for a large percentage of reported diseases.

4. The Igbo do not drink alcohol.

**FALSE**

The Igbo regularly drink alcoholic beverages, favoring beer and especially locally produced palm wine, a staple at Igbo meals.

5. Urban transportation is safe and well regulated.

**FALSE**

Roads in Igboland are in serious disrepair. Understaffed police forces do not have the personnel to control traffic, and extortion is common among traffic control officers.

## CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE

### Introduction

Igbo rural life has remained relatively unchanged over the years. Daily life is still influenced by remnants of Odinani, the traditional tribal religion. Shrines occupy prominent places within family compounds and village market squares. The Igbo belief in spirits and ancestor worship still influences the lives of the people and informs their decision-making.<sup>220</sup> Agriculture is the primary mode of existence for the people. Furthermore, traditional social structures prevail in many Igbo rural communities.<sup>221, 222</sup>



© Munir Squires  
Old Igbo shrine

Traditional Igbo society has been affected by the modern world. Many young Igbo head to the cities in search of careers and income, wanting to leave their subsistence-farming existence.<sup>223</sup> Christianity is well entrenched in Igbo society. Catholicism and numerous Protestant denominations abound in Igboland. More recently, many churches have taken to combining traditional Igbo religion with Christianity.<sup>224</sup>

### Land Distribution and Ownership

Land distribution comes in many variations in Igboland. Each Igbo community assigns ownership of land based on population, geography, the number of migrant workers, and individual community values. But, some basic rules apply. Local Government Areas grant customary rights of occupancy to people who use the land for agriculture or the support of agriculture. People are given renewable, legal rights to use the land for a period of about 50 years. The Igbo employ a system based on traditional practices of ancestor worship. The community holds the land, which they see as owned by a local deity. In turn, the village elder or chief administers the land. Communities can be as large as a small town or as small as a single family.<sup>225, 226</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> Joanne Silberner, "Stamping Out Guinea Worm," NPR, 3 July 2007, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7693351>

<sup>221</sup> Michael Widjaja, "Insight in to Igbo Culture, Igbo Language, and Enugu: Village," n.d., <http://www.igboguide.org/index.php?l=chapter10>

<sup>222</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 12–15.

<sup>223</sup> Barth Chukwuezi, "Through Thick and Thin: Igbo Rural-Urban Circularity, Identity and Investment," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19, no. 1 (2001): 55–66, [http://intranet.ukzn.ac.za/geog/ugrad/level3/hc\\_sust\\_cities/readings/3\\_RURAL%20URBAN%20MIGRATION/Chukwuezi%202001.pdf](http://intranet.ukzn.ac.za/geog/ugrad/level3/hc_sust_cities/readings/3_RURAL%20URBAN%20MIGRATION/Chukwuezi%202001.pdf)

<sup>224</sup> Michael Widjaja, "Insight in to Igbo Culture, Igbo Language, and Enugu: Religion," n.d., <http://www.igboguide.org/index.php?l=chapter10>

<sup>225</sup> Emea O. Arua and Eugene C. Okorji, "Multidimensional Analysis of Land Tenure Systems in Eastern Nigeria," *SDdimensions*, April 1998, <http://www.fao.org/sd/LTdirect/LR972/w6728t14.htm>

### Exchange 31: Do you own this land?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you own this land?	Obuginwa-la-?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E-.

In 1978, the Land Use Act replaced the customary system of land tenure. Incorporated into the Nigerian Constitution ratified in 1999, the Land Use Act attempted to create an equitable distribution of land in Nigeria that did not favor any ethnic group. The Land Use Act failed to reform land tenure practices in Nigeria. In fact, the act was never fully implemented, and many rural Nigerians are unaware that it exists. They continue to practice local customary law.<sup>227, 228</sup>

### Rural Economy

Agriculture accounts for 30% of Nigeria's GDP.<sup>229</sup> Primarily for domestic consumption, agriculture employs about half of Nigeria's rural population. The Igbo grow cassava, maize, oil palm, yam, banana, and plantain. The Igbo also grow Nigeria's major cash crops: palm oil, cocoa, and rubber.<sup>230</sup> Population increases regularly strain the productivity of agricultural areas. Food needs for the growing population force farmers to shorten fallow periods for their croplands, which decreases the richness of the soil.<sup>231</sup>

Since agriculture is increasingly unprofitable, many rural Igbo have migrated to urban and semi-urban areas in search of more profitable work. Some rural Igbo groups have invested in the development of rural trade and industry. They import and trade spare parts for automobiles, develop industry, deal in timber and building materials, establish supermarkets, and trade



© Mike Blyth  
Women working in field



© International Institute of Tropical Agriculture  
Bananas at market

<sup>226</sup> USAID Land Tenure and Property Rights Portal, "USAID Country Profile: Property Rights and Resource Governance: Nigeria," 29 September 2010, [http://usaidlandtenure.net/usaidltpproducts/country-profiles/nigeria/nigeria-country-profile/at\\_download/file](http://usaidlandtenure.net/usaidltpproducts/country-profiles/nigeria/nigeria-country-profile/at_download/file)

<sup>227</sup> USAID Land Tenure and Property Rights Portal, "USAID Country Profile: Property Rights and Resource Governance: Nigeria," 29 September 2010, [http://usaidlandtenure.net/usaidltpproducts/country-profiles/nigeria/nigeria-country-profile/at\\_download/file](http://usaidlandtenure.net/usaidltpproducts/country-profiles/nigeria/nigeria-country-profile/at_download/file)

<sup>228</sup> Emea O. Arua and Eugene C. Okorji, "Multidimensional Analysis of Land Tenure Systems in Eastern Nigeria," SDdimensions, April 1998, <http://www.fao.org/sd/LTdirect/LR972/w6728t14.htm>

<sup>229</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Notes: Nigeria," 1 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2836.htm#econ>

<sup>230</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Nigeria: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 24 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

<sup>231</sup> USAID Land Tenure and Property Rights Portal, "USAID Country Profile: Property Rights and Resource Governance: Nigeria," 29 September 2010, [http://usaidlandtenure.net/usaidltpproducts/country-profiles/nigeria/nigeria-country-profile/at\\_download/file](http://usaidlandtenure.net/usaidltpproducts/country-profiles/nigeria/nigeria-country-profile/at_download/file)

meat, among other enterprises.<sup>232</sup> Igbo men tend to work in non-agricultural trade and industry while Igbo women maintain their traditionally dominant role in agricultural trade.<sup>233</sup>

## Rural Transportation

Transportation throughout Nigeria is problematic. The federal government of Nigeria failed to invest sufficiently in infrastructure, resulting in deteriorating roadways that are slow and unsafe.<sup>234</sup> Transportation systems in rural Igboland are gravely underdeveloped, though financially successful entrepreneurs have begun to invest in infrastructure for their home villages.<sup>235</sup> Still, many roads are unpaved, and thick mud and erosion make travel difficult during the rainy season. Many continue to travel by foot or by bicycle and occasionally by motorcycle.<sup>236</sup> Rural Igbo travel by bus, transport truck, and animal-drawn carts, when the season, road conditions, and availability permit. In river-rich areas, people can travel by canoe or boat. Bicycles are a major source of transportation, especially for women who use them to bring goods to market.<sup>237, 238</sup> Remote communities risk being cut off during the rainy season, so farmers often work as wage laborers on farms that can afford motorized transport to markets.<sup>239</sup>



© Mike Blyth  
Rural motorcycle shop

<sup>232</sup> Barth Chukwuezi, "Through Thick and Thin: Igbo Rural-Urban Circularity, Identity, and Investment," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19, no. 1 (2001): 55–66, [http://intranet.ukzn.ac.za/geog/ugrad/level3/hc\\_sust\\_cities/readings/3\\_RURAL%20URBAN%20MIGRATION/Chukwuezi%202001.pdf](http://intranet.ukzn.ac.za/geog/ugrad/level3/hc_sust_cities/readings/3_RURAL%20URBAN%20MIGRATION/Chukwuezi%202001.pdf)

<sup>233</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, "Igbo," in *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures* vol. 1, eds. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., 2003), 512.

<sup>234</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Nigeria: Economy: Transportation and Telecommunications: Roads," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414840/Nigeria/55313/Igboland-and-the-delta-city-states?anchor=ref517342>

<sup>235</sup> Barth Chukwuezi, "Through Thick and Thin: Igbo Rural-Urban Circularity, Identity, and Investment," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19, no. 1 (2001): 55–66, [http://intranet.ukzn.ac.za/geog/ugrad/level3/hc\\_sust\\_cities/readings/3\\_RURAL%20URBAN%20MIGRATION/Chukwuezi%202001.pdf](http://intranet.ukzn.ac.za/geog/ugrad/level3/hc_sust_cities/readings/3_RURAL%20URBAN%20MIGRATION/Chukwuezi%202001.pdf)

<sup>236</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 28.

<sup>237</sup> Sam Olukoya, "Two Wheels Good in Rural Nigeria," BBC News, 2 April 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1256382.stm>

<sup>238</sup> World Bank, "Country Report 10: Nigeria," 12 June 2006, <http://www4.worldbank.org/afr/ssatp/Resources/HTML/Gender-RG/Source%20%20documents/Technical%20Reports/GRTI%20Reports/TEGRT12%20Country%20Report%2010%20Nigeria.pdf>

<sup>239</sup> Cecelia Tacoli, "Changing Rural-Urban Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa and Their Impact on Livelihoods: A Summary," (working paper, IIED Working Paper on Rural-Urban Interactions and Livelihood Strategies, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, 2002), 13, <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/9153IIED.pdf>

## Rural Healthcare

Poor water supplies pose health concerns to many rural Igbo. Many rural Igbo collect rainwater or water from rivers and streams. Others rely on water delivery trucks. These water sources are unsafe. Poor sanitation and inadequate sewage systems increase illness in rural areas. Many Igbo suffer from preventable illnesses, among them hepatitis A and E, typhoid, and yellow fever.<sup>240, 241</sup>



© Mike Blyth  
Water tanker

### Exchange 32: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	Onwerula-huiké no-nso eba--?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, over there.	E, ofe-ba-hu.

Malaria poses a serious health risk. The climate of Igboland is conducive to mosquitoes that carry the parasite, which can cause anemia, kidney failure, coma, and death. Rural Igbo lack adequate immediate medical facilities, and access to clinics and hospitals in urban areas is limited or nonexistent. Malaria is the leading cause of death in children under 5 years old.<sup>242</sup>

## Rural Education

Although the constitution calls for schooling for all Nigerians, rural Igbo lack access to schools. Supplies and resources are scarce, and facilities are substandard.<sup>243</sup> Salaries for teachers are low and often paid sporadically. Some teachers regularly miss class, choosing to pursue more profitable ventures. Still other teachers earn income by charging or trading with students.<sup>244</sup> For a variety of reasons, attrition rates in Igbo schools are high. Some children leave and return to school at different times of the year to work to help support their families. The result is that it may take many years to complete their education. Still others leave school because of illness, while others leave school permanently to



© Carla Gomez Monroy  
School teacher

<sup>240</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Major Infectious Diseases," in *The World Factbook*, 12 July 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2193.html>

<sup>241</sup> State and Local Government Programme, "Location: Enugu State, Nigeria: A Fair Price for Water," Department for International Development, 2008, 1–2, <http://www.slgpnigeria.org/uploads/File/5318%20Enugu.pdf>

<sup>242</sup> World Health Organization, "Nigeria: Health Profile," 15 April 2011, <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/nga.pdf>

<sup>243</sup> Institute for Anambra Development, "The State of Educational and Healthcare System in the Area," 2008, <http://www.tifad.org/>

<sup>244</sup> Dayo Desulu, "Who Cares for Public Schools in Nigeria?," *Vanguard*, 16 September 2010, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/09/who-cares-for-public-schools-in-nigeria/>



apprentice themselves to masters or to find jobs to support their families.<sup>245</sup>

### Village Life

Igbo villages vary in size, usually not exceeding 5,000 individuals. The traditional Igbo village is a collection of patrilineages, *umunna*, each consisting of any number of individual families. The *umunna* are governed by an *nde isi*, a ritual head, who is the oldest living male. Each *umunna* is divided into groups called *agburu*, a grouping of people related through three generations of men. Each *agburu* contains *ndebe*, family compounds where a man, his wife (or wives if the tribe practices polygyny), and their children reside.<sup>246</sup>

#### Exchange 33: Does your chief live here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your chief (eze) live here?	Ezu-nu obieba--?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Power is not vested in any individual. Village elders govern, and their authority is local. Although village elders make decisions for the village, they consult all the authority groups within the village: age councils, councils of chiefs, women's associations, and any secret societies the village may have.<sup>247</sup>



© Shiraz Chakera / flickr.com  
Igbo village

#### Exchange 34: Can you take me to your chief?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me to your chief (eze)?	Inweri-ki-Pogaram ezeunu?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

<sup>245</sup> C.O. Duze, "Attrition Rates in Primary Schools in Delta State of Nigeria," *International Journal of Education Administration and Policy Studies* 3, no. 6 (2011): 68–77, <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJEAPS/PDF/pdf2011/Jun/Duze.pdf>

<sup>246</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 12–15.

<sup>247</sup> Toyin Ayeni, *I'm a Nigerian, Not a Terrorist* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010), 49.

This hierarchy of village elders works to safeguard community values, develop community projects, and resolve community conflicts. They also work as advisors with the Local Government Areas regarding village affairs.<sup>248</sup>

**Exchange 35: Respected chief, we need your help / advice / opinion.**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Respected chief (eze), we need your help / advice / opinion.	Eze ana-sopuru, anyichore-nyema-ka, ndumo-du/ mbunu-chegi.
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E

**Checkpoints**

Because of high crime rates and armed militants battling oil interests and companies in southeastern Nigeria, checkpoints have become common across Igboland. Police officers exact bribes from travelers. Individuals who refuse are sometimes subjected to arrest, threats, physical violence, or detention until they or family members pay the bribes. Demand for bribes is arbitrary and endemic. Often bribes are part of what is known as a system of returns. Police extort bribes to pay their superiors for choice postings.<sup>249</sup>



© satanoid / flickr.com  
Nigerian police

**Exchange 36: Where is the nearest checkpoint?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	Ole-bencha-hukacha nso?
<b>Local:</b>	It's two kilometers to the west.	Odikilometa-buo-gawo-dida-nyanwu.

**Exchange 37: Is this all the ID you have?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this all the ID you have?	Nko-Gula aidi-ni-le inwere?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

<sup>248</sup> Michael Widjaja, "Insight in to Igbo Culture, Igbo Language, and Enugu: Village," n.d., <http://www.igboguide.org/index.php?l=chapter10>

<sup>249</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Corruption Fueling Police Abuses," 17 August 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/08/17/nigeria-corruption-fueling-police-abuses>

Reports from the end of August 2010 claim that more than 1,300 police checkpoints existed in southeastern Nigeria alone.<sup>250</sup> Military personnel also engage in human rights abuses at checkpoints, often in response to political turmoil that erupts periodically throughout the country.<sup>251</sup>



© Rhys Thom  
Police station

**Exchange 38: Please get out of the car.**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Please get out of the car.	Biko sinu-Ba-la-hu puta.
<b>Local:</b>	OK.	Odimma.

**Exchange 39: Show us the car registration.**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Show us the car registration.	Gosia-nyi akwukwuo-nnabata uBa-la-hu.
<b>Local:</b>	OK.	Odimma.

**Land Mines and Munitions**

Nigeria signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions in June 2009. Although Nigeria has no record of producing or exporting cluster munitions, it has a history of importing them. Reports claim that Nigeria possesses a stockpile of cluster munitions. Sierra Leone claims that the Nigerian military dropped cluster bombs in 1997, a claim the Nigerian government denies.<sup>252</sup>



© Todd Lappin  
Nigerian military

<sup>250</sup> Emeka Umeagbaloasi and Justus Ijeoma, “Corruption in the Nigeria Police Force: Putting the Records Straight,” Sahara Reporters, 28 August 2010, <http://saharareporters.com/report/corruption-nigeria-police-force-putting-records-straight?page=1>

<sup>251</sup> Human Rights Watch, “The Ogoni Crisis: A Case-Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria,” 1 July 1995, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1995/Nigeria.htm>

<sup>252</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Nigeria: Cluster Munition Ban Policy,” 22 October 2010, [http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region\\_profiles/print\\_profile/339](http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/339)

**Exchange 40: Is this area mined?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this area mined?	Eliro-Buni-gwe-ba--?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E

Land mine threats exist in Igboland as the result of 1967–1970 civil war, known as the Biafran War. From 2009–2010, almost 10,000 explosive remnants of war (ERW) left over from the Biafran War were destroyed, but reports state that more ERW may exist in Igboland. In 2009, just under 1,500 antipersonnel mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were discovered and destroyed in and around Igboland.<sup>253</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Nigeria: Cluster Munition Ban Policy,” 22 October 2010, [http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region\\_profiles/print\\_profile/339](http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/339)

## **Chapter 5 Assessment**

1. Although many Igbo are Christian, belief in spirits is still common.

**TRUE**

The Igbo belief in spirits and ancestor worship still influences the lives of people and informs their decision-making.

2. Rural communities consider the land to be owned by a local deity.

**TRUE**

Land is owned by deities and communities hold the land, allowing individuals and families to farm with a usufruct—the renewable right to use something belonging to another.

3. Trade and industry are rare in Igboland.

**FALSE**

Some Igbo groups have invested in trade and industry, importing and trading spare parts for automobiles, developing industry, dealing timber and building materials, establishing supermarkets, and trading meat.

4. Roads in rural Igboland may be impassable in wet seasons.

**TRUE**

Remote communities risk being cut off during the rainy season, so farmers often work as wage laborers on farms that can afford motorized transport to markets.

5. Rural checkpoints ensure the safety of travelers in Igboland.

**FALSE**

Police officers often exact bribes from travelers at checkpoints. Some individuals who refuse are subjected to arrest, threats, physical violence, or detention until bribes are paid.



## CHAPTER 6: FAMILY LIFE

### Family Structure

Igbo families are patriarchal and patrilineal. Traditional rural families live in villages that consist of a number of compounds. Each compound houses an extended family. The individual families in the compound are related to a single male ancestor going back at least three generations. Within each compound, nuclear family groups have their own housing units made up of a husband, his wife (or wives), and their children.<sup>254</sup>

Polygyny enlarges the number of people within any individual family unit. Large, polygynous families live in numerous huts or houses, each one headed by a male or female who looks to the senior male for guidance in all decisions.<sup>255</sup>



© Melvin Baker  
Igbo family compound

#### Exchange 41: Are these people part of your family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these people part of your family?	Umummadundia- haso na-nndi ezinulo gi?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E-.

Modern, professional Igbo living in urban areas often ignore the traditional family structure. They prefer to set up nuclear-family households separate from their extended families.<sup>256</sup> This does not mean that modern, professional Igbo desert their families. Often, the distance between urban and rural family members is great, and members do not have the opportunity to spend time together frequently. Still, Igbo families maintain strong bonds and rely on one another for support.<sup>257</sup>

#### Exchange 42: Is this your entire family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your entire family?	Iha- obu ezinulogi ni-le?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	Mba.

<sup>254</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 12–15.

<sup>255</sup> *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* vol. 1, Africa, 2 ed., “Igbo,” eds. M. Njoroge, Timothy L. Gall, and Jeneen Hobby (New York: Gale, 2009), 285.

<sup>256</sup> *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* vol. 1, Africa, 2 ed., “Igbo,” eds. M. Njoroge, Timothy L. Gall, and Jeneen Hobby (New York: Gale, 2009), 285.

<sup>257</sup> Kwintessential, “Nigeria: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette,” n.d., [www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/nigeria.html](http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/nigeria.html)

## Interactions between Men and Women

Men and women are rarely separated in Igbo family life. Children especially are afforded a great deal of freedom of interaction: eating, sleeping, and playing together. Adolescents engage in inter-gender activities, working together in the fields or on communal projects. Mothers are tasked with feeding children and their moral education. Once children reach puberty, women take on the training of girls in female duties while fathers take on the training of boys in male duties.<sup>258</sup>

Relationships between brothers and sisters are typically close, but half siblings are often reserved with one another. Brothers and sisters commonly sleep in the same room together after they are grown.<sup>259</sup>



© Mike Blyth

Mother and daughters

### Exchange 43: Do you have any brothers?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any brothers?	IWeru-munno-bula nndinwoke?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

## Status

### Elders

The Igbo revere their elders and believe age equates to wisdom. The oldest male heads each family group. Often, elders function as village leaders or priests. They are required to maintain order within the community and are sought out for advice on social or religious matters.<sup>260</sup> Male elders are more respected than female elders, but age confers respect to all Igbo. Younger members of society (especially children) are required to offer first greetings to community elders.<sup>261</sup>



© World Bank / flickr.com

Family childcare

<sup>258</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 45–46.

<sup>259</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 85–86.

<sup>260</sup> Umunna, “Igbo Political Systems,” 7 July 2008, <http://www.umunna.org/politicalsystems.htm>

<sup>261</sup> Every Culture, “Igbo: Relationships,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>

### Adolescents

Adolescents play complex roles in Igbo society. Those who have younger siblings act as potential leaders and elders, a position that commands great respect. Both boys and girls participate in labor such as childcare to help support the family. The Igbo believe helping with childcare prepares them for their adult roles as parents.<sup>262</sup>

Adolescent males can attend village council meetings. They seldom participate, but attendance affords them the opportunity to learn village management for when they become title holders and village leaders. Similarly, female adolescents may attend female councils.<sup>263</sup>

### Children

The Igbo value children enormously. The main reason for marriage is to have children.<sup>264</sup> Children play a complex role in Igbo society. Especially for Christian Igbo, children are required to obey their parents and to view them as superior. They also believe children are their ancestors reincarnated. The value of a child is high, males in particular, because they represent the return and the continuation of lineage groups. Without male children, lineage groups die off.<sup>265, 266</sup> Mothers especially favor male children. They cannot inherit directly from their husbands. Rather, inheritance goes to male children and by extension to the wives and mothers.<sup>267, 268</sup>



© IIP / flickr.com  
Kids laughing

### Exchange 44: Are these your children?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these your children?	Ndia-habu-mugi?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

<sup>262</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 86.

<sup>263</sup> Chuka Onwumechili, *African Democratization and Military Coups* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 3–4.

<sup>264</sup> Peter Chidi Okuma, *Omumu—The Igbo Life Value: A Challenge to Human Life Issue Today* (Frankfurt: Peter Lange GmbH, 2009), 123.

<sup>265</sup> Vernantius Emeka Ndukaihe, *Achievement as Value in the Igbo/African Identity: the Ethics* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 245–257.

<sup>266</sup> Nkem Hyginus M.V. Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 40.

<sup>267</sup> Nkem Hyginus M.V. Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 40.

<sup>268</sup> Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 27.

Children also reflect the blessings bestowed upon or withheld from parents. The Igbo see respectful children as a blessing, demonstrating respect for God and for their ancestors. The Igbo believe these children to be best suited to care for their elders when the time comes. Disrespectful children are seen as a kind of punishment, suggesting parents have failed in their duties to their deity and their ancestors. Importantly, the Igbo assign wealth to families with many children.<sup>269, 270</sup>

## Married Life, Divorce, Birth

### *Married Life*

Married life for the Igbo is seldom a relationship between only husband and wife. In traditional families, a wife must satisfy obligations to her husband as well as his immediate family and extended relatives. These responsibilities become burdensome in polygynous families simply because of the size of the extended family. New brides move to their husbands' compounds. Until they have birthed their first child, they are under the tutelage of their mothers-in-law. The required duties of a new bride include feeding her husband properly, deferring to him, safe-guarding his reputation, dignifying him, and—in the case of his death—mourning over him according to custom. Added to these duties are cleaning the house and compound, farming with the mother-in-law, showing proper respect to all relatives, and remaining neutral in family disputes.<sup>271</sup>



© International Institute of Tropical Agriculture  
Father with children

### Exchange 45: Are you married?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you married?	Iluo-la nwunye?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

Igbo wives are expected to bear children, care for them, and to support the morality of the family. Child rearing is particularly important. If a husband cannot impregnate his wife, often a brother or other close male relative can impregnate the wife for him. Conversely, women who cannot conceive can pay a bride price and marry another woman, becoming her husband. The new bride sleeps with the male husband to become pregnant. All the children born from that union belong to the legal, female husband.<sup>272, 273</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 27.

<sup>270</sup> Daniel Jordon Smith, “Igbo,” in *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World’s Cultures* vol. 1, eds. Carol R Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., 2003), 513.

<sup>271</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 115–128.

<sup>272</sup> Every Culture, “Igbo: Marriage and Family,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Igbo-Marriage-and-Family.html>

Husbands, on the other hand, have traditionally been responsible for the financial support and upkeep of the family. Igbo society encourages men to create large families, though not larger than they can support. Husbands delegate responsibilities to their wives and provide financial support where necessary. They make all decisions regarding their families and take on the socialization of young and adolescent boys.<sup>274</sup>

#### Exchange 46: Is this your wife?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your wife?	Nko-bu nwunye gi?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	E.

#### Divorce

The Igbo frown on divorce, seeing it as irresponsible, weak, and a failure in life that brings shame on the larger family.<sup>275</sup> Marriage fulfills a rite of passage, and Igbo tend to remain in marriages, even when the conditions are less than desirable.<sup>276</sup> Divorce does occur, though, and it is customary for the wife to leave her husband's home and return to live with her parents.<sup>277</sup> Because having children is the main reason for marriage, childlessness in marriage prompts Igbo to divorce.<sup>278</sup> In traditional marriages, witchcraft, cruelty, desertion, insubordination, and adultery (by women) are further causes of divorce.<sup>279</sup>



© International Institute of Tropical Agriculture  
Mother and her twins

Educated, professional, urban Igbo divorce at a higher rate than their traditional, rural compatriots.<sup>280</sup> In part, this is because many urban Igbo lack immediate family to help arbitrate marital disputes. Urban, professional Igbo—women included—also earn more than rural Igbo and are better suited to single parenthood. Yet urban, professional Igbo women are hesitant to file for divorce because they risk losing custody of their children in divorce cases. This holds

<sup>273</sup> Brian Schwimmer, "Igbo Marriage Patterns," 2003, [http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/case\\_studies/igbo/igbo\\_marriage.html](http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/case_studies/igbo/igbo_marriage.html)

<sup>274</sup> Philomina Ezeagbor Okeke-Ihejirika, *Negotiating Power and Privilege: Igbo Career Women in Contemporary Nigeria* (Athens, OH: Center for International Studies Ohio University, 2004), 165.

<sup>275</sup> Patrick E. Iroegbu, *Healing Insanity: A Study of Igbo Medicine in Contemporary Nigeria* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 117.

<sup>276</sup> Feleicia E. Ibezim, "Cultural Conflicts and Crises in Marriages among the Igbo Ethnic Group of Nigerian-Americans Living in Metropolitan New York" (dissertation, Capella University, March 2008).

<sup>277</sup> Kalu Ogbaa, *Igbo* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1995), 13.

<sup>278</sup> Patrick Okafor, "Educational Resource on Marriage in Africa," 23 June 2007, <http://www.patrickokafor.com/files/EducationalResource.pdf>

<sup>279</sup> Man Singh Das, ed., *The Family in Africa* (New Dehli, India: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1993), 23.

<sup>280</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 139.



true especially when women have male children. Igbo society believes that men must play the primary role in raising male children.<sup>281</sup>

### *Birth*

The Igbo celebrate the birth of children with fervor. Preparations for birth begin long before delivery. Women are forbidden to engage in rigorous labor or any other activity that may shock the child. Husbands and relatives perform these tasks for the expecting mother and help her observe a strict diet. Igbo husbands are not allowed to witness the birth. Though elderly women traditionally assist with delivery, trained midwives are also common.<sup>282</sup>

Traditionally, twin births were a curse to the Igbo who believed twins violated the laws of nature. Since Christianity has become entrenched in Igbo society, twin births have become cause for great celebration, twins being seen as a blessing from God. Traditional and Christian Igbo alike continue to honor the tradition of burying a newborn's umbilical cord and planting a tree or cash crop over it. This symbolizes fertility and ensures the child's rights within the community.<sup>283</sup>

## **Family Social Events**

### *Rites of Passage*

Numerous social events mark important transitions in Igbo family life. Many of these are the rites of passage for young people. Igbo children's first rite of passage is circumcision. Both girls and boys are circumcised. Occurring about 8 days after birth, circumcision marks a child's initiation into the culture. Female genital mutilation (FGM), or female circumcision, is highly contested in Igboland and even outlawed in some states. Yet the custom prevails and is preformed on young girls primarily to prevent future promiscuity. For boys, circumcision is related to the Biblical practice. Many contemporary Igbo are Christian. Other non-Christian Igbo believe they are descendants of the ancient Israelites who fled captivity in Egypt. Circumcision for boys reflects that lineage.<sup>284</sup>



© pjotter05 / flickr.com  
Wedding celebration

Another important rite of passage for Igbo youth is *Iwa Akwa*—Wearing Cloth Ceremony. Traditionally, Igbo boys marked their emergence into adulthood by donning clothing for the first time. They would wear a long cloth wrapped around their waists and display their adult status in

<sup>281</sup> Philomina Ezeagbor Okeke-Iherijirika, *Negotiating Power and Privilege: Igbo Career Women in Contemporary Nigeria* (Athens, OH: Center for International Studies Ohio University, 2004), 89.

<sup>282</sup> Nkem Hyginus M.V. Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 75–76.

<sup>283</sup> Nkem Hyginus M.V. Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 75–76.

<sup>284</sup> C.O. Chigbu et. al., “Survey of Women’s Opinions on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Southeast Nigeria: Study of Patients Attending Antenatal Care,” in *Annals of Health and Medical Science Research* 1, no. 1 (2011): 15–20, <http://www.amhsr.org/Articles/Article%203.pdf>

the marketplace. They would never appear again in public without being clothed. After the *Iwa Akwa*, Igbo boys were given all the rights associated with adulthood. They would begin the search for a wife, pay taxes, and engage in community affairs. Once practiced widely across Igboland, *Iwa Akwa* is now less common. Some communities still practice *Iwa Akwa* to recognize the maturation of their young men and to initiate marriages between them and eligible young women.<sup>285, 286</sup>

### Weddings

In traditional Igbo society, marriages were arranged by parents and couples married young. Today, many Igbo—especially educated urban professionals—choose spouses themselves and marry later in life.<sup>287</sup> Traditional weddings are lengthy affairs. The prospective groom must meet with the prospective bride's father or other male family members and treat them to a feast while discussing a bride price. Once the price is agreed on, a date for the ceremony is set. Numerous guests attend the wedding ceremony. The young woman's father gives her a cup of palm wine, and she must search out her groom while the female guests try to distract her. When she finds him, she presents the cup of wine to him. If he sips the cup, he accepts her into his family and the wedding is complete. Dancing, feasting, and celebrating ensue. Many contemporary Igbo schedule a church wedding that takes place about one week after the traditional wedding.<sup>288, 289, 290</sup>

### Funerals

Igbo funeral customs are complex. The rites and rituals are subject to many factors, such as the sex of the individual, marital status, age, and “quality” of death. The Igbo make the distinction between good and bad death. Good death comes when the decedent has lived a life fairly, generously, and justly. This entitles the deceased to burial with full ceremonial rites, which the Igbo call “good bush.” Bad death comes when the decedent commits suicide, perjury, incest, or murder and is denied burial and ceremonial rites. In these cases, the decedent's body is discarded in what is called “bad bush.”<sup>291</sup>

Full ceremonial burial requires a widow or other significant survivor to mourn the deceased. Depending on the customs of the region, mourning



© Jeremy Weate / flickr.com  
Masquerade of death

<sup>285</sup> Damien Onwuegbuchulam Eze, *The Eucharist as Orikonso: A Study in Eucharistic Ecclesiology from an Igbo* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008), 108.

<sup>286</sup> U.D. Anyanwu and Jude C.U. Aguwa, eds., *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics* (New Haven, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1993), 63.

<sup>287</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, “Igbo,” in *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures* vol. 1, eds. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, Inc., 2003), 515.

<sup>288</sup> BBC, “A Traditional Igbo Wedding in Nigeria,” 30 September 2010, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-09-30/world/nigerian.wedding.ceremony\\_1\\_wedding-wine-ceremony?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-09-30/world/nigerian.wedding.ceremony_1_wedding-wine-ceremony?_s=PM:WORLD)

<sup>289</sup> BBC, “In Pictures: Nigerian Igbo Wedding,” 6 March 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_pictures/4717608.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/4717608.stm)

<sup>290</sup> Igbo Guide, “Traditional Family Ceremonies,” n.d., <http://www.igboguide.org/index.php?l=chapter11>

<sup>291</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 143–145.

lasts from 6 months to a full year. At the end of the mourning period, the family conducts a formal funeral ceremony that confers ancestorhood on the deceased. Funerals are sacred events in Igbo culture. The process of burial, mourning, and funeral ceremony continues the cycle of life and establishes family in the world of deities and ancestors.<sup>292, 293</sup>

## Naming Conventions

For the Igbo, names hold special significance. Although some names are gender neutral, the majority are gendered. Usually consisting of a first, middle, and last name, some Igbo parents give their children numerous names, each indicating a personal, family, or community value. For boys, names often refer to deities—*Ala* (earth), *Kamalu* (thunder)—or to religious objects or beliefs of greatness—*Ofo* (innocence), *Eze* (king). Female names reflect virtue and morality—*Mma* (moral acceptability), *Anura* (happiness), *Ola* (ornament). Other Igbo names reflect the circumstances surrounding a child's birth. Names that refer to the great god *Chukwu* or other deities in traditional Igbo religion are also common.<sup>294, 295</sup>



© amberdrop / flickr.com  
Igbo child

Another tradition is to name children after the market day on which they were born.<sup>296</sup> It is not uncommon for Igbo to have Western first names or nicknames. Often Biblical, these names are common among the Christian population. Parents give children names such as Joseph, Samson, and Moses.<sup>297</sup>

---

<sup>292</sup> Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 143–145.

<sup>293</sup> David Asonye Ihenacho, *African Christianity Rises: Eucharistic Inculturation in Igbo Catholicism*, vol. 2 (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2004), 109.

<sup>294</sup> Financial and Banking Information Infrastructure Committee, “A Guide to Names and Naming Practices,” March 2006, [http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming\\_practice\\_guide\\_UK\\_2006.pdf](http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf)

<sup>295</sup> M. C. Onukawa, “The Chi Concept in Igbo Gender Naming,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 2 (2000): 107–117, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1161403.pdf?acceptTC=true>

<sup>296</sup> Ashkari Hodari, “African Naming Ceremonies and Traditions,” *African Names*, 16 August 2010, <http://afrikannames.com/2010/08/african-naming-ceremonies/>

<sup>297</sup> Financial and Banking Information Infrastructure Committee, “A Guide to Names and Naming Practices,” March 2006, [http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming\\_practice\\_guide\\_UK\\_2006.pdf](http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf)

## Chapter 6 Assessment

1. Modern, urban Igbo maintain the traditional Igbo family structure.

**FALSE**

Modern, professional Igbo often ignore the traditional family structure, preferring to marry for love and setting up separate households that support only a nuclear family.

2. The Igbo make sure that males and females in the family are strictly separated.

**FALSE**

Males and females are rarely separated in Igbo family life. Children eat, sleep, and play together. Adolescents engage in inter-gender activities, working together in the fields or on communal projects.

3. In polygynous families, only full siblings interact without reserve.

**TRUE**

Full brothers and sisters are very close. Half siblings exhibit reserve with one another, but not so much that it hampers productivity within the family.

4. Elders are the most revered individuals in Igbo families.

**TRUE**

The Igbo revere their elders who head each family group, function as village leaders, maintain community order, and advise on social and religious matters.

5. Igbo names often have religious connotations.

**TRUE**

Names that refer to the great god *Chukwu* or other traditional Igbo deities are common.

## **FINAL ASSESSMENT**

1. The Igbo are concentrated in southeastern Nigeria.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
2. Igboland suffers cold winters.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
3. The Niger River is important to the economy of Igboland.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
4. The Igbo have occupied Igboland for only a few decades.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
5. The Igbo believe in democratic government.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
6. The Igbo are a Muslim ethnic group.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
7. Traditional Igbo religion still influences the lives of the Igbo.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
8. Modern Igbo Christians do not blend elements of traditional Igbo religions with Christianity.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
9. Women perform distinct roles in Odinani.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
10. Igbos living outside of Igboland pilgrimage home at Christmas.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
11. Igbo society is based on individuality.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
12. Polygyny is still practiced in Igboland.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
13. The Igbo are a punctual people.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
14. Gift-giving is customary in Igboland.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
15. The Igbo dress conservatively.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
16. Rural poverty has increased migration to cities in Igboland.  
**TRUE or FALSE**



17. Urban areas have no real informal economy.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
18. Urban healthcare for Igbo women and children is inadequate.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
19. Marketplaces are prohibited in Igbo cities.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
20. The crime rate is high in urban Igboland.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
21. The Igbo commonly combine Christianity with Odinani, the traditional tribal religion.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
22. Agriculture has little effect on Nigeria's GDP.  
**23. TRUE or FALSE**
24. There is a well-developed transportation infrastructure in rural Igboland.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
25. Rural Igbo communities struggle to avoid serious health problems.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
26. Rural Igbo children attend school regularly.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
27. Traditional Igbo families live in single-family homes.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
28. Adolescents are taught different duties based on their gender.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
29. The Igbo value children highly.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
30. Traditional Igbo wives are obligated only to their husbands.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
31. Divorce carries no social stigma in Igbo society.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

## FURTHER READING

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.
- Agbasiere, Joseph Thérèse. *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Falola, Toyin. *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Falola, Toyin. *The History of Nigeria*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Imobighe, T.A. *Nigeria's Defence and National Security Linkages: A Framework of Analysis*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, Plc, 2003.
- Maier, Karl. *This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria*. New York: Public Affairs, 2000.
- Obi, Samuel C. *Readings for Amerigerian Igbo: Culture, History, Language, and Legacy*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010.
- Okehie-Offaha, Marcellina Ulunmuna, and Matthew N.O. Sakiku, eds. *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1996.
- Okeke, Raymond Nzedigbo. *History of the Eri Igbo: The Cradle of the World*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Sparks Group Co., 2000.
- Smith, Daniel Jordan. *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.